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The Methodist Circuit Rider in the Old Northwest

Edmond Thomas Parker
Loyola University Chicago

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THE METHODIST CIRCUIT RIDER
IN THE OLD NORTHWEST

by

Edmond Thomas Parker

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the Requirements for the Degree of
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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis will be dual: Primarily, the author hopes to describe and analyze the frontier Methodist circuit rider in the Old Northwest from research in primary source materials and to arrive at valid generalizations about this colorful and significant frontier type. Secondarily, he would like to indicate some ways in which the circuit rider seems to him to fit Frederick Jackson Turner's classic definition of the frontiersman.

The time limits chosen are from the "Christmas Conference" of 1784, which is the date of the establishment of the Methodist Episcopal Church as an entity separate both from the Church of England and the English Methodists, until the year 1844, the occasion of the division of Methodism into two sectional churches. The logic of these dates is as follows: While Methodism did not penetrate into what is properly the Northwest Territory until 1798, many of the earliest circuit riders active in the Territory were contemporary with the formation of the church. Moreover, the early history of the church in the Old Northwest is colored by events which transpired on that occasion. The terminal date recommends itself for several reasons: By 1844, Methodism had changed considerably in the Northwest. No longer
was it primarily a frontier religion, a frontier phenomenon. By this time too, many changes were overtaking the itineracy. Fewer men were on circuit; more were established in one place. Civilization was catching up with the Northwest, with Methodism, with the circuit rider. They were not the same afterwards. Finally, in 1844, occurred a great schism over slavery which rent the church into two; and this constitutes a great dividing line in the history of the church.

For many reasons, the study is not restricted to an area smaller than the Old Northwest. Pioneer circuit riders ranged over a wide area of the country, serving congregations in many places. They went where they were assigned, and assignments might be made to any state or even any part of the country, so that almost any itinerant who served more than ten years would be likely to have worked in at least two or three states. A study of itinerants who worked in a particular state or district could be undertaken, but it would be less meaningful and less relevant to the life and career of most circuit riders.

The method chosen has been to rely almost entirely on primary sources. There are no other studies of the circuit rider per se. Many historians of America and most frontier historians have made generalizations about Frontier Methodism and the circuit rider. None seem to have been much documented by primary material. Secondary materials, then, would have been of very
limited use in fulfillment of the primary purpose of this thesis. They might be of use in considering the secondary purpose. However, the author has intentionally avoided over-expansion of his topic. The question of how perfectly, or how uniquely, the Methodist circuit rider fits Turner's description of the frontiersman could provide ample material for a scholarly article of its own or another thesis. Accordingly, the secondary purpose of this thesis is not to embark on another topic but merely to share some observations which struck this investigator as noteworthy.

As regards the sample used in this study, the author has attempted to arrive at a valid one. Several problems presented themselves. Not all itinerants wrote memoirs, and only a few manuscript materials have survived. Those who wrote were not necessarily the most important or the most typical. Some of those who wrote made exhaustive chronicles of their lives and labors; others scribbled the most laconic entries if at all.2 The men themselves were highly individualistic. Most itinerants served only a few years, leaving no record of their service. Many served in several parts of the country besides the Northwest. Yet with all of these limitations, much material was available from which to select as judiciously as possible.

As a foundation for the research, the author has studied all manuscript materials on the subject available in the Chicago area, and Chicago has more such than any place in America.
After this he has endeavored to use printed autobiographical materials to help create a representative sample of itinerants. Those chosen reflect a variety of personalities, work locations, and dates of service in the itineracy. A selection of official church documents and Methodist periodicals has been used to help fill in a more complete picture. It is the belief of the author that the result is a valid sample of the Methodist itinerant in the Old Northwest.
CHAPTER I

METHODISM, THE FRONTIER RELIGION

After the American Revolution, as the frontier moved restlessly westward, especially into the Old Northwest, it became increasingly evident that one of the newest and smallest of America's religious bodies was destined to become the dominant religion of the frontier. That the Methodist Episcopal Church should have become preeminent in this area is remarkable, as can best be seen from comparison with the leading denominations of the day.

With the Revolution over, and the United States beginning a rapid expansion, the largest and most influential church in the new nation was the Congregational. Besides its advantage of size, it had come out of the war with great prestige and influence because so many of its members had taken prominent roles in the revolutionary cause. Its patriotic credentials were faultless. As a church body its ties with England were weak. Its ministers were American born and trained, and had early preached in favor of rebellion. During the war both clergy and laity were overwhelmingly patriotic. Because of its size and prestige, then, this church might seem to have been singularly
situated to increase its already-dominant position everywhere, including on the frontier.

That the Congregational Church did not spread to the limits of its potential was attributable chiefly to the fact that it was from the very beginning a New England church and remained consciously so. Wherever New Englanders emigrated, they essayed to establish their "city set upon a hill" once again, instituting, as far as they could, another newer New England. With them, wherever they moved in sufficient numbers, went most of their old institutions, among which was their church. But it did not proselytize; it went west to minister to its own. Cut across Connecticut, down along the Genesee Valley, later along the Great Lakes—wherever the Yankee went—Congregationalism followed, but it went no farther.

From the point of view of location on the frontier, it was the Presbyterian Church which seemed to have the best opportunity to become the largest and most influential church there. After the war, it was, in fact, the second largest church in America. Many factors augured well for its expansion. Presbyterianism was the religion of the Scotch-Irish, the rugged pioneer stock that was at the time in the vanguard of the westward movement. Stern religious folk, the Scotch-Irish invariably brought their religion with them; and so, by 1790, Presbyterianism, of the organized Protestant religions, was probably established farthest
west. It had moved there with our hardiest, fastest-advancing frontiersmen.11

Despite this favored position, Presbyterianism failed to take much advantage of it to dominate the frontier. One practical obstacle to missionary efforts was the high level of education required of its clergymen. Members of this faith still believed in a prerequisite classical education for their ministers; even in the wilderness there were very few compromises of this high standard.12 Consequently, the number of men properly educated for the clergy was understandably few, and the shortage of clergy chronic. A second obstacle to expansion was the Presbyterian practice of calling the minister to the congregation. Where there were no congregations, there were, naturally, no calls for ministers. For non-Presbyterian frontiersmen, a great stumbling-block was the rigid creed of the orthodox Calvinist Scotch-Irish. Theirs was a harsh, stern, humorless religion, well suited to the flinty Scotch-Irish but little suited to the average, pragmatic Westerner. Such a formidable, awesome creed seemed to have little attraction for the normal pioneer, nor did predestination suit his democratic ideas.13 Another factor that militated against expansion was that Presbyterian ministers generally were not primarily interested in conversions. They went west looking not for converts, but for Presbyterians. Finally, because of their education and because Presbyterians held education in high
esteem, ministers were almost invariably pressed into service as teachers. Almost all did double duty as minister and teacher which double occupation kept them from going about on any extensive or even regular missionary travels.

The third largest religion was the Baptists. This church body had emerged from the Revolution with its reputation enhanced because most of the members had been patriots. It had a strong presence on the frontier and its doctrine was appealingly democratic, but its expansion and influence were hampered by too much democracy and too little organization. The Baptist Church was characterized by an uneducated and unordained ministry. Anyone who felt God's call could and did preach. A formal ministry was unknown, resulting in a system of farmer-preachers. These were otherwise ordinary men, farmers, pioneers, who felt a call to preach and thereupon gathered small congregations around them. The preacher, who was usually no more trained than his fellows, conducted services which were informal, and often emotional, on Sundays and other suitable occasions. Because the doctrine and organization of the church were very democratic, they held a strong appeal for the independent Westerner; moreover, the gospel would be preached wherever there was a farmer-preacher. But such a system had serious organizational weaknesses.

The church in this system moved from place to place, was established, flourished, or declined as the farmer-preacher
Loved. Thus the church had the potential both for growth and decline; but growth was haphazard, with no official provision made to effect orderly missionary work or to keep active a congregation once started. Nor was there any supervision over preacher or doctrine. In addition, the farmer-preacher was of necessity a farmer first and a preacher second. His livelihood came from his farm, and he had little time to study, to prepare sermons, to meditate. When this uneven situation is compared with the organization and efficiency of the Methodists, it is not surprising that Baptists operated at a disadvantage, with the result that eventually Methodism had greater numbers and influence on the frontier. Still, the democratic doctrines and informality of the Baptists and their church organization had sufficient appeal to finally make them the second largest religion in the West. They were also the most direct competitors for conversions on the frontier, a point which was everywhere in evidence in all the narratives utilized in this study.

The fourth largest religious body in the United States was the Anglican Church. So many of its clergy and members were Loyalists during the Revolution that it had been almost completely discredited by the end of the war; and in general it was much resented, especially by the patriotic frontier types. Its ties with England were traditionally very close and its clergymen were usually educated in England. More, its creed and ceremonies
were too formal to frontier liking, and its organization, parish-oriented, did not readily adapt to missionary work. In point of fact, there were some Anglican missionaries on the frontier, but in the main, the impact of this church on the West was slight.17

Each of these religions was on the frontier after the American Revolution. Congregationalism was with the New Englanders; Presbyterianism was with the Scotch-Irish. The Anglicans had moved here and there with settlers from the Tidewater area; the Baptists were scattered all over. But it was Methodism which shortly became the dominant religion of the frontier. There were many good reasons:

First of all, Methodist preachers practiced their calling on a full-time basis; they did nothing else. Also, these full-time preachers were constantly on the move, going everywhere where there might be souls to be saved. The circuit was an essential part of the early Methodist clergyman's lot; this helped make the circuit rider ubiquitous. Of major importance to successful proselytizing was the fact that Methodism was highly organized, the most organized of any church in the West. Nothing was haphazard or left to chance. Yet despite the highly formalized church structure, the internal government of the church had an elasticity that admirably the frontier situation and frontier attitudes. While the autocracy and eminent efficiency of Methodism greatly contributed to its effectiveness, flexibility
was also built into the system. For example, the office of presiding elder was developed, making it possible for preachers' circuits to be set up and congregations established, with constant supervision maintained, by an official close to the field who had power to act and make decisions. In any contingency, decisions could be made at once either by a bishop or local presiding elder. Because ministers were sent wherever needed, when a new settlement sprang up in the wilderness, the nearest presiding elder could immediately assign a preacher to stop there. All this organization operated through a hierarchy that gave wide discretion to local superiors. With such organization and flexibility Methodism was able to expand as fast as the frontier. No sooner was a new settlement begun than the local presiding elder would assign a preacher to stop there on his next circuit.

There are countless stories dealing with the omnipresence of the Methodist circuit rider. Peter Cartwright gleefully told such a story of a man who hated and despised the Methodists and all their ways. Accordingly and hopefully he moved as far out into the wilderness as he could and as far away from any Methodist circuit as he could estimate. When he felt he was so far from any Methodist circuit rider, or even any Methodist, that he could live in peace, he began to clear his land and build his cabin, "but he had scarcely got into his rude cabin before there was the Methodist preacher, preaching hell fire and damnation, as they
always did." Johnson recounts such a tale when he quotes a Presbyterian who searched to find a frontier household which hadn't been visited by a Methodist itinerant first and couldn't find one. The point to be made is that the Methodist circuit rider was everywhere on the expanding frontier, and this was an important factor in Methodism's becoming the dominant religion of the West.

Another favorable factor was a doctrine that was singularly suited to the frontiersman and the frontier situation in which he lived. Methodism taught free grace to all men, free will, and individual responsibility to God. Without expanding on our examination of doctrine at this point, it is important to indicate that these doctrines in their own egalitarianism and individualism suited the egalitarian, individualistic frontiersman perfectly.

The result, then, was almost inevitable. The Methodist Episcopal Church expanded over the whole frontier at an unbelievable rate. It seemed to be everywhere. In fine, the best organized, the Methodists came to dominate the frontier in numbers, influence, and results.
CHAPTER II
THE CIRCUIT RIDER SYSTEM

Organization. Again and again, even the casual investigator of early Methodism must be impressed by the sophisticated organization of this church. Did not the term Methodist arise from the methodical approach of Wesley's followers to salvation? The methodical approach characterized Methodism as well in its more mundane concerns as in its spiritual.

The Doctrine and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church, commonly referred to as the Discipline is a good example of this aspect of Methodism. This single slim volume in 24 mo. or 12 mo., purchasable for as little as twenty-five or fifty cents, contained in the most astonishing detail the doctrine, rules, and rituals of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Certainly impressive is the all-inclusiveness of church regulations; everything seems to be provided for, from the time a circuit rider's day should begin (4:00 A.M.). to minutiae regulating church buildings, free pews, church trustees (nine in number where possible), land deeds and the like. The title itself, the Discipline, suggests a certain cast of mind which is not irrelevant.
Statistics also indicate some of the methodical approach of the church. Dearly the Methodists loved statistics; and every volume of the _Minutes of the Annual Conferences_, every _Journal of the General Conference_, or journal of the annual conferences is studded with statistics of many kinds, most often of numbers of communicants and clergy, usually replete with lists of circuits, preachers, elders, deacons, and so on. How much of interest can be seen in this data. For example, in 1773, at the time of the very first conference, the church had 1160 members and ten preachers in the five states of New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Maryland, and Virginia. In 1776, 4,921 members and twenty-four preachers; in 1784, at the start of its separate existence as a church, 14,988 members and eighty-three preachers. In 1815, at the end of the War of 1812, the church could claim 211,155 members; in 1828, 421,156, and in 1844, 1,171,356.

Certainly, much significant data can be gleaned from the careful records kept by the church. Besides a certain addiction to statistics, however, one impressive aspect of these records is their apparent candor. While the numbers show a regular increase, occasional years reflect decreases, which indicate both scrupulous gathering of data and stringent adherence to standards for membership in the early church. One example of this decrease is between 1791 and 1792 when membership of Caucasians declined from 63,269 to 52,109 (Negro membership, however, increased in
the same period.). There are other examples as well.

Most of all, it is obvious that the Methodist Episcopal Church was the most highly organized of any on the frontier. It was, without doubt, a hierarchical church with an elaborate stratification of members organized with tightly drawn lines of authority, even authoritarianism, tempered by a great deal of flexibility and freedom of action for local authorities. At the top of the hierarchy were the bishops. Going downward in the ecclesiastical scale were the presiding elders, elders, deacons, preachers, local preachers, exhorters, and class leaders, some of whom had extensive executive powers. In a separate class were the supernumerary and superannuated preachers.

Bishops, called superintendents until 1769, had very extensive executive powers in the church, especially presiding at conferences, setting the circuits of the preachers, overseeing the spiritual and temporal affairs of the church, and ordaining. In addition, they constituted a distinct clerical rank with power to administer all the sacraments but they were not a clerical order in the Episcopal or Catholic sense.

Elders had both a spiritual and executive function. As a distinct ecclesiastical order they had power "To administer baptism and the Lord's supper, and to perform the office of matrimony, and all parts of divine worship." Presiding elders had power to perform most of the executive functions of a bishop
in his absence. With his wide discretionary powers, the presiding elder is particularly an example of the genius of organization and adaptation of the Methodist Church. Since obviously the bishops could not be everywhere, and especially in the frontier situation many contingencies required prompt action, the presiding elder had full authority to react to the exigencies of each local situation taking whatever action seemed necessary. He was authority localized, stationed in a district comprising several circuits, with his personal circuit being the circuits in his district. Whenever a decision had to be made about adding a stop on a circuit, appointing a new preacher, removing a preacher, administering church discipline, settling intra-church disputes, he had authority to act. As new settlements sprang up and he added them as stops on a preacher's circuit, he played an important role in the expansion and omnipresence of the church. With his wide powers, he made it possible for the church to maintain at all times doctrinal and organizational orthodoxy. His office, in a special way, exemplified the fine balance of centralization of authority and local autonomy within Methodism.

The deaconate constituted another order within the clergy. Deacons had power "to baptize in the absence of an elder, to assist the elder in the administration of the Lord's supper but not to administer the sacrament, to marry, bury the dead, and read the liturgy to the people . . . ." This order conferred
spiritual powers, and would normally be attained by all circuit riders upon their admission to the "full connection." It conferred no executive powers, and is clearly an order inferior to elder.

At the heart of the whole system was the circuit rider who rode a circuit and had charge of the souls on that circuit. Simply put in the Discipline of 1784, his duties were to preach, to meet the society and bands of believers weekly, to visit the sick, and to meet the class leaders weekly. If he held the orders of deacon or elder he could administer those sacraments and liturgies authorized by his orders. The preacher in charge of a circuit had innumerable responsibilities including teaching, baptizing, conducting services, meeting with all leaders and trustees, compiling statistics without end, circulating books and magazines, and on and on. This man was the core of the organization, about whom more later.

Local preachers might be of two kinds: A quite common type of local preacher was the circuit rider who had "located." Often a circuit rider found he could not support a family as an itinerant and would leave this vocation to "localize." As often as not, he would preach regularly and was recognized as a "local preacher" even before the licensing provisions of 1796. Some laymen were granted license to preach (as distinguished from exhorting) without ever having gone on circuit and were also called local preachers. Yet so integral was the idea of a circuit-riding
clergy that local preachers were not treated in the Discipline until 1796, which was thirty years after the introduction of Methodism to America. In 1789, localized preachers were made eligible for ordination as deacons, and in 1812, for ordination as elders, but not for appointment as presiding elders. The office of local preacher provided an opportunity for service for those who could not dedicate themselves to the full-time itineracy. It also made it possible for settlements to have services more often than the visit of the circuit rider would allow. Indeed, it also symbolized the settling down of people and the church and the establishment of a more civilized way of life.

Exhorters held an office which had no specific duties or functions indicated in the Discipline. They might be considered lay preachers, after a fashion, though their function, as indicated by the name, was not so much preaching as praying with and exhorting to prayer, those individuals powerfully affected by a religious service. In point of fact, they might very well deliver a sermon, lead songs, or otherwise help the clergyman during services. Frequently, on the frontier, an exhorter's license, a short, informal document, was the first step toward the commitment of a young man's life to the itineracy.

Class leaders fulfilled an important function in Methodist congregations. Within congregations, the members were divided
into groups of approximately twelve members, one of whom was constituted the leader. He had the obligation of seeing the members of the class weekly at meetings and checking into the state of their souls, keeping them always on the alert for opportunities to practice virtue, admonishing the sinner, and keeping the circuit rider apprised of the religious state of the class and its members. Smaller groups of three or four were called band societies and had no specified leader.

Often the term supernumerary preacher crops up in church records. Supernumeraries were identified as "worn out" preachers, usually the old and/or the ill who yet were willing "to serve as best they could." They were given assignments which were within their strength by their conferences and presiding elders. The superannuated were just that, retired preachers. But even these often assisted in preaching, though they were not considered to be on the roll for assignment as were supernumeraries.

On the organizational level, the church was likewise divided and stratified. The whole church was divided into conferences, districts, and circuits, with an increasing amount of organization apparent as the church grew in numbers and territory. The highest legislative body in the church was the General Conference which had "full powers to make rules and regulations for . . . [the] church." The first General Conference was held in 1792, attended by "all the travelling preachers . . . in full
Subsequent General Conferences were held every four years. In 1812, because of the practical problems involved in attempting to have a conference of all preachers, representative conferences were begun. Also in 1792, began the organization of the church into conferences, six at first, called Annual Conferences because they met annually. The Annual Conferences were composed by a bishop from a number of more or less contiguous districts. Within their area, these conferences had legislative and judicial powers. Districts were made up of circuits under the administration of a presiding elder. District meetings were held quarterly within a year, frequently, at least on the frontier, attended by camp meetings. Within this table of organization was provided a great deal of flexibility and an elaborate system of checks and balances within the total church and its parts.

Throughout, in the organization of the Methodist Church can be seen these characteristics of authoritarianism moderated by pragmatism and flexibility. With its all-inclusive regulations from the Discipline, with the specific legislative powers of the conferences, General and Annual, with its hierarchy and elaborate chain of command, with the extensive executive powers of bishops, the church was authoritarian, no doubt. Yet all the authoritarianism was ameliorated by the democracy which permeated the church organization. Legislative bodies were representative and
elective. Executives were elected by representative bodies. Church trials followed democratic procedures. Here were checks and balances. In many other respects, the church can be seen to be as flexible and adaptable as the frontier on which it flourished. The best indication of this is the constant evolution which the church organization underwent. The conferences changed, and the number of bishops. Presiding elders evolved to fit a need. All of the structures of the church were expanded as the church and the nation grew. From the first decision to become an independent church, pragmatic considerations were more important than traditions. All the changes, indeed, were made from pragmatic considerations. The bishops' powers to act as necessary between General Conferences reflect flexibility. The presiding elders' extensive powers to appoint, remove, discipline, adjudicate in the absence of the bishop are other examples of the same characteristic. The Annual Conferences' discretion to act between meetings of the General Conferences provides another example. Each segment of the organization had the widest discretion to act ad interim. This striking feature of the church helped make it singularly suited to the frontier situation and adaptable in a unique way as a church polity to the strange environment that the frontier provided.

Still, again and again, the core of the system, the basis, since Wesley's day, of all the rest of the organizational appa-
The authentic Methodist preacher was an itinerant, which meant that he traveled from place to place preaching the gospel. In England, John Wesley gave form to the idea that a vigorous church, if it were so to remain, must be ministered to by an itinerant clergy. And from the beginning in the Methodist Church, the preachers were that. In America, this idea was reinforced by Bishop Francis Asbury who did so much to shape Methodism here and who himself never had a home or fixed residence of any kind. Indeed, Asbury was on circuit constantly, traveling all over, preaching, administering the sacraments, presiding over conferences, so that even death found him on the circuit riding to the General Conference of 1816.43

It is very significant that the rules of the Church, the Discipline, emphasize the itinerant nature of the clergy. Those clergymen in charge of congregations were circuit riders. Similarly, the Discipline gave charge over circuits to presiding elders who were themselves itinerants and who could not preside in the same district for any term exceeding four years in succession.44 Possibly most significant of all is the fact that even bishops had to be itinerant. The Discipline plainly stated that if a bishop should "cease from travelling without the consent of the general conference he shall not thereafter exercise the office."45 This rule was continuous during our whole period.46
Over the years, inevitably, changes crept into the church's ways. Originally circuits were changed quarterly. By 1774, circuits changed bi-annually. By 1804, circuits were "for no more than two years." By the 1840's old itinerants would write such declamations as: "localize the ministry and secularize them too; then farewell to itineracy; and when this fails, we plunge right into Congregationalism." But that is another, and later, story. The point here is that in the frontier church the "Travelling Connection" was the heart of Methodist church organization.
CHAPTER III

"THE TRAVELING CONNECTION"

How did it all begin? How did one become a circuit rider? In that informal time and place, especially in the first four or five decades of Methodism in the Old Northwest, a man often got his start on the way to becoming a circuit rider very informally indeed.

In the Methodist, as in the Baptist clergy, a man might become a preacher if he felt God's call to preach, without any specific theological training. Such a one, in the Methodist Church, might find his talents used as an exhorter or class leader in his local congregation. If he felt the call to greater service, he might discuss this call with the local circuit rider or the local presiding elder with the aim of assuming the traveling connection.

In other instances, the initiative might be taken by the local itinerant or presiding elder who singled out a promising, religious young man and invited him to serve. Obviously, many men so called were awed by the responsibilities and dubious of their own merits, and correspondingly reluctant to commit themselves to the life. Peter Cartwright, for example, felt very
serious doubts and felt oppressed by the responsibilities entailed before he made a commitment. And Ezekial Cooper, who felt a call to preach, before following it fought the call so strongly that he became very upset in mind and physically ill. Samuel Parker hesitated for twelve years before accepting a call to preach.

An informal initiation into the itineracy might take many forms. A (sometimes unsuspecting) neophyte might be invited to accompany a rider on his circuit, given a chance to exhort at various congregations, preach a sermon at others; he might be sent to reconnoiter and draw up a new circuit in the wilderness and later prevailed upon to service the circuit.

In point of fact, however, the Discipline did provide for a formal first step toward acceptance into the full-fledged ministry. This was acceptance as a preacher "on trial." At an annual conference the prospective preacher would be examined by the preachers, presiding elders, and bishop present as to his character and doctrine. Recommended and endorsed by his local preacher and presiding elder, and approved by the conference, he would begin his period of probation "on trial." This procedure was established in the first Discipline of 1784, with some minor modifications in procedures adopted over the years.

Once the initial steps had been taken, however informal or formal, the formation of a preacher with sound doctrine and good
habits was very definite and established even though this formation did not take place in a formal situation or in a school of theology.

During the two years of probation, the aspirant circuit rider was normally sent out on a circuit under the guidance of an experienced itinerant who was called either the senior preacher or the preacher-in-charge. Incidentally, he was unequivocally in charge of the circuit. While not every young preacher had an opportunity to observe and work with a preacher of extensive experience, and might even find the period of observation cut short, spending the full time under the guidance of a properly experienced preacher seemed far and away to be the most common experience. During this time the aspirant performed many of the duties of a clergyman, especially preaching, teaching, and meeting with class leaders. He was, as well, expected to steep himself in the Bible, learn by observing his senior, and aim at broadening his general knowledge by study, prayer, and practice. In this schooling, quite commonly referred to as "Brush College," the student could be expected to learn a great deal about the arts and science of his calling, a great deal about the content and exegesis of the Bible, and much else besides; moreover he was under the constant supervision of a teacher who was interested in his student and constantly checking him in word and deed, for doctrine, character, and general suitability. An investigator gets the
impression that those circuit riders who were entrusted with the training of hopeful candidates took their work seriously and were remembered with reverence and gratitude by their disciples in later years. This investigator did not find a single incident mentioned of disinterest or negligence on the part of a senior preacher, though probably such occurred. In sum, while the situation was informal, the training, guidance, and growth of the probationer was quite calculated and well suited to the needs and circumstances of the frontier.

At the same time as the new circuit rider was being daily trained by word and example of his companion, the supervision and formation of the man was being undertaken in other ways by the local presiding elder who had serious responsibilities in the selection, training, and doctrinal orthodoxy of aspirant circuit riders. This supervision by the presiding elder was normally rather formalized so that he examined the candidate in doctrine and other matters, and observed him in action on those occasions, possibly several times a year, when the elder would reach the candidate's circuit or they would meet at conferences or revivals. This supervision, which included quizzing, assigning of reading, theological discussions, and counseling, seemed to have had a basic similarity of approach modified by the unique characteristics and approaches of the individual presiding elders, as might be expected in the West.
Actually, the candidates were constantly being observed for proper conduct and doctrine, not only by those especially responsible for their formation, but also by the congregations they served, by class leaders and exhorters, and by an occasional bishop on his rounds.

After serving "on trial," if a candidate had proven his convictions and mettle, he would, in the normal course of events, be given a circuit of his own. Naturally, he would first have had to satisfy his companion and his presiding elder as to his fitness and readiness. The Discipline put it: "After two years probation, being recommended by the elders and deacons present, approved by the district annual conference, and examined by the president of the conference, he may be received into full connection."55

The questioning of the candidates recommended by the Discipline is interesting in itself in revealing something about both the circuit riders and Methodism:

Have you faith in Christ? Are you "going on to perfection?" Do you expect to be "perfected in love" in this life? Are you groaning after it? Are you resolved to devote yourself wholly to God and to his work? Do you know the rules of the society? of the bands? Do you keep them? Do you constantly attend the sacrament? Have you read the "Minutes of the Conferences?" Are you willing to conform to them? Have you considered the rules of a helper . . . ? Will you keep them for conscience sake? Are you determined to employ all your time in the work of God? Will you endeavour not to speak too long or too loud? Will you diligently instruct the children
in every place? Will you visit from house to house? Will you recommend fasting both by precept and example? Are you in debt? 56

This formal procedure ended the "on trial" period. Approved candidates' names were entered in the Minutes of the conference as admitted that year, and normally those admitted were ordained deacons at the same conference.

The attrition among the "on trial" preachers was high—probably one third to one half—though to this researcher's knowledge, discrete statistics were not kept on this matter. Nevertheless, considering the rigors of the life and the sacrifices demanded, to say nothing of the rectitude of life required, this was remarkably small especially when the high attrition in modern-day seminaries is considered. Those who did leave the itineracy before achieving the full connection did so for a variety of reasons: general inability to cope with the hardships, poverty, unfitness, or marriage. Many left of their own accord, especially in order to marry or to support their families; some were urged to leave, most often by their senior preacher or presiding elder, who judged their man unsuited for one reason or another.

For those who persevered, once entered on the itineracy, a man adopted a way of life that involved elements of the most bizarre novelty but had a good many elements of routine.

Part of the routine was provided for by regulation of the
Discipline. The preacher was advised to rise "as often as possible" at four. "From four to five in the morning, and from five to six in the evening, to meditate, pray and read, partly the Scripture with Mr. Wesley's Notes, partly the closely practical parts of what he has published . . . . From six in the morning till twelve, (allowing an hour for Breakfast) to read . . . with much prayer . . . pious books." Other, extensive duties demanded much time and elaborate record-keeping, especially for the preacher in charge of a circuit who had to keep statistics on members in good standing, supply each society with books, keep in contact with all believers, maintain exact and detailed records of baptism, deaths, and so on, and supply these records and statistics to the presiding elder and the conference. He had to examine the financial accounts of the church stewards, take up the regular collection, make special collections and keep records of all these financial matters. One of his prescribed functions was to act as arbitrator in disputes between church members. It must be remembered that all these duties were required by the Discipline, were absolutely mandatory, and that all of these administrative functions and tasks were in addition to the itinerant's full-time functions of daily preaching, keeping track of the state of soul of members of his congregations, establishing church societies, bands, and classes, proselytizing, conducting morning and evening services everywhere possible, promoting
education for the young, visiting the sick, seemingly ad infinitum.

However, the routine might at the same time be described quite simply. The circuit rider's duty was to ride his circuit, preaching wherever and as often as he could gather listeners, conduct those services and administer those sacraments for which he had canonical authority, caring for the souls on his circuit, and seeking out other souls thereon.

The itinerant kept making his same circuit as long as he was there assigned. The average circuit in the West took from about four to about six weeks to complete, involving from twenty to thirty stops or "appointments." Usually a circuit was designated as a four-week or six-week one. On the frontier, a circuit that involved a hundred or more miles was not in the least unusual and might be as great as 400 miles. Normally, at each appointment the preacher would make arrangements to preach, holding services every day except Monday, which was set aside for rest after the more strenuous preaching duties of Sundays on which at least two services were held.

Part of each day was spent in reading. Almost every day a part had to be spent in traveling. The remainder might be spent visiting members of the local societies, meeting with class leaders, visiting the sick, or working on records, the day usually capped by an evening service. Seldom did the single evening service comprise all of a preacher's preaching. Methodist circuit
riders, it seems, had a way of turning every situation into a prayer or preaching situation. The itinerant would begin his day by praying (loudly) with the family with whom he had spent the night. Host families apparently received concentrated doses of a preacher’s evangelical efforts, sometimes not very gratefully. Inquiring after the state of soul of one’s hosts or visitors or members of the society often involved considerable ad hoc preaching. And numberless are the stories of how a preacher’s night prayers (again, loudly recited and sung) resulted in a small revival. The point being that Methodist circuit riders were indefatigable preachers and searchers after souls in season and out of season.

On circuit, the accommodations the circuit rider had were typical of the frontier. The itinerant shared the shelter and food of various families on his rounds. Sometimes he was an expected and honored guest at a devout Methodist home; as often as not he stopped at the house of a stranger and asked for shelter wherever or whenever night found him. As the life of those people was austere, their lodgings and food simple, even coarse, so did the circuit rider share the hard life, the plain accommodations, and the simple fare of his hosts. Here and there might be found public houses, and itinerants were known to stay at these. Occasionally, on more settled circuits, a rider might be invited to stay in the home of the relatively wealthy; and some families
of means, Methodist or not, became famous for their hospitality toward preachers. More often, because of storm, flood, or snow, a rider had to seek shelter among those to whom he was not welcome, and occasionally one reads of the innkeeper who charged preachers more than others. On the whole, nevertheless, the circuit rider was welcome as a guest for the news and variety he could bring.

Part of the routine involved frequent change of station for itinerants. Wesley had believed in frequent changes of station both for the good of the preacher and of the congregations. In 1794, the rule still provided for semi-annual changes "whenever it can be made convenient." Only in 1804, was the tour of duty on a circuit extended to no more than two years successively. Since these changes might very well require a movement of hundreds of miles from one station to another, they involved no little sacrifice and adaptability. Not all Methodists agreed that this system of frequent changes of circuits was best. Joseph Pilmore, for example, who tended to reflect a British point of view, felt that, "Frequent changes amongst gospel preachers may keep up the spirits of some kinds of people, but is never likely to promote the spirit of the Gospel nor increase true religion." In general, it seems, church members accepted the practice; and the hardships involved in frequent change of assignment were felt by the preachers themselves, and, if they were married, by their wives and families. From the pragmatic point
seemed to promote a most valuable versatility in the preachers, helped to spread the most talented men throughout the West, and provided a trial that helped weed out weak links. The dauntless preacher who could survive a life of twenty, thirty, or forty years such as this must have been a very durable, adaptable, and tough type indeed.

Another type of change might also be considered routine. In the normal course of events, an itinerant would advance in the church. From status as a preacher "on trial," a man would enter into a career in "the full connection," and be ordained deacon at this time. After two years probation as deacon, a man might be ordained elder. This investigation did not find any pattern according to which one became a presiding elder, but all the long-time preachers studied became presiding elders at some time in their careers, some quite early on. All of the preceding steps might be considered common in the career of a circuit rider. Other recognition of a man of talents and experience might receive was election as delegate to the General Conference. Men of outstanding talents were elected bishops by the delegated body of the General Conference. In this regard, it does seem that the earliest bishops, and very particularly Bishops Asbury and McKendree, were of the highest ability, much to the good fortune of the church.

Out of the humdrum, but part of another regular cycle, were
the periodic conferences to which clergymen especially were called. Each presiding elder's district held quarterly conferences attended by as many of the faithful and clergy as could possibly come. Frequently, these meetings were occasions for camp meeting revivals. The annual conference was another gathering attended by all those preachers in full connection and those to be received into full connection. This very important meeting was a legislative session about which important function those attending were very serious, but it was also an occasion for the circuit rider to meet old friends and acquaintances, possibly obtain spiritual refreshment at one of the many religious services, and certainly get away from one's inexorable rounds.

Very much part and parcel of the itinerant's routine was hardship. Indeed, so normal was it that seldom is it much mentioned in the journals and diaries seen during this study. What is mentioned is remarked about almost parenthetically and always in the briefest way: "I lay down to rest on Some Straw laid on boards being weary & fatig'd I slept [sic] tolerable well."64 "Had a disagreeable night, the fleas swarmed about me."65 Only in the memoirs and autobiographies does the investigator find extended mention of the difficulties of the circuit rider's life. They were severe and numerous.

Merely the regimen of constant travel constituted a considerable hardship. The itinerant traveled almost daily, occasionally
by bone-rattling coach or carriage. Distances involved varied, of course, and so did the attendant discomfort, but any frontier preacher rode thousands of miles each year. In addition, each year in many places a long journey was necessary to the quarterly and annual conferences. Cartwright, for example, once rode over 500 miles to an annual conference after which he had to ride back to his new station. 66

En route, the preacher was exposed to the elements but was usually little daunted by them. Time and again one reads of the necessity of fording swollen streams or of having to swim across a river. Ferries were welcome amenities only infrequently available. Snow storms were more likely to detain the circuit rider, especially on open terrain. But most preachers made allowances for the weather reluctantly when at all. "the snow was up to the Horses' belly so that I could get no farther and was oblig'd to turn back again."67 Heat and cold were almost equally trying, and with such frequent exposure to the vagaries of weather, it is not strange that preachers frequently suffered from fevers, chills, and racking coughs.

Danger was not unknown to the circuit rider. Swollen streams and freezing cold had their dangers. Highwaymen found preachers not worth much attention. But ambushes and physical attacks by bands of rowdies who thought it good sport to molest Methodist preachers or who had been offended by their words were
not unknown. Almost every circuit rider was threatened by such at least once in his career, it seems. Those hardy souls who carried the Gospel beyond the fringe of the frontier were liable as well to many other dangers. More than one preacher is noted in the obituaries of the Minutes of the General Conferences as having died "on the Western Waters." And William Burke recounts a time in 1795, during the Cherokee War, when he left a fort surrounded by Indians in the dead of night to go on to his next appointment. He just trusted to God and made it. The War of 1812 was a trying and dangerous time for the circuit riders in the Northwest.

Overnight accommodations for the itinerant were varied and often comprised some hardship. Not unusually, when caught away from any home, or turned away from a home, he slept outside, exposed to the weather with saddle for pillow and coat for blanket. As mentioned earlier, occasionally a rider was able to stay with families which were famous for hospitality toward preachers and with whom accommodations were far better than average. Most often, he stayed at a typical frontier cabin and shared its meager comforts gladly. Extra beds for guests were not the frontier norm, however, so that often he slept on the floor; but he was used to this lack of comfort and tended in his diaries and memoirs to remark favorably on his rude lodgings and his hosts except when caused particular discomfort such as when
plagued by fleas or subjected to an indignity like having to sleep in a house with a sick cow.70

While the lot of the preacher in terms of accommodations was not easy, and added to the difficulties of his life, generally speaking, he complained little. He was, so often, a frontiersman like his people and knew the frontier way of life. It was difficult and short on luxury, but whatever a family had for shelter or food, it shared gladly and most often graciously received the itinerant. He, in turn, took what was available, gratefully.

Sickness could be very difficult for the circuit rider. Being mortal, he was subject to physical ills, and his way of life probably exposed him to more than the normal share, though, needless to say, some men were of more frail constitution than others. He noticed these sicknesses and chafed when kept by them from his duties, but generally speaking he did not yield much to them, tending rather to follow Joseph Pilmore's practice: "I generally find that Preaching is the best Doctor I have, especially when I have liberty of mind and am blessed with the presence of God."71 Nonetheless, serious illnesses must have been more of a burden for a man alone and far from home and family.

Some hardships were not physical at all. Probably all
circuit riders had moments of doubt as to their worthiness and effectiveness. All had days and conducted services when they felt they could do no good, no matter how they had tried. All must have had particularly bleak moments such as Haskins' which made him exclaim, "Oh Who is sufficient for all this, half was not told me."72 Moreover, the frontiersman was not always a considerate or patient person and did not hesitate to indicate displeasure or boredom. A preacher could and did get very discouraged to have his voice, projection, text, style, and singing, singly or collectively, zealously criticized by his hearers. Frequently, especially in the writings of certain humble or introspective men such as Pilmore, Haskins, Reed, or Lakin, the investigator comes across such comments as "preached to a hardened set,"73 "universal deadness seemed to prevail among us,"74 or "a large congregation ... would look me Right in ye face and laugh at me .... Nevertheless I found a desire for their happiness."75 Even a self-confident extrovert such as Cartwright or James Axley could be disconcerted and downcast by ingratitude or harsh criticisms.

Of all the hardships, one of those most remarked upon was poverty. Methodism from the start ministered to the poorer classes in America and there were few wealthy members in the early history of the church. On the frontier this poverty was endemic. No one could possibly get rich as a preacher, even if
he received his full disciplinary salary. In 1784, preachers were to receive £6 per quarter, Pennsylvania currency, with a wife to receive nothing unless "they stand in need." Children received £6 or £8, depending on age, with the allowance ceasing at age eleven. In 1792 preachers' annual salaries were changed to £64.00, plus expenses, and £64.00 for a wife, "if they be in want of it." Only in 1796, was the wife's allowance made absolute. In 1800, salaries for the preacher were £80.00 plus expenses, £80.00 for his wife, £16.00 per child under age seven, and £24.00 per child between seven and fourteen years. After 1816, the preacher's salary was £100.00 as was the allowance for his wife; the children's allowances were unchanged.

The heart of the problem was that seldom, if ever, did the frontier circuit rider receive any amount approaching the full allowance. James Finley wryly remarked that "of all denominations of Christians we ever knew, the Methodists, in general, are the most attached to a free Gospel: that is, one that cost them nothing [In terms of preachers' salaries]." The poor preachers who ministered to the frontier Methodists were poor indeed. Whether from poverty, which was theirs, or from parsimony, which sometimes there was, Methodists did not well support their clergy. Cartwright told of having received but six dollars in one three-month period in 1804, and went on to say "that in nine
cases out of ten [the preacher] could not get half his disciplinary salary. While no adequate statistics are available, it seems most likely that most preachers were lucky to receive half their due and that they could match these narratives:

"In 1812, I closed my itineracy, and sold my horse, bridle, saddle bags, and saddle, and gathered up the fragments, and the fortune that I made from twenty-six years' labor amounted to three hundred dollars."82

"I . . . had been from my father's house about three years; was five hundred miles from home; my horse had gone blind; my saddle was worn out; my bridle reins had been eaten up and replaced (after a sort) at least a dozen times; and my clothes had been patched till it was difficult to detect the original . . . . I had just seventy-five cents in my pocket."83

For such men in such circumstances, obviously marriage was an extremely difficult proposition; and with the preacher's long absences on circuit and his meager income, life was particularly distressing for his wife and family. Accordingly, up until 1796, no circuit rider continued in the itineracy after marriage but rather had to locate.

William Burke seems to have been the first married man to continue in the travelling connection, and how hard his way was made. "I had many difficulties to contend with being the first married preacher that has ever attempted to travel with what the
people and preachers called the incumbrance (sic) of a wife; and everything was thrown in my way to discourage me. The presiding elder thought I had better locate; for, he said, the people would not support a married man."84

In the earliest days there was tremendous prejudice against a married itinerant who was "looked upon almost as a heretic who had denied the faith."85 Even the first five bishops were unmarried men. Burke, for example, was once placed on a circuit where the people were so set against a married preacher that he could not lodge his wife anywhere. He had to build a cabin for her himself.86 The reason for the prejudice is difficult to say with any certainty, but certain it is that the strong antipathy existed.

Aside from prejudice, the difficulties of married life for the itinerant were inescapable and enormous. In most cases, a wife and family would be left to their own devices for weeks on end. Farming between rounds must have been all but impossible for the preacher to undertake effectively. Yet farming would be almost all the preacher's family could expect to live on, so inadequate was the amount of money a preacher might expect to receive in a year. "I think I received about forty dollars this year (1806); but many of our preachers did not receive half that amount. These were hard times in those Western wilds; many, very many pious and useful preachers were literally starved
into a location."87 Thus well is the problem stated. Only in 1800, is the first mention made of a disciplinary obligation to provide a home for the family of preachers.88

The sufferings of preachers' families was well known. Some provision for relief was made at the General Conference of 1796, when the Chartered Fund was established "for the distressed traveling preachers, for the families of traveling preachers, and for superannuated and worn-out preachers and the widows and orphans."89 So severe were matters that in 1813, Bishop Asbury begged from door to door in the East so that he might distribute ten dollars for each young child of a circuit rider in the West.90 The measures provided but feeble relief.

By 1810, it seems, marriage among circuit riders in the West became much more common and accepted.91 Yet one narrator indicated that even in the 1830's and 1840's, "We recollect ... young men have been discontinued who married within two years, though there was nothing else against them."92

Even the itinerant's wife and family had to be made of very stern stuff. Clearly, few average women could reconcile themselves to a life so demanding and trying. Few were willing to abide the long absences, the lonely work at home, the burden of raising a family virtually unaided, and the weight of perpetual poverty. More, the life required frequent changes of station with concomitant change of domicile. Some wives traveled
everywhere with their husbands, but this was normally impossible when children came. Then, as now, the clergyman's wife was expected to be a paragon of virtue and charm, and obviously, even some of those who began the life with their preacher-husbands were found to be constitutionally or emotionally unsuited.

Little wonder that the majority of circuit riders located once married or at some time soon after. More remarkable still is the large number of them who served for decades, at such great cost. Strange the pull this vocation had on some men, for it is not in the least unusual to read of a man who had located but who rejoined the traveling connection once on his economic feet. One who followed this vocation was not choosing an easy road.
CHAPTER IV

THE MAN HIMSELF

What was this man like, the circuit rider of the Old Northwest? In many ways he was as individualistic as his own fingerprints with his essence difficult to extract. However, at the risk of over-simplification, a composite picture of the average itinerant may be drawn.

To begin, the vocation of circuit rider was a young man's calling, one made in the enthusiasm and fervor of youth. A hard life, it was easier for the vigorous young frontiersman than for the mature individual. A life hard on a family, it was one which often must needs be abandoned once a man married. Many venerable and vital men of mature years were circuit riders, certainly, but this was a calling accepted more often by young men than old, and one the ranks of which were depleted as men entered marriage and filled up again by men in their early twenties or even their late teens.

The background of these young idealists was generally typical of the frontier. Most, it seems, were American born, of American parents, from families which had moved West into the Piedmont then into trans-Appalachia. They were, most of them, of humble stock, not too different from the other settlers in this new region, being more likely to be Upland Southerners.
or people from the Middle States than New Englanders or Tidewater Southerners. In every respect, in fact, they might be judged typical of the people who filled up the Northwest.95

The itinerant's education would, by our standards, be considered meagre; but he would more probably be judged to be of average learning by his contemporaries. His theological education, by modern standards, might be considered non-existent; but his training in Brush College seemed completely adequate to his congregations.

His creed had a definite appeal to the frontier types whom he sought to bring to salvation, unsophisticated as it might appear to our eyes. His doctrine emphasized free grace to all who sought it, free will involving individual responsibility for actions, and an individual response to God which he often referred to as "experimental religion." His religion, considered a Pietist offshoot of Anglicanism, emphasized personal salvation and personal response to God's graces, and was sometimes criticized for a certain tendency toward emotionalism.

The temperament most common in circuit riders is the most difficult to identify simply because investigation plainly indicated that they were the most varied in this regard. There were introverts among their number and extroverts, simple men and complex, sickly types and hearty, meek types and imperious. In their ranks were religious fanatics, temperance men,
abolitionists, puritans, cool theorizers, and unruffled moderates. All these there were and more. Consequently, there was no one temperament that, to this investigator, seemed dominant, though there were some which seemed more resilient to the abrasions of the frontier situation.

Their character may be rather simply described. There is no doubt that the circuit rider felt himself called by God to a sacred task and that the overwhelming majority led a dedicated, exemplary life. As with any group of humans, backsliders were to be found among them; but even their vices tended to be small; and the transgressor was soon punished and often expelled from his office, if not from the church. More, the individual who made the sacrifices demanded by this calling, fulfilled the Disciplinary duties, rode his circuit looking for souls to save, gave abundant evidence of many, many virtues and indications of strong and dedicated character.

That the itinerant service of the average preacher was not of long duration, resulted both in benefits and problems for Methodism. Because so many located, always there was a need for more itinerants and a high turnover of personnel; and on the face of things, this created problems for the church and its members. Nevertheless, it was quite the norm that located preachers continued to serve, and the strength of local congregations which had in their midst this resource of located, supernumerary, or
superannuated preachers was by so much increased. In addition, this commitment early in life undoubtedly tended to make the man with itinerant experience a better person and church member, though, admittedly, such a statement defies empirical proof.

A very prominent characteristic of the circuit rider of the Old Northwest was his democracy. A frontiersman himself, in most cases, he tended to have about him some of the air of the democracy of the frontier. Particularly, because of the itinerant's education, background, origins, poverty, and style, the frontiersman was able to identify with him. A democrat, he spoke the language of the frontier, met the settlers on their own level, lived their life unself-consciously and unflinchingly, never looked down at or talked down to them. In addition, his doctrine had in it elements of democracy, and his church obviously was conducted with keen regard for democratic methods.

Immediately after having made these generalizations, the necessity of avoiding the stereotype and establishing a more valid working definition and a more authentic and adequate description is obvious. Certainly, some of these facets in the characterization of the circuit rider require more detailed analysis.

It was never surprising either to contemporary or more modern critics, friendly or not, that the itinerant came from a background in no substantial way different from that of his
frontier flock. It has been considered discreditible by many, then as now, that he had characteristically little formal education.

He did in fact have little. Volume I of the Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church contains obituaries of dead itinerants. Of the 122 men who died between 1764, and 1815, only four are singled out as educated men. Two, John Dickens (1798) and John Wilson (1810), were natives of Great Britain and had served as superintendents of the Methodist Book Concern. Francis Ward (1814) was born in Ireland, and William Hunt (1811) in Massachusetts. No men were identified as having any noteworthy education in the period 1820-25. Right up until 1844, the pattern remained essentially the same, especially in the Western conferences. That some men are not noted in their obituaries for education admittedly does not absolutely preclude the possibility of their having been educated, but this investigation did not indicate any but the normal, irregular, education common in those days and parts for the average itinerant in the Northwest.

Bishop Francis Asbury himself, the paragon of circuit riders, had only six years of formal education. Bishop McKendree, another giant among early preachers and bishops, had no more education than normal on the frontier. Of the first twelve bishops, only two were college graduates: Thomas Coke,
one of the first two bishops, and John Emory, who was elected to the episcopacy in 1832.99

Bishop Coke is an example of one group of preachers who had had the benefits of good education. He was an Oxford graduate. Among the very earliest Methodists were several men who had been educated in England, men who were intelligent, polished, urbane, even scholarly. These were men in the tradition of the Anglican clergy, some of whom, like Coke, had the degree of Doctor of Divinity. Such a person also was Joseph Pilmore, the breadth and depth of whose readings clearly indicate an educated and a scholarly mind. James Finley was a classical scholar. Another such a one with a classical education was Thomas Haskins who read the New Testament in Greek, to keep in practice.100 Of the educated clergy, it seems most were Englishmen, and of these, the majority found the East more congenial than the frontier.

Another group of men who could lay claim to some higher education was composed of those who joined the itineracy after careers in medicine, law, or teaching. These men were considered educated, even though American schools and their graduates in the period were not noted for their scholarship, and even though these and other professions did not presume college education of any great duration if any at all. Still and all, here and there in the ranks might be found a few scholars such as Finley.

The diaries studied for this investigation exemplify the
point well. Some diaries reveal the barest minimum of knowledge necessary to communicate on paper, written as they are in broken style, misspelled, poorly written, showing no control over the language and little knowledge of vocabulary or grammatical usage. Some are written in beautiful calligraphy and elegant, formal style. The great majority are plainly and simply written and stated.

By the 1830's and 1840's, some Eastern clergymen with formal theological training were sent west, but their numbers were few and their influence negligible because of a tendency on their part to locate and an antipathy toward them on the part of the Westerner. Old time and old style itinerants might not be considered unbiased in judging the new crop of preachers who were, in their eyes, men with many advantages and few problems, but all these old-timers were critical of their replacements in the work or at least worried that the church would be worse off following their novel ways. Peter Cartwright, as might be expected, put the sentiments of the pioneers most pungently: "I do not wish to undervalue education, but really, I have seen so many of these educated preachers who forcibly reminded me of lettuce growing under the shade of a peach-tree, or like a gosling that had got the straddles by wading in the dew, that I turn away sick and faint." It is, in fact, a characteristic both of memoirs of old itinerants and of their letters published
in periodicals that considerable scepticism is indicated of the necessity for, if not the benefits of, theological training for the upcoming Methodist clergymen.

Whether some of the deprecation of education for the ministry is defensiveness, conservativism on the part of the old, or a sound evaluation of the new crop is difficult to assess. It was true that the educated clergy tended to locate, to teach, to work for church publishing houses, and do a great number of things other than ride circuit, and there was a universal fear among veteran preachers that the end of the itineracy would mean the most serious weakening of Methodism.

If it was not likely that circuit riders would have had much formal education, the chances of their having had any formal theological training were nearly nil. Hardly any frontier preachers had formal theological training, which to many contemporaries seemed a reproach and to many moderns seems disreputable. Still, the Methodist preacher was seldom an ignorant man, largely because part of his training was given up to education à la Brush College. This education produced men who knew their Bible thoroughly, were skilled in theological debate, were keen judges of human nature, had more familiarity with record-keeping, bookkeeping, and written expression than their lay peers, and had been broadened by more exposure to varied reading and ideas than one might expect.
Officially, the church promoted education for the clergy. The General Conference of 1816, resolved that annual conferences should determine "a course of reading and study proper to be pursued by candidates for the ministry." An example of such a course of study is contained in the Journal of the Illinois Conference for the year 1827. It was recommended that candidates study a long line of doctrines together with "the nature and principles of Church Government, especially our own. The Philosophy, or Grammar of the English Language--Geography--Ancient History--Ecclesiastical History, Moral & Natural Philosophy & Logic." In 1844, the bishops were authorized to prepare a uniform four-year course of study for all conferences.

Moreover, the Discipline required five hours daily be spent in reading by all itinerants. It went further and commanded preachers to "Contract a taste for it [reading] by use or return to your former employment." How this dictum was interpreted and practiced is impossible to judge. Many narratives and diaries indicated that the circuit rider in earliest times traveled light as far as books were concerned, having with him regularly the Discipline, the Bible, and a hymnal as his library. Certain diaries such as Haskins' and Pilmore's indicated a voracious appetite for reading, with dozens of titles noted as they were read and studied. Very probably, by about 1820, all preachers...
had a more varied stock of books about them at most times since all itinerants were book and magazine agents for the Methodist publishing houses, and circulated numbers of their publications.

Circulating books and periodicals was a duty of every preacher in charge of a circuit. The Methodist Book Concern published an ever-increasing number of books, beginning first with a few titles by Wesley and other English Methodists and having, by 1844, a catalogue of nearly 200 titles in print. In addition, the concern or its branch offices published several magazines and newspapers, several of which later had some variant of the title, Christian Advocate. Parenthetically, some part of the growth of the Methodist Church can be traced in that of the book concern which was organized in 1789, and by the 1840's had two publishing houses, one in New York City and one in Cincinnati, book depositories in Charleston, Pittsburgh, and Boston, published Christian Advocates in New York, Cincinnati, Charleston, Richmond, Nashville, and Pittsburgh, and even had a German-language department. The importance attached to this function of the preacher is indicated in many ways: The official church declared "The propagation of religious knowledge by the means of the press is next in importance to the preaching of the Gospel." The Discipline required the compilation of elaborate records and statistics on book sales. Commissions provided added incentive.
The significant aspect, as it seems to this writer, of the itinerants' circulation of books and periodicals was its indication that these men played a very important role in spreading reading and knowledge, though it was predominately religious, or the frontier. By 1840, the Western Christian Advocate, with its 15,000 paid subscribers had one of the largest periodical circulations in the nation.112 These men with not much formal education of their own encouraged reading and spread books and other printed materials far and wide, performing thereby a significant and unparalleled educational function.113

In other respects too, the Methodist clergy promoted education on the frontier. Very often the Methodist clergy and the early church have been criticized for anti-intellectualism; and it is true that right up through 1844, there was in the West steadfast and vocal defense of the preeminence of God's call and aid over the doubtful benefits of seminary training for preachers. Which is to the point, for of all the words directed against learning and educational institutions, almost all were directed specifically not at education or institutions of higher learning in general, but at theological seminaries. Almost all memoirs contain references to the effectiveness of the old time preachers working under staggering handicaps and indicate a fear that younger men, seminary educated, would abandon the old ways.

"Multiply colleges, universities, seminaries, and academies;
multiply our agencies and editorships, and fill them all with the best and most efficient preachers, and you localize the ministry and secularize them too.\textsuperscript{114} This fear that education would tend to wean preachers from the itinerancy was the great fear of men who had spent their lives on circuit.

On the other hand, while so few had much formal education, and did not feel apologetic about it,\textsuperscript{115} Methodist clergymen generally helped promote education, even higher education. At the organizing conference of 1784, the official church provided for the establishment of Cokesbury College in Abingdon, Maryland, which, unfortunately, lasted but three years after its opening in 1792. Still, this was the first of a long line of "seminaries," i.e., high schools, and colleges. In 1820, the general conference recommended that the annual conferences establish literary institutions under their control; and in the three decades following, many such were founded in all the conferences. Most were "seminaries," with some colleges, many of which failed in a few years from a variety of causes. Nevertheless, in 1840, the Committee on Education reported the existence of three "universities," eighteen colleges, eleven "seminaries," nine academies, and six other educational institutions which were under the control of the annual conferences,\textsuperscript{116} some of which have had a continuous existence to the present.\textsuperscript{117}

As for the preachers, some of those who railed against
theological seminaries played a role in the establishment of other schools. Cartwright, for example, who has achieved a certain notoriety for his opposition to theological training had a hand in the establishment of two colleges in Illinois, McKendree College, and Jacksonville Women's College, and as a state legislator introduced the first bill for the establishment of a state university.118

On balance then, while both the church and the clergy were ambivalent regarding education -- on one hand insisting on reading and learning and establishing an elaborate "plan of education,"119 on the other hand stating, "gaining knowledge is a good thing, but saving souls is better;"120 or" ... we ought to throw by all the libraries in the world, rather than be guilty of the loss of one soul"121—consideration of all factors leads this writer to view the circuit rider, and the church, as positive promoters of education on the frontier.

In conclusion, when judging the education and culture of these men, several other factors deserve consideration: The average itinerant's education was no more nor less than that normal in the milieu in which he worked. His "on trial" training and the daily reading required by the Discipline tended to broaden the base of whatever formal education he had. By the criterion of worldly success located preachers did uncommonly well. Ex-circuit riders achieved worldly distinction as Congressmen,
state legislators, doctors, judges, governors, business men, and on and on. Such ones, no matter what their exposure to formal schooling, must have been men of native intelligence and ability. More to the point, the circuit rider must be judged a success in terms of how well he fulfilled his spiritual role. Thousands of frontier people's lives were touched by circuit riders. Hundreds of thousands joined the ranks of Methodism. All of this was done in circumstances most difficult, in a society not naturally inclined to follow the rigid morality and the committed life of the church. Finally, the circuit rider, selling his books and periodicals, preaching morality, honesty, sobriety, and respect for the law constituted one of the few, and demonstrably effective, civilizing and educational influences on the frontier.

Thus, when considering the education or culture of the Western itinerant, it is not remiss to consider in such an evaluation those standards most relevant to him and his calling. Some of the veteran itinerants felt obliged in their memoirs to answer charges of circuit rider ignorance. They felt their culture and education should be judged by criteria of greater priority:

The early circuit riders perhaps knew little about Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, or Biblical literature in the critical sense of that term, but they were thoroughly versed in the Bible. They were men of the Bible; men of faith and men of prayer; and coming to their congregations with an unction from the holy one, the word of God.
was like "a fire and a hammer, which broke the rock in pieces." 123

And . . .

It is true we could not, many of us, conjugate a verb or parse a sentence, and murdered the king's English almost every lick. But there was a Divine unction attended the word preached, and thousands fell under the mighty power of God, and thus the Methodist Episcopal Church was planted firmly in this Western wilderness. . . . 124

This investigator is inclined to agree that these criteria are relevant and of greater priority.

The circuit rider's beliefs were Wesleyan. The basic doctrines were contained in twenty-five articles, proposed by Mr. Wesley, which were adapted from the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England. These Wesleyan articles were accepted by Methodists in America from the beginning, adopted in full when the church became independent, and sustained no substantial changes during our whole period. 125

Certain features of the gospel of the circuit riders are particularly significant because of their appeal to the frontiersman. As the itinerant went abroad preaching free grace, free will, and individual responsibility to God, he struck responsive chords in Western hearts and minds. Among men who believed that they were equal to anyone else, who admitted of no aristocracy, no superiors, the doctrine of free grace, that is, of a salvation open to everyone, seemed only fitting. Parenthetically, the predestination of the Presbyterians was
ever a stumbling block for the Westerner; he never could abide the idea of a preordained "elect." Among men who felt themselves free to the point of belligerancy, who were constitutionally opposed to determinism, the doctrine of free will was patently true. Again, in a land where each man had to rely on himself and felt keenly that his survival depended on his own efforts, the preacher's emphasis on an individual responsibility to God was a fact of life he could readily appreciate.

In another context, the democracy of the Methodist creed was brought out, but briefly. Yet it cannot be over-emphasized that doctrines such as those above, by placing all men on an equal footing before God, recognizing individualism, and emphasizing democratic ideals had a natural appeal to the individualistic and egalitarian Westerner.

As open as the doors of the church were to all comers, membership in the church required a real commitment on the part of anyone who joined. To begin association with Methodism, individuals needed merely "a desire" to flee from the wrath to come, to be saved from their sin." Membership, however, demanded participation in class meetings, with all the scrutiny of character that entailed, adherence to rigid standards of public and private morality, submission to church discipline, and foreswearing of frivolous dress. It goes almost without saying that over the years Methodist practices changed as the
land filled up, the frontier moved west, the Northwest became more settled, and the church settled down as well; but in the early days, into the 1820's, and in some places beyond then, membership required a different way of life which set the Methodist off from his fellows.

The Methodists in that early day dressed plain; attended their meetings faithfully, especially preaching, prayer, and class meetings; they wore no jewelry, no ruffles; they would frequently walk three or four miles to class meetings and home again; they would go thirty or forty miles to their quarterly meetings, and think it a glorious privilege to meet their presiding elder, and the rest of the preachers. They could, nearly every soul of them, sing our hymns and spiritual songs. They religiously kept the Sabbath day: many of them abstained from dram-drinking, not because the temperance reformation was ever heard of in that day, but because it was interdicted in the General Rules of our Discipline. . . . Parents did not allow their children to go to balls or plays; they generally fasted once a week . . . .

By inference, this quotation from a book written in 1850, also tells much about the changes in Methodist practices by mid-nineteenth century.

While studying the Discipline, the investigator must be struck by an emphasis in the church rules and procedures which require and enforce rigid honesty, payment of debts, and honoring of contracts. Preoccupation with such matters, and the preeminence of the values implicit in this preoccupation, might be enigmatic but for the fact that just such a concern is a typical characteristic of a church of the dispossessed.
which is what Methodism was at that time.

Another curious situation involved church trials. The church enforced its discipline with church trials; and it might, at first glance, seem very strange indeed that any layman at least should submit himself to a tribunal which had no legal status or sanctions. Possible explanations are various, but they might have been submitted to out of fear of divine penalty, or exclusion from the church, or simply the weight of public opinion.

In any event, both the strict morality preached by the itinerants and the church trials provide good examples of the role the circuit riders and the church played in providing some social controls in a lawless environment. This is very significant, and any evaluation of the itinerant must recognize his part in civilizing the frontier where often he, his doctrines, and his church provided the major portion of the effective social controls.

On the frontier, the chief professional and religious opponents of the Methodists were the Baptists and Calvinists who, in the North were Congregationalists and in the South, Presbyterians. Aside from these and some of the sects such as the Shakers and the New Lights, most itinerants had little contact with other religious groups. The sects were generally harshly condemned, but the hardest words were reserved for
Unitarians who were obviously worse in Methodist eyes than any other religious body, Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, or whatever. Since it seems plain that there would have been few actual Unitarian church members in the West, this antipathy is curious but understandable considering the Methodists' own clear and strongly held beliefs.

On the whole, circuit riders frequently cooperated with clergymen of other Protestant faiths, especially Presbyterians and Baptists with whom they would join in such religious affairs as camp meetings. Methodists and Presbyterians, on occasion, even received the Lord's Supper at one another's services.129

Nevertheless, there was definite competition between churches. With the Calvinists the greatest conflict was doctrinal. There were not so many Presbyterian or Congregational clergymen in the West where the circuit riders roamed nor so many of their churches either, but Calvinist doctrines were significant enough and well enough known to require constant analysis and refutation. Between Methodists and Baptists, doctrinal differences were not great except for divergent dogma about Baptism. On the other hand, the Baptist farmer-preacher and his doctrines were a very direct competition for souls, and between him and the itinerant there was a continual contest. This particular competitiveness provides many amusing stories of battles waged for souls involving irrepressible and
imaginative warriors such as Dow, Cartwright, and Axley. The heart of the doctrinal issue between these churches was that Baptists believed that the only Scriptural type of Baptism was by immersion and that children could not be eligible for the sacrament. The Methodists believed that valid Baptism could be by immersion, sprinkling, or pouring of water, and also that children could be baptized. A standing circuit rider taunt was that the Baptists believed heaven was an island and one had to swim to get there.

Some problems of orthodoxy the circuit rider had involved schisms. From time to time, for one reason or another, personal, theological, political, or mercenary, itinerants bolted the church, sometimes to join another church, sometimes to form a sect. In these instances a man might take with him out of the church some few members, a whole congregation, or no one. Usually these defections were too small to constitute schism. On the other hand, over the years, Methodism was weakened by more serious splits involving numbers of preachers and relatively large numbers of people, one of the most famous of which was the O'Kelly schism. It was over the power of bishops and resulted in the formation of the Republican Methodist Church. A similar issue in 1824, caused another serious defection and the founding of the Protestant Methodist Church. In 1816, Richard Allen left the church, leading nearly 900 Negroes out with him, and
founded the African Methodist Episcopal Church. The issue was Negro self-determination. 133 In 1836, a number of abolitionists battled over the slavery issue and formed their own True Wesleyans. 134 Finally, in 1844, the church was rent in two over slavery, resulting in the creation of the Methodist Episcopal Church, North and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. 135

Some other very serious problems were created for the church and the circuit rider by two Wesleyan preachments, namely that alcoholic beverages and slavery were moral evils. In the theological sense, these two issues were almost peripheral to the circuit rider's creed, and yet they were very prominent concerns for certain elements within the church during our period. Familiarly typically of ante-bellum Protestantism in America, a good deal of the energies of some Methodists was spent on extirpating the twin evils of drink and slavery. Since on these matters there was some room for various interpretations of precisely what the Discipline stated and forbade, and since the customs of the time and of the various sections determined many of the actual patterns of behavior, accordingly, neither abolition nor temperance was promoted by all itinerants.

Regarding drink, for example, the Discipline prohibited preachers' drinking "spirituous liquors unless it be medicinally."136 In addition, "drunkenness or drinking spiritous liquors, unless in cases of necessity"137 were interdicted for all. Yet the
mores of the frontier required liberal libations on any formal or festive occasion—-to say nothing of a reasonable daily ration. So much was this the case and so great the consumption of hard liquors that alcoholism at worst and heavy drinking at best constituted a serious moral and social problem.

In such a situation, with drink and drinking considered so much a commonplace, it is likely that in the eighteenth century at least, a majority of itinerants drank, as did their neighbors, family, congregations, business acquaintances—everybody. Further on into the nineteenth century, temperance became more and more common a sermon topic, and certain preachers came to be distinguished as vehement temperance crusaders. Such ones were James Axley and James Gilruth. Cartwright is typical, undoubtedly, of many other circuit riders who felt all drinking was contrary to the Discipline and urged temperance without any trace of the doctrinaire or the crusader. This investigation did not uncover any accurate information regarding either the extent of the temperance movement among Methodist preachers or the time at which drink clearly was identified as being intolerable among Methodists. However, it seems likely, from inference, that by the 1820's the majority of preachers did not drink and that they preached against it, maintaining the while a sense of proportion and an appreciation of the realities of Western life.

Slavery was an altogether different matter. From the very
beginning it was the cause of many difficulties for the church, difficulties which grew more and more serious; and eventually it was the cause of the agonized and traumatic rupture of the church into two sectional churches. The first Discipline, as had been Wesley's rules before, was clear on the issue of slavery among Methodists and required freeing of any slaves held, prohibited buying or selling slaves, all under penalty of exclusion from Methodist society.\(^{138}\) Converts posed a particularly thorny problem. Some of these, of course, accepted this teaching with all others and obeyed the provisions. An early diary of Bishop Richard Whatcoat mentioned at least one case of a convert who posted £1000 bond that he would free two slaves he had bought by their twenty-eighth birthdays.\(^{139}\) On the other hand, the prohibitions did not have much practical impact on the customs in the South and were rather widely ignored. Even as early as 1800, feelings were strong enough on the matter that a correspondent of Ezekial Cooper's wrote of having been attacked by crowds because of the Discipline's stand on slavery.\(^ {140}\) In the turmoil, various general conferences chose to suspend the rules or modify them lest they harm the church irreparably.\(^ {141}\) At such times, however, the conferences never failed to emphasize their deepest abhorrence of slavery and all its evils.\(^ {142}\) Clearly the church was never quite able to cope with the institution of slavery—at least in the South.
In the Northwest there was not the same set of problems over slavery. Slavery was effectively forbidden both to clergy and laity. In fact, many Methodists in the Northwest had moved into the area specifically to get away from slavery. A slightly different problem existed, however. Abolitionist sentiment gripped some Methodist clergymen, and occasionally one read of a man who left the ministry to join the abolitionist crusade, especially in the decades of the 1830's and 1840's. As was the case in society at large, their agitation had a disquieting effect on congregations and caused innumerable controversies and great ill will at conferences.

Eventually abolitionist elements went into schism in 1836, and founded the True Wesleyan Church. But even this did not cure the problem. Events within the church mirrored accurately the course of events in the nation. Beginning most noticeably in the 1830's, a tension and friction was apparent in the church, with abolitionists agitating and calling for the strictest application of the original Wesleyan prohibitions of slavery—no matter the cost—and with Southerners beginning to seek Scriptural vindication of it. As was the case in the nation, in the church an increasing hardening of positions became evident, concomitant with a shriller and shriller appeal to principle.

The crisis was reached at the general conference of 1840, when it seemed a slave owner would be proposed for bishop by the
Southern delegates. A slave-owning bishop was more than even the liberals and compromisers were prepared to accept, so that a rupture was avoided temporarily only by Peter Cartwright's motion against electing any bishops at all at this conference.143

By 1844, however, the issue of a slave-holding bishop could not be ignored or delayed because a Southern bishop, Bishop James O. Andrew, had acquired slaves by marriage and refused to give them up. The story of this general conference with its bitter struggle between abolitionists and pro-slavery people was a prototype of the struggle that would grip the country.144 The outcome was a vote to split the church in two, resulting in separate sectional churches. Clearly, this was a significant and symbolic event which prefigured another dichotomy in the nation. It was a clear symptom of the illness which would prostrate it. In the split was no little irony. By 1844, the church was mature, respectable, at the height of its powers. How ironic it should fragment itself at just such a time over such an issue which, it should be noted again, was not a central doctrine of the church nor one that had been treated with consistency through the years. It is not necessary to make elaborate interpretations or to belabor the obvious.

Affecting absolute definition of the character of the circuit rider would be presumptuous. These were good men of strong
character and many virtues, men who felt God's call and strove mightily, even heroically, to follow it according to their best lights. These things might be taken for granted as obvious, but some facets of the itinerant's character might be expanded on to give a fuller and more detailed picture of the man.

Backsliders and sinners there were in the ranks. Records of church trials, \textit{145} minutes of annual and general conferences \textit{146} indicated that transgressions and infractions of discipline occurred. It is not possible, this investigator feels, to determine with any degree of accuracy the number of sins or sinners involved because most matters of the sort were settled on the local level and available records are very fragmentary. However, from the records surviving, it is possible to make some inferences about the types of infractions and something of their extent. Thus, with relatively little evidence available, it seems most likely that the numbers of circuit riders who were charged with offenses against public morality were few. These sins ran the gamut from drunkenness to sexual promiscuity to embezzlement, on through the catalogue of capital sins. Such scandals met with immediate remedial steps. If the charges of such offenses seemed to have merit, the presiding elder would suspend the accused from his functions. He would be tried at the next quarterly meeting, and if found guilty, punished—frequently by expulsion from office and church. This said, it
is important that perspective be maintained. First, it seems that the number involved is small. Probably most persons with weak or vicious characters would soon have dropped out of the ministry even if they had gotten through the screening of the "on trial" period. Secondly, it can not be inferred that such matters were hushed up. This was not the Methodist way. Rather, the opposite is true.

On the other hand, many circuit riders, including some of the most notable, were charged at some time or another with minor offenses and infractions of discipline. Throughout these early days there were many problems in the church over authoritarianism. The Methodist church economy required discipline and submission to authority, and many good preachers ran afoul of these. Two schisms occurred after challenges to the power of bishops. Lorenzo Dow's life, for example, is almost the story of a running guerilla warfare against authoritarianism as he viewed it. Accordingly, this flamboyant character's status in the church frequently changed. Other, less colorful characters were plagued by similar problems. An irreconcilable difference with a presiding elder could put a preacher beyond the pale and cause his trial and suspension. This rigorous enforcement of discipline worked many hardships on some conscientious and capable men, and yet it was also one reason for the effectiveness of the church organization in a primitive and disorganized society.
Many of the charges leveled in church trials centered around business dealings and contractual matters. This was true both of preachers and laymen and well exemplified the values of this church of the disinherited. 149

Other common charges concerned minor infractions of the Discipline: obstinacy, calumny, high-handedness, rudeness, and such like. Many of the more colorful preachers, given to extravagant words and imperious gestures, found themselves charged with one of these.

Before proceeding further, two especially noteworthy matters might be emphasized. Of far-reaching significance is the fact that Methodism involved itself with the orderly, legal, settlement of a vast array of problems, crimes, and disputes, and this in a situation that was not always orderly or concerned with legal procedures. Part of the significance of the impact of the Methodist circuit rider on the frontier, then, is that he brought with him on his rounds this attitude of respect for law and order. Another important fact is that all of these matters were settled in church trials. The Discipline provided an elaborate system of trials and appeals which at the same time indicated a respect for the rights of the individual to fair trial and appeal to higher authority and a respect for democratic procedures since these trials were democratic. Both the respect for the rights of the individual and respect for democratic procedures are
characteristic of the circuit rider.

With the character flaws and failures recognized, and placed in perspective, other particular aspects of the itinerant's character might be described.

Certainly, all circuit riders were not cut from the same piece of cloth. Some were adaptable; some were inflexible. Some were noted for a sense of humor; others were humorless. Some were noted for physical and mental courage; others were meek men. Some were broad-minded and tolerant; others were narrow-minded and intolerant. Yet this investigation indicated that most circuit riders in the Northwest were likely to be very adaptable, courageous, broad-minded men, blessed with a sense of humor. These might be elaborated on as some of the characteristics of the Western preacher.

Adaptability was absolutely essential for the circuit rider, at least if he were to remain in the ministry for any length of time. His life was so irregular and difficult that he could not be otherwise. The preacher in the Northwest had to be prepared to speak to any audience in almost any situation. He had to be able to pack up and change circuits on short notice and be ready to minister to any type of congregation. He had to be ready to answer disputants of every motive and theological background. His life in the back country required his being able to share whatever food and accommodations were available,
and sleep under the sky, hungry, when necessary. He had to be able to do without and make do. He lived and worked on the frontier, and his way of life required all the adaptability of frontiersmen. It required more, in fact, because his station was changed so often and because he was constantly on circuit. At least other frontiersmen settled down for a time and established a homestead. Inflexible men there were, but they did not generally last long.

Physical and mental courage often were called for on the part of the itinerant. This way of life involved real dangers. Snow storms and swollen rivers provided some. At times Indians were another, particularly during the War of 1812. Not infrequently circuit riders were threatened with physical violence. Some were threatened by irate people who had been rebuked in public or expelled from the society for transgressions. Lawless elements often resented the preaching and activities of itinerants and attempted physical intimidation. Many of the rowdy element in the Northwest reveled in harassing preachers. Disorderly and violent men sometimes came to services. But some of the greatest problems were connected with camp meetings. To these, hundreds and even thousands of people came, of whom many were present mainly for entertainment and socializing. In addition, it seems as if revivals provided great attraction for numbers of irreverent, drunk, and mischievous ruffians. Gener-
worshipers to prevent incidents by such hangers-on. Repulsion or expulsion of these elements normally involved some risk for the preachers. Threatened often by physical violence, itinerants inevitably found times when they had to stand up to the men or groups who threatened them. Not infrequently, the circuit rider stood his ground and met his assailants on their own terms. Some acquired a certain fame for their rough handling of troublemakers, obviously sharing Cartwright's creed: "It was part of my creed to love everybody, but to fear no one; and I did not permit myself to believe any man could whip me till it was tried." 

Moral courage and toughness were also requisite. Itinerants had to be willing to challenge the mores of a society which was often lawless and amoral. Moral courage was required to turn down some of those who sought admission to the church, but who did not meet its standards. Often loyal church-goers were offended when the circuit rider rebuked, punished, or even expelled members of their families; but most itinerants were flattered to be known as men "excellent in reproof" of their recalcitrant church members. Social pressures were often felt by them, but they seldom succumbed. These were men of the frontier, as brave and tough as any of their breed—and possibly more so, since the demands on them were more constant.

A sense of humor would have been a blessing indeed in this
life, and there are clear indications that many circuit riders were so blessed. It is true that some diarists rebuke themselves for letting their "risibilities" get the better of them, but there are far more examples of buoyancy and jest in the writings of itinerants. They were not humorists, but they had a sense of the ironic and the incongruous and did not hesitate to laugh at what was funny. Memoirs written after 1850, such as those of Cartwright, Finley, Miller, Tarkington, and Young illustrate this, sometimes obliquely. Thus many funny incidents were recollected with relish, and often it was noted that younger preachers of a later day were surprised, if not scandalized, when they had seen the old pioneers yield to laughter at conferences and even during religious services. Frontier congregations were not loath to laugh at the ridiculous, and a frontier preacher would not have been taken amiss if he laughed with them.

Western itinerants were also surprisingly broad-minded and tolerant with almost everything but sin. They could, in fact, even be fairly tolerant of such failings as drink, slavery, gambling, and frivolity on the part of the unconverted. Coming themselves from the milieu to which they preached, they were not shocked by its human weakness. Quite the contrary was the case when Methodists were involved. A member of the church would be rebuked in public and private for such offenses against the Methodist way of life.
A very noteworthy type of their tolerance was religious. Methodist itinerants were not, on the whole doctrinaire. They disagreed with Baptist ideas about Baptism; they disbelieved predestination. They had a creed which they professed. Yet there was much friendliness and cooperation on the part of Methodists with preachers from other denominations, most especially at camp meetings. At these events interdenominational cooperation was normal. Frequently, in the memoirs, there were expressions of respect and affection toward preachers and members of other faiths.

Partisanship there certainly was. Cartwright could talk about the "blasphemous Shakers," the "diabolical Mormons," and the "self-deceived modern Millerites." Pilmore could make snide remarks about Catholics. Competitiveness was strong between Methodist, Calvinist, and Baptist clergymen. Yet, taken as a whole, all the materials used in this study yielded very few derogatory remarks about other religions. Circuit riders do not seem to have been preoccupied with vitriolic attacks on other churches.

There are other positive indications of broad-mindedness as well. Those, for example, who reflected in their diaries on their readings, men such as Haskins, Pilmore, Cooper, and Finley, frequently demonstrated tolerance for other ideas, realization of prejudice, and a respect for the truth. A willingness to
preach in other than their own churches might also show this openness of mind. Methodists did preach in other churches, though the frequency of this cannot be determined. Pilmore even preached in a synagogue to a Jewish congregation in Philadelphia.

Persistence seems also to have been a characteristic of the itinerant. Many are the expressions of disappointment and heaviness of heart in some diaries, but the same men who recorded these feelings invariably returned to try again to win the resisting sinners who caused the disappointments. Every memoir and diary had its stories of sinners who did not yield to the blandishments of grace and preaching until after innumerable attempts. Probably the best example of this persistence is the fact that circuit riders were so ready to preach and seek souls on every occasion. They preached as often as a few listeners could be gathered. They prayed with their hosts. Some did not hesitate to seek conversions even at funerals. The more uninhibited would infiltrate public meetings and religious services to get an opportunity to promote the Methodist message. Traveling companions were usually exposed to religious ideas. On a stage coach, for example, an itinerant might "take an outside seat with the driver, enjoy the air... and, as occasion offered, drop a word of kind counsel or warning to exposed and misguided youth." There were always such opportunities. Like Saint
Paul, Methodist circuit riders in the Northwest preached persistently, in season and out of season.

Enthusiasm was certainly part of the itinerant's style. It is not strange that these men who felt they were doing God's work felt excited about it: "Good news from Zion; the work of God is going on rapidly in the new world; a glorious victory the Son of God has gained, and he is still going on conquering and to conquer. Shout ye angels! Hell trembles and heaven rejoices daily over sinners that repent." That was the spirit. It spilled out from many letters, like this one, from many diaries, from many newspapers. Good news from Zion. How often these very words were used. Methodism was on the move in our period. The circuit rider was in the vanguard, and he was exultant at the experience.

The simplicity, sincerity, and candor of these men showed in page after page of their journals. These were some more of their more admirable characteristics. "If there is any good done, the Lord take the glory." Expressions like this are like a refrain running through diaries. The diaries also indicate a keen appreciation of the limitations of the writer, his spirituality, his skill, his dedication, and so on. Old men writing memoirs boast a little, but the diarists were all humble men of obvious sincerity and noble purposes.

If they had not been humble, probably their obituaries
might have made them so. The slight compliments contained in these provide some evidence of the candor of early Methodists. These obituaries are to be found in the Minutes of the General Conferences and some of the phrases frequently used to describe deceased circuit riders are more candid than ever is expected in that genre of writing. Many were identified thus: "He was improvable," or "he was not without his usefulness." Frequently a preacher was a "man plain in his manners." Not infrequently one reads of men who were evidently disciplinarians: "Of course he was not among the most popular, but he sought not the praise that cometh from man." Somehow, this plain speaking seems quite appropriate to the Old Northwest and its frontier circuit riders.

Very frequently emotionalism is identified with early Methodist preachers. Theirs was a Pietist church, and early itinerants believed in "experimental religion," which an individual felt personally. There is little question that Methodist preachers were given to colorful methods, dramatic preaching, and some revivalist techniques. Most preachers, it seemed to this investigator, did not shrink when members of a congregation became "powerfully affected" by a sermon or service and "shouted aloud the high praises of the Lord." Some relied heavily on methods and sermons calculated to stir the hearts and emotions of their hearers. Methodist preachers believed in a very terrifying and vivid hell, and some constantly and effectively
stirred their hearers with such themes as: "You are hair-hung and breeze shaken over hell."

Judging by recollections of itinerants, they presided over a great number of awesome, emotional services. Those that are singled out for description are those in which "there was a shaking among the dry bones," where there were many "slain of the Lord," in other words, when there were emotional and public conversions. But these are memorable because they are instances of dramatic success and dramatic evidence of the workings of grace. On the other hand, the preacher gave hundreds of sermons in a year, and it strains credibility to imagine each one resulted in a powerful revival. Not many sermons by frontier itinerants are extant. No self-respecting Western preacher read a sermon, so that those available are transcriptions by those who heard them. But many itinerants did keep a record of their sermon texts, i.e. the Scriptural quotation on which it was to be based. Judging from these texts, sermons simply were not all directed at emotion-charged subjects.

Not to be overlooked is the fact that not all preachers favored emotionalism. Joseph Pilmore, for example, preached against excess: "It is hard to stem the current and convince ignorant men that the Infinite Jehovah is much more pleased with the gentle melting of a broken heart and the pious breathings of humble love, than all the noise and clamor in the world."
Yet even such a one's sermons would be described as dramatic, if not emotion-charged:

What an awful thought is this! A flaming world—dissolving elements—the Lord descending from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the Archangel and the trump of God—rocks rending—graves opening—the dead arising—ten thousand worlds assembling before the Son of Man! O gracious Father, give me power to stand in that tremendous moment and rise triumphant with the sons of God. 156

Camp meetings are a frequent target of those who deprecate Methodist emotionalism. The importance of these meetings in the church economy is much over-emphasized. They were not officially promoted as part of the church's activities. Actually, they were a semi-official phenomenon which usually began in unofficial conjunction with district meetings. Because many of the church members and other curious people were attracted to these district conferences, ministers, who were always alert to opportunities to reach souls, frequently capitalized on the presence of crowds to preach during the time of the conference. Eventually, the camp meetings came to be a regular feature of the conferences and finally came to be organized even as separate religious events.

From the Cumberland Revival of 1801, to the 1840's, camp meetings came to be very popular in the Northwest. Almost all of the preachers in this investigation would have sworn to their efficacy. These men saw them as priceless opportunities to reach large numbers of people, and many disreputable types not
normally within their reach. At these times, the emotional atmosphere was conducive to conversions, and large numbers actually were converted.

It was chiefly at these meetings that the excesses of emotionalism and revivalism were evident. It was here that people, worn out from lack of sleep, moved by association with hundreds of praying, singing, shouting believers, stirred by night vigils and marathon services, could get caught up in the "barking exercise," or "the jerks," fall into trances, babble incoherently, and so on. These obvious aberrations and excesses no sensible preacher encouraged. Just the opposite, one after another had critical comments on them. But these manifestations were not the point of the meetings, nor were they the experiences of any significant percentage of participants.

All such matters require perspective. A full and definitive analysis of the camp meeting is beyond the scope of this paper and may be found elsewhere. But it should be understood that both the camp meeting and emotionalism are much over-emphasized in many general works and that these both should be interpreted in the frontier context. Emotionalism is less surprising and bizarre when it is appreciated that these were social and religious events for people who often hungered for society and longed for release from drabness and isolation. From an extravagant and in many ways uninhibited people, extravagant and
uninhibited actions might be expected, given a conducive at-
mosphere.

At which point we return to the original question of the emo-
tionalism of the Methodist circuit rider. In his normal 
rounds and services, the Methodist preacher did not discourage 
all shows of emotion. He believed in "experimental religion." 
He frequently preached emotionally. He was accustomed to some 
shouting at services, some public confessions and conversions, 
some spontaneous displays of feeling. Some of his number played 
for and to emotionalism. Yet very few encouraged excesses or 
felt that highly charged emotional experiences were necessary 
at services. He was a man who was preaching to Westerners. He 
was only effective if he reached them, and sometimes emotions 
were aroused. Yet, he was more interested in reaching them than 
anything else. In this aim, he was successful. He did not give 
priority to emotionalism; for critics to do so is to caricature 
a complex and subtle frontier type.

The circuit rider was not a caricature. He was a complex, 
colorful, and subtle frontier type; and it is this writer's 
opinion that one way to understand him best is as a Turnerian 
frontiersman in the context of the frontier.
CHAPTER V

THE FRONTIERSMAN PAR EXCELLENCE

The major portion of this paper has been concerned with the description and analysis of the frontier Methodist circuit rider of the Old Northwest. This portion is intended to present some observations on the itinerant which seemed to the writer to be both intriguing and relevant so that he would not wish to close without commenting on them. Throughout the study he has been struck by the many parallels between the circuit rider and the frontiersman described by Frederick Jackson Turner. Eventually, it had occurred to the writer that the Methodist itinerant fitted the Turnerian description of the frontiersman so well that he might well be considered the frontiersman par excellence. More, viewing the circuit rider from this perspective helps in fitting him into the larger context of American history; it also aids in explaining his dramatic effectiveness in making Methodism the largest church body in the United States in 1844. 158

Immediately upon introducing such a tantalizing speculation, the author runs the risk of being forced to develop the definition and exposition of an extended thesis. This is not the intent. It is not intended to over-draw or over-simplify the
picture of the circuit rider per se or as a frontiersman. It is intended to share some reflections, hopefully avoiding getting drawn into the quicksands of debate on Turner, his "thesis," his partisans, his detractors, his revisionists. It is merely posited that the circuit rider fits the Turnerian description remarkably.

Turner, for his part, never did give a closed definition of his frontiersman. On the contrary, in many different places he ascribed to him a great diversity of characteristics, so that the Turnerian frontiersman is a complex character of many exaggerated and sometimes seemingly contradictory characteristics.

Among the foremost qualities of Turner's frontiersman was his democracy. From this basic characteristic flowed many others. At several other points the circuit rider's democratic background, religious beliefs, and attitudes have been noted. He possessed as well some of the other democratic characteristics of the frontier.

The frontiersman believed, for example, in self-government. As for the itinerant, his church was founded on the idea of autonomy from both the Church of England and the Methodist Church of England. It had many democratic practices: elections, majority rule, supremacy of the elected conferences. Church discipline followed democratic usages. The circuit rider's attitudes toward self-government were evident in the universal
acceptance of democratic methods in the running of annual and general conferences joined with a zealous protection of the right of local control of local conferences and districts. In effect, the Methodist preacher was a practical democrat in his church organization as well as a theoretical democrat.

Egalitarianism also characterized the frontiersman. The itinerant was similarly disposed. Among his basic beliefs were doctrines which emphasized the equality of all men before God and the accessibility of God's grace to all. His church's Discipline required simplicity in church buildings and proscribed pews which would be rented and thus discriminate against the poor. It stated, "Let all our churches be built plain and decent, with free seats; but not more expensive than is absolutely necessary." Old time preachers in the Northwest felt strongly about these matters. By 1856, obviously, practices had been changing, for one pioneer itinerant felt compelled to admonish: "Lord save the Church from desiring to have pews, choirs, organs, or instrumental music, and a congregational ministry like the other heathen churches around them." This was a typical plaint of the time. Fancy dress was also interdicted among early Methodists, as much to preclude pride and uncharitableness as frivolity.

Openness to new ideas characterized the circuit riders as well as other frontiersmen. Examples abound. The church
itself was a new idea. The idea of autonomy was new. Even before formal independence, Robert Strawbridge in Virginia acted independently of Wesley to create some of Methodism's first crop of American preachers. Itineracy might be considered to have been new. Over the years the church adapted itself easily to new situations. Adaptation to the realities of the frontier was one of the hallmarks of the circuit rider. Such for example, was his espousal of the camp meeting. Such was his changing back and forth from traveling to located connection and back again as the exigencies of his family life required. Cooperation with clergymen of other faiths indicated openness. It might be suggested that this openness to new ideas helped foster in the itinerant some of that flexibility and adaptability which contributed to his success.

Self-confidence and self-assertiveness are characteristics Turner ascribed to his frontiersman. Among the Methodist preachers were humble men, even meek men, but the majority of the men in our study were notable for both of the former qualities. Both were nearly prerequisite for setting out on the traveling connection. A man might be humble enough to recognize flaws and limitations in himself, but how could he preach daily in all situations, and to all types of people, if he lacked confidence and assertiveness? In fact, reinforcing and exaggerating these characteristics in itinerants was likely to be a calm faith in
God's direct help. The investigator can only be amazed at the audacity and confidence of men who did not blink at the possibility of being relocated frequently and having to serve wherever sent, who did not hesitate to address any crowd, however hostile, irreverent, or dissolute, who thought nothing of reproving sinners young and old, and who assumed with their vocation grievous burdens and hardships, often at a very early age.

Some of these things, no doubt, the circuit rider was able to do because he possessed another frontier quality, natural leadership. The itinerant was a leader, not a follower. His striking out alone on his vocation indicated that. So too was the way he organized circuits, recruited classes, sold publications, taught young aspirants, all in the normal course of daily duties. And eventually, in each of the cases in this study, he assumed unhesitatingly the obligations and leadership of the office of presiding elder. The preacher functioned as a leader of the people in a hierarchical church, and his leadership was manifest in many ways. The vocation required independence of spirit and demanded the assumption of the mantle of leadership, and none of the subjects of this study was found wanting in this respect. One indication of the leadership qualities brought out by the calling was that numbers of ex-itinerants became successes after leaving the itineracy—in business, government, the professions—becoming thereby the frontier
ideal, self-made men. Peter Cartwright didn't even leave the traveling connection and he defeated Abraham Lincoln for the Illinois General Assembly.

Sometimes conflicting with the frontiersman's belief in democracy and democratic practices was his general unwillingness to submit to complex regulations. The circuit rider's conformity to this aspect of the Turnerian frontiersman requires qualification. Certainly, circuit riders accepted the regulation of the discipline which was considerable. That some ran afoul of the rule might indicate more independence of spirit. Yet for all of this conformity, the itinerant's creed and church practices were much less complex than, for example, the Catholic or the Anglican. On the other hand, in most practical matters, the circuit rider was a pragmatist and not much restrained by traditions. This was especially true in secular matters.

If the frontiersman was uncultured, the Methodist preacher, it must be admitted, was typical in this regard. He had little formal education and was not very tolerant of those with it. He agreed, like the generality of Westerners, that education in the abstract was good; but he was a long time in supporting any number of viable schools, and never was reconciled to theological seminaries.

Idealism is another frontier characteristic Turner identified and one which was the source of others. The Methodist circuit
rider was indeed idealistic. His whole life was oriented by the frontiersman's boundless confidence in the future. He set out on a difficult road, confident in himself, confident he could effect some good, sure that God's kingdom would triumph. He pushed on each year or two to new pastoral pastures with faith that next year would gain a better harvest for the Lord. How many times he wrote, "Good news from Zion!" He had as well the frontier confidence in the future of the West and of the nation. Most often he himself came West drawn on by the same hopes and in the same spirit of optimism as other Westerners. Part of this idealism was connected with faith in man and a belief in his destiny. Frontiersmen and itinerants both had these ideals. The Methodist preacher was a man of the people who worked for their salvation. He liked his congregations, loved his fellow men. He believed with all his heart that the Westerner could be saved, and he was firm in his belief that the Methodist church was destined to lead the West to Zion. Man was improvable and destined to see heaven, he knew. It should be noted as well that circuit riders shared the frontiersman's confidence in man's ability to succeed in more mundane matters, and his grandiose vision of the Westerner achieving a place in the social, economic, and political sun. He too, savored the success of America and the Americans and was not in the least surprised to see God's providence in their good fortune. He,
Westerner that he was, had faith in his abilities to make his dreams come true, and his dreams had wide scope. They included dreams of spiritual successes, and they also included visions of the greatness of the church, the West, the nation, and sometimes doubtless, of self.

Turner took note of tremendous energy and incessant activity in his frontiersman. Some itinerants were typical of the inveterate pioneer, the restless spirits who had to be always in the vanguard of the fluid frontier. The journals of Rev. James Smith give ample evidence of such a spirit. Orneceht Fisher described himself as being "in the main a frontier man," and his ministry ranged to all points of the compass, from Indiana to Texas to Oregon. These are two examples of such types, but the lives of all circuit riders in the Northwest required a tremendous expenditure of energy and constant activity to move from appointment to appointment on circuit unendingly year upon year, giving hundreds of sermons, meeting hundreds of class meetings, ever on the trail till too old, or feeble, or poor, or until death ended all travail.

If one of the characteristics of the frontier was its ability to and propensity for adapting European institutions to the frontier situation, Methodism provided a good example. It was adopted from English Methodism, but not whole. It had no autocrat like John Wesley, but adopted democratic ways and
a democratically chosen leadership. While utilizing Wesley's itinerant method, it adapted this in many ways, expanding and reorganizing to suit the needs of the West. One of the best examples of this adaptation was the evolution of the role of the presiding elder in which local control and autonomy were provided for areas distant from bishops and expanding faster than a bishop or conference could provide for. The same would hold true for the expansion of the episcopacy. Relations between the church and the Anglicans were much different from those in England. Modifications of the rules on slavery and liquor were examples of fitting the institution to the situation.

At one point in his great seminal article, "The Significance of the Frontier," Turner enumerated "certain common traits" to which "the American intellect owes its striking characteristics. That coarseness and strength combined with acuteness and inquisitiveness." The frontier circuit rider would have to be acknowledged as coarse; he admitted as much himself. He had as well a reservoir of strength with which he met the challenges and hardships of life, face forward and head high. His diaries and memoirs both indicate a frontier acuteness which might even be called cunning and shrewdness which was directed at the seeking out of souls. "That practical, inventive turn of mind, quick to find expediency" was also the circuit rider's. The life required practical men who could survive, imaginative men who
could see the opportunities available for saving souls, and men flexible enough to find a way around a host of difficulties in the way of their travel, their preaching, their supporting their families, ad infinitum. Even "that masterful grasp of material things, lacking in the artistic but powerful to effect great ends"\(^{181}\) can be seen in him. That the circuit rider was not an aesthete should be clear. That he achieved great ends can be demonstrated statistically and concretely by the members in his church and the impact he had on the frontier. That he would be identified with a "masterful grasp of material things" might seem less evident, given the poverty he normally had to embrace. Still, he did not reject the material world or material success in theory or in fact. He merely accepted a difficult way of life while at the same time he showed himself able to cope with the material world unflinchingly. He was not troubled by physical suffering or danger, nor flustered by hardship. He knew how to survive in an inhospitable environment, even support and raise a family. And so often when he saw his obligations to his family being impaired beyond endurance he took up another role as farmer or teacher or politician, as often as not, quite successfully.

"That restless, nervous energy"\(^{182}\) he had in abundance, as can be seen from his acceptance of a life of constant movement and change. "That dominant individualism, working for good and
for evil." In the case of the itinerant, his self-confidence, self-reliance, and self-assertiveness normally worked for good. But even in this regard the individualism of such men as O'Kelly, Strawbridge, and Dow could reflect a certain pride of spirit which could hurt the church. "And withal that buoyancy and exhuberance which comes from freedom." Certainly, the circuit rider, as indicated earlier, was filled with zest and élan, if his writings are any indication at all of his spirit. They indicate his sense of humor. They are filled with wonder and excitement because he knew that "a Divine unction attended the word preached and thousands fell under the mighty power of God, and thus the Methodist Episcopal Church was planted firmly in this Western wilderness and many glorious signs have followed, and will follow, to the end of time." If the circuit rider seems too picturesque or exotic to modern eyes, and possibly does not fit modern conceptions of the clergy or missionaries, it may help modern readers to see him from the perspective of the frontier and the Turnerian frontiersman. He fit the frontier because he was of it. He fit the Turnerian description of the frontiersman because he was one. At the same time it might also be concluded that one reason for the itinerant's outstanding, demonstrable success was that he was a frontiersman himself, a man with whom other frontiersmen could identify, a man who knew the lives and hearts of his
fellows. Peter Cartwright said it well: "The great mass of our Western people wanted a preacher that could mount a stump, a block or an old log, or stand in the bed of a wagon, and without note or manuscript, quote, expound, and apply the word of God to the hearts and consciences of the people." The circuit rider in the Old Northwest had a certain style which made him effective, and that style was of the frontier.
NOTES

Introduction

1 As far as is known, the first itinerant to cross the Ohio River into the Northwest Territory was John Kobler who was sent there by his presiding elder in 1798. See James B. Finley, Sketches of Western Methodism: Biographical, Historical, and Miscellaneous (Cincinnati, 1854), p. 169.

2 Richard Whatcoat, an important early bishop, made such brief entries in his journal that two sides of a five by seven inch page could easily accommodate a month's record.

Chapter I

3 The church did not become independent of English Methodism until Christmas of 1784.

4 By the end of the war, there were only thirty-seven Methodist circuits. By contrast, Dutch and German Reformed churches had 250 congregations, the Lutherans, some 200. German sectaries comprised some fifty or sixty congregations; Catholics had just about fifty. The four largest churches dwarfed all of these. See William W. Sweet, The American Churches (London, 1947), p. 15.


6 Sweet, Churches, p. 15.

7 Turner, p. 74.

8 It is telling that Methodist circuit riders seldom mentioned Congregationalists except for those whose work carried them near the Great Lakes where New Englanders were concentrated.


10 Sweet, Churches, p. 15.

11 Turner, pp. 103-106.
12 John Rankin, for example, a pioneer Presbyterian clergyman in the Northwest Territory, tells in his autobiographical fragment of reading Greek for practice as well as edification. John Rankin, Sr., MS "Autobiography."

13 Even the average circuit rider perceived this problem and mentioned that Predestinarianism, as Calvinism usually was identified, didn't seem suited to the frontier. Only one such example may be found in Ezekiel Cooper, MS "Autobiography," p. 45. Another may be found in Joseph Howe, himself a Presbyterian minister, MS "Record of Two Preaching Tours, 1813-1814."

14 Sweet, Churches, p. 15.
16 Sweet, Churches, p. 18. 17 Ibid., p. 16.


Chapter II

20 This title was adopted in 1804. Robert Emory, History of the Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church (New York, 1844), p. 88.

21 Ibid., p. 48. Most often references to the Discipline will be cited from this excellent and authoritative work because it alone provides in one place regulations in full with dates of adoption, amendment, or deletion. On the other hand, yearly editions of the Discipline varied both in numbering of the sections and in wording.

22 Ibid., pp. 11, 13, 228 ff.

23 Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, for the Years 1773-1828, I (New York, 1840), p. 5.

24 Ibid., p. 7. 25 Ibid., p. 20.
26 Ibid., p. 260. 27 Ibid., p. 572.
28 Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, for the Years 1839-1845, III (New York, 1840 / sic/), p. 477.

29 Minutes, I, pp. 43, 47. 30 Emory, pp. 119-120.

31 The powers and duties of bishops remained substantially the same during the period 1784-1844. See Emory, pp. 119-124.

32 Right up until the Christmas Conference there was considerable concern among the Methodists about their lack of valid canonical orders and their power to administer the sacraments. This, because their early status had been that of a lay movement within the Church of England. As late as 1784, on the brink of the Christmas Conference, Haskins, for example, mentions having planned to go to England "for Church of England Holy orders." Thomas Haskins, MS "Journal" (typewritten copy), p. 30.

33 The Doctrine and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church (21st ed.; New York, 1821), p. 30. This edition of the Discipline is the one from which all citations in this paper will be taken when, in the author's opinion, clarity is better served by a citation from the Discipline rather than Emory.

34 Emory, pp. 129-130. 35 Ibid., p. 133.

36 Cf. infra. 37 Emory, pp. 164-165.

38 Ibid., pp. 168-69. 39 Ibid., pp. 177-78.

40 Ibid., p. 112. 41 Ibid., p. 111.

42 Ibid., pp. 113-14, 228. 43 Touchingly narrated in Cartwright, pp. 108-09.

44 Discipline, p. 29. 45 Ibid., p. 27.

46 Emory, pp. 119-24. 47 Ibid., p. 11.

48 Ibid., p. 122. 49 Cartwright, p. 65

Chapter III

50 Cartwright, p. 52.

51 Ezekial Cooper Collection, MS "Autobiography," pp. 34-36.
52 James B. Finley, *Sketches of Western Methodism* (Cincinnati, 1856), p. 203.

53 Emory, pp. 62-64.


55 This particular form was adopted in 1792. Emory, p. 135.

56 This form was made final in 1789. The original form may be found in Emory, pp. 63-64, with the changes, *ibid.*, p. 135. Until 1789, some of the questions included were: "Do you take no drugs? Will you preach every morning at five o'clock, wherever you can have twenty hearers?" *Idem.*

57 Emory, p. 48.


59 Cf. Finley, p. 28.

60 Emory, n., p. 122.


63 Emory, p. 130.

64 James Smith, MS "Journals to the Western Country" (handwritten copy), p. 7.

65 Thomas Haskins, MS "Journal" (typewritten copy), p. 34.

66 This occurred in 1806. See Cartwright, p. 75.

67 Smith, p. 45.

68 In Burke's "Autobiography" from Finley, pp. 31-32.


70 Smith, p. 52.

71 Pilmore, p. 45.

72 Haskins, p. 33.


75 Nelson Reed, MS "Diary" (typewritten copy), p. 29.
Chapter IV

In obituaries contained in Minutes of the Annual Conferences, place of birth is indicated for most of the deceased. Between 1789 and 1812, 63 of 72 with known places of birth were born in America. Between 1820 and 1827, 62 of 68 were born here. After 1827, the percentage of foreign-born, understandably, drops sharply. Minutes, I, II.

This is more difficult to document. This judgment is inferred from the same obituaries as above, but there is less definite information on parents, and correspondingly less certitude. Ibid.

Between 1789 and 1812, of 63 itinerants identified by state of birth, 17 were born in Va., 13 in Md., 7 in N.C., 5 in S.C., 4 each in Del. and N.J., 3 each in N.Y., Pa., and Mass, 2 each in Conn. and N.H. Between 1820 and 1827, of 61 identified, 12 were born in Va., 10 in Md., 8 in N.C., 5 each in N.Y. and 1 each in Ga., Tenn., N.H., and Me. These figures also reflect a trend of gradual expansion into New England and the South. After 1828, the West was represented, and continued expansion north and south was evident. Ibid.
Of a sample of 170, chosen alphabetically and from different periods, 42% served five years or less after entering the full connection. 79% served ten years or less. This information compiled from appendices made up of list of itinerants in Vols. II, III, IV, of Nathan Bangs, *A History of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York, 1839-40-45).

**97** Bangs, II, 415.

**98** Sweet, *Methodists*, p. 61.

**99** *Idem.*

**100** Haskins, p. 20.

**101** Nelson Reed is a good example of these weaknesses.

**102** Joseph Pilmore exemplified a diarist with an elegant and formal style.

**103** Cartwright, p. 264.


**107** *Discipline*, p. 60.

**108** See Bangs, IV, 425-26. The first titles were: Wesley’s edition of *A Kempis*/ The *Imitation of Christ*, Wesley’s *Primitive Physic*, The *Methodist Discipline*, the *Arminian Magazine*, and *Saints’ Everlasting Rest*, a humb book.

**109** A catalogue may be found in Emory, following p. 350.

**110** This development can be followed in Emory, pp. 254-72.


**113** The salary granted to the superintendent of the Methodist Book Concern might give a good idea of the importance placed on education and the printed word by preachers. In 1792, while itinerants were living in poverty and their salary per annum was to be $64.00 for them and $64.00 for needful wives with
nothing for children, John Dickins, first superintendent, was
granted the munificent sum of $333.00 to feed and clothe his
family with a like amount allocated for house, storage space,
firewood, and a boy helper. Since the itinerants granted this
sum at a General Conference, it is clear they were more inter­
ested in the promulgation of learning and some aspects of edu­
cation than is often supposed. See Emory, pp. 254-55.

114 Cartwright, p. 65.

115 Of all the authors read, only Jacob Young expressed real
regret that he had not finished his education. He felt that all
in authority should encourage young men so inclined to finish
their education before joining the itineracy. Jacob Young, Auto­
biography of a Pioneer (Cincinnati, 1857), p. 77.

116 Journals, II, 162.

117 Because of the time-consuming furor over slavery, no
report of the Committee on Education was made in 1844, so that
no accurate tabulation for that year is possible. In 1848, the
Methodist Church, North, listed thirty-four "seminaries" and
eight colleges. Journals, III, 140. The reduction of colleges
reflects some reclassification of schools, some closings, and
some, few, losses to the Church, South.

118 Sweet, Methodists, p. 67.

119 For the details of this plan, see Emory, pp. 151-57.

120 Discipline, p. 54. 121 Idem.

122 Finley, passim, provides a number of examples of this
sort of worldly success. William Burke, as one example, became
Postmaster of Cincinnati. Ibid., p. 90. One singularly success­
ful person was Edward Tiffin, a local preacher, who became first
governor of Ohio, a state legislator, a U. S. Senator, the first
Commissioner of the General Land Office, and Surveyor General of
the United States. He was also a medical doctor. Ibid.

123 Finley, p. 179. 124 Cartwright, p. 12.

125 See Emory, pp. 95-110. 126 Emory, p. 178.

127 Cartwright, p. 61.
128 This is one of the themes of H. Richard Niebuhr. See The Social Sources of Denominationalism (Meridian ed.; New York, 1957), p. 31.

129 One such example may be found in Howe, MS, 1814. There are others.

130 Discipline, p. 70.

131 It occurred in 1792. See Bangs, II, 10, and Sweet Methodists, pp. 39-40.

132 Bangs, III, 396-402. 133 Ibid., pp. 30-32.

134 Cartwright, p. 239. 135 See infra, pp. 68-69.

136 Emory, p. 37. 137 Idem.

138 Emory, pp. 43-45.


140 Cooper, MS "Letters," No. 22.

141 E.g., in 1804, N.C., S.C., Ga., and Tenn. were exempted from these regulations. In 1808, each annual conference was empowered to set its own regulations. Emory, pp. 277-78.

142 Cf. ibid., p. 80. 143 Cartwright, p. 246.

144 See Journals, II, Appendix pp. 5-240, for the "Report of Debates in the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1844." They are reminiscent of later Congressional debates.

145 Some "Documents Illustrating Church Trials ... on the Frontier" may be found in Sweet, Methodists, pp. 646-79. Eleven trials are represented.

146 These generally are deficient in details. Some trials received coverage in the Methodist periodicals.

147 A sampling of 300 itinerants chosen alphabetically and proportionately from three different time periods yielded eight expulsions, or 2.7%, for any cause. This information was compiled from appendices in Vols. II, III, IV of Bangs, op. cit.
William Burke and Lorenzo Dow are cases in point. They were both expelled from the Church. See William W. Sweet, *Circuit Rider Days Along the Ohio* (New York, 1923), pp. 53-54. Jacob Young's brother was expelled over a minor infraction. See Young, pp. 141-42.

Cf. supra, pp. 161-62 and n. 128.

Cartwright, p. 96.  
Pilmore, p. 140.


Finley, p. 71.  
Reed, p. 42.

Ibid., p. 121.

See Johnson for a recent and definitive study of the camp meeting.

Chapter V

See supra, pp. 9, 14.  
Turner, pp. 30-31.

Ibid., p. 207.  
Ibid., p. 212.

Discipline, p. 58.  
Cartwright, p. 86.

Idem.

Ibid., p. 213.  
Idem.

In 1832.  
Ibid., p. 212.

Ibid., p. 216.  
Ibid., pp. 261-62.

Ibid., p. 214.

Idem.  
Ibid., p. 211.

Three MS "Journals to the Western Country," n.d.

In Sweet, *Methodists*, p. 469.

Turner, pp. 3-4.  
Ibid., p. 37.

Idem.  
Idem.
182 Turner, pp. 3-4.
184 Idem.
186 Ibid., p. 236.
183 Idem.
185 Cartwright, p. 12.
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Colbert came in contact with and worked with many of the most notable itinerants and bishops of the early Church. At Garrett Library of Garrett Biblical Institute.

Ezekial Cooper Collection: "Autobiography"; "Correspondence"; "Journals"; Notebooks"; "Poetry"; "Sermon Notes."

Cooper was the guiding light of pioneer Methodist publishing ventures in Cincinnati, played an important role in Methodist councils, and had extensive contacts throughout the Northwest in our period. At Garrett Library.


Approximately 400 documents of all kinds: letters, signatures, photographs, ordination parchments, notes. At Garrett Library.


The bulk of these materials concerns the collection and preservation of Methodist history and documents. "Methodist Documents" had some useful material. Other volumes were of limited use. At Garrett Library.

Haskins, Thomas. "Journal." Two long fragments covering the periods November 7, 1782 to October 28, 1783, and October 3, 1784 to May 13, 1785. (Typewritten copy).

Haskins was a young man who traveled with Bishop Asbury. At Harper Library of the University of Chicago.
Hickmann, William. "A short account of My life & travels. For more than Fifty years, a Professed Servant of Jesus Christ." (Handwritten copy by Richard Collins).

Hickmann was a Baptist preacher for many years, a man of no education but good written style. Useful as a competitor's view of Methodist activity and for a comparative view of the status of Baptists. At Harper Library.


Written by a Presbyterian minister sent on a circuit to Kentucky. Another view of Methodist activity and the status of Presbyterianism on the frontier. At Harper Library.


An early English Methodist preacher who came to America, a man who was educated, cosmopolitan, fluent. Presents a good example of those few circuit riders with some comparable background. At Harper Library.


The author was a Presbyterian minister who took part in the famous Great Kentucky Revival. Gives insights into early camp meetings. At Harper Library.

Rankin, Rev. Thomas. "Diary." N.d.

Written by an early English Methodist preacher who had come to America, a serious man who was a friend of Wesley, Asbury, and Coke. At Garrett Library.


The dates of this diary are early, but the author was one of the old-time itinerants who had taken part in the Christmas Conference of 1784. His experiences were common to later preachers. At Harper Library.


Autographs and brief sentiments from all the notable itinerants of the day, particularly those working in the Northwest. Of limited use for this study. At Garrett Library.

Smith was a prototype of the incurable pioneer. His violent anti-slavery views were indicative of some Methodists' attitudes. At Harper Library.


Whatcoat was the third bishop of the Methodist Church, and a very important early figure. Entries are very brief. At Garrett Library.

Official Documents

The Doctrine and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church.


This edition was chosen because at the time the Church was mature in America but still clearly a church of the frontier.


Indispensable for tracing changes in the Discipline and the evolution of institutions, doctrines, and practices within the Church.


These volumes give expansive coverage to events of the General Conferences. Much information can be obtained about controversies troubling the Church in reports of the debates. The histories of various changes in church policies are likewise traceable. Obituaries of deceased itinerants were helpful particularly since they were normally written by co-workers.


These dry and business-like reports cover events at all of the annual conferences.


This helps provide information about one part of the
Methodist Church in the West. An introduction is useful.


Useful introduction. This time period was one troubled by the slavery debates.

Printed Autobiographies


The classic autobiography of an itinerant by one of the most influential, and certainly the most quotable of all circuit riders.


Dow was a flamboyant, eccentric Methodist preacher who was not usually in good graces with the Church because of his opposition to authoritarianism. The work is useful for its highly colored views.

History of Cosmopolite. Wheeling, W. Va., 1848.

Includes Dow's journal and his polemical writings.


By a colorful, quotable, and fluent Methodist who worked in the Northwest and among the Indians.

Gavitt, Elnathan C. Crumbs from My Saddle Bags. Toledo, Ohio, 1884.

Gavitt worked in the Northwest from 1819, through and beyond our period.


Goode worked on the frontier during our period.

Miller, Rev. W. G. Thirty Years in the Itineracy. Milwaukee, 1875.

Miller's service began about 1830, and is useful for the later portion of our chosen period.

This circuit rider began preaching in 1793, riding circuit about forty years. He drew sharp comparisons between his generation of preachers and the new.


Miscellaneous Primary Materials


Brunson was a prominent itinerant who served from 1815 to 1839, and then after our period. This interesting memoir provides a panoramic view of frontier Methodism in 1835.

Finley, James B. Sketches of Western Methodism: Biographical, Historical, and Miscellaneous. Cincinnati, 1854. Contains an autobiography of William Burke and biographical sketches of many prominent Methodist figures who had been known by Finley. Because of his own close association with the people and events he chronicles, this work would best be classified as primary, this author feels, well written and authoritative.

Sweet, William W. The Methodists, Vol. IV: Religion on the American Frontier: 1783-1840. Chicago, 1946. This work contains over 650 pages of varies "Documents to Illustrate the Work of Methodists on the Frontier." Important selections included are the journals of Bishop Richard Whatcoat, Benjamin Lakin, and James Gilmour. The introductory chapter is also useful.

Secondary Materials

style and coverage, but rich in information not available elsewhere. An unimpeachable source by the Superintendent of the Methodist Book Concern.

An old classic in the field of the history of the Northwest Territory, but with no bibliography. Not notable for cultural or social history.

Probably the definitive work on the Old Northwest in the period 1815-1840. It is rich in quotations from primary material and has a very fine bibliography. This author feels that some superficial generalizations were made in the field of religious history.

Definitive and recent study of the camp meeting as a phenomenon of frontier religion. Good bibliography.

The thesis posited is that denominations begin, organize, adapt, and split because of social causes, and that denominations are shaped by their social class. Methodism is considered.

Potter, David M. *People of Plenty.* Chicago, 1954.
Some insights into frontier history by a revisionist of Turner.

Provides a brief, over-all view of various religious groups in America.

  By the authority on frontier religion in America. Used exclusively for its excellent introduction.


Thirteen essays including the classic statement of the so-called "Turner thesis." It has no bibliography.

**Methodist Periodicals**

**Methodist Magazine.** New York, 1818-1828.

Useful to get an idea of discussions and conflicts within the Church as well as for many letters from circuit riders. At Garrett Library.

**Western Christian Advocate.** Cincinnati, 1834-1838.

Useful for articles by and letters from Western itinerants. The magazine had a continuous existence into the twentieth century but its use for this study was restricted to the dates indicated. At Garrett Library.
APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Edmond Thomas Parker has been read and approved by three members of the Department of History.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

7/26/66
Date

Signature of Adviser