

Early Circuit Riders In Alabama



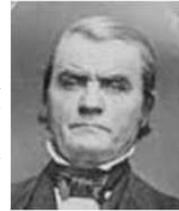
In 1803, Lorenzo Dow (1777-1834) traveled through the Tombigbee region. A bold eccentric personality earned him the nickname “Crazy”

Dow. The story is that he arrived at the early territorial capitol of Saint Stephens to find many taverns and no church. Dow scolded the settlers. They threw him out of town as Dow proclaimed “You will not find one stone on top of another. Only owls and bats will roost in Saint Stephens.” The town died.

The year 1808 marks the first official Methodist work in the Alabama Territory with Matthew Parham Sturdivant (1776-1851) sent from the South Carolina Conference. He reported “I crossed floods, swum rivers and creeks, slept on the ground, endured hunger and thirst, and heard the howl of the wolf, the growl of the bear, and the scream of the panther.” After two years of seeing some success he left Alabama.

In 1818, the Tennessee Conference sent Ebenezer Hearn (1794-1862) to Alabama. No stranger to Alabama because he served in the Creek Indian War in 1813.

His first sermon was at a trading post called Bear Meat Cabin: present day Blountsville. Hearn remained in Alabama planting churches.



Hearn was a delegate at the first meeting to establish the Alabama Conference in Tuscaloosa in 1832.

In 1939, The Methodist Church was established by merging with the Methodist Episcopal Church: The Methodist Episcopal Church, South (1844 split over the slavery issue) and The Methodist Protestant Church (split in 1828, they wanted lay people representation in church governing). As early as 1870 the Alabama Conference formed with most of the Florida panhandle included in their boundaries. The Central Alabama Conference with African American members existed from 1876 until 1972. In 1968, The Methodist Church merged with the Evangelical United Brethren to form The United Methodist Church. With this joining the names were changed to the North Alabama Conference and the Alabama-West Florida Conference. In 1988, The Alabama-West Florida Conference received their own Bishop Charles Hancock followed by Bishop William Morris (1992-2000), Bishop Larry Goodpaster (2000-2008), Bishop Paul Leeland (2008 to 2016) and Bishop David Graves (2016).

from Aldersgate to Alabama



**A brief history of the
United Methodist Church
and Methodists in
Alabama**

Prepared by AWF Conference Historian

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Samuel Wesley

1662-1735



Susanna Wesley

1669-1742

Samuel Wesley was an ordained minister in the Church of England. He married Susanna, the daughter of famous Puritan preacher Samuel Annesley of London. Samuel Wesley left an assistant clergyman position in London to become rector (pastor) of Saint Andrew's Church in Epworth. They had 19 children, six died as infants. Their three surviving sons became ordained ministers in the Church of England: Samuel Wesley born 1690, John Wesley born 1703, and Charles Wesley born 1707. Susanna Wesley believed John would be used by God for a special purpose. Especially, after escaping the fire that engulfed the Epworth rectory on February 9, 1709. She came up with another nickname for John (the other being Jacky) "a brand plucked from the burning." (Zachariah 3:2)



John Wesley

1703-1791

Charles Wesley

1707-1788

John began his studies at Christ College, Oxford, in 1720. Charles arrived in 1726. After a sibling scolding about waywardness, Charles started "The Holy Club." Returning from a brief time of helping his father in Epworth, John assumed the leadership of The Holy Club: a group of students holding one another accountable for holy living. The other students ridiculed their methodical meetings calling them "Methodists." The new governor for Georgia, James Oglethorpe, asked John to be the new chaplain for the colony. Of course John coerced Charles into accompanying him in 1735. Both were back in England by the close of 1736. Yet, their lives were greatly impacted by a group of German Christians called "Moravians." On their trip to America the Moravians gathered for their usual time of worship even in the midst of a fierce storm. The Wesley brothers sought to possess that same faith. John attended a Moravian Bible study on Aldersgate Street in London on May 24, 1738.

John said "My heart was strangely warmed." Charles had the inner witness of the Holy Spirit three days before. Now they had both heart and head knowledge of Jesus as Savior. George Whitefield (former member of The Holy Club) introduced John to field preaching. The Gospel found its way to the common people along roadsides as John preached and Charles wrote hymns to be sung to familiar tunes. The first Methodist Conference was held in 1744. During the 1771 conference Francis Asbury agreed to go to America. Many ministers returned to England during the Revolutionary War, but Asbury remained to help establish The Methodist Episcopal Church in 1784. It was the defining moment of official separation from the Church of England when John Wesley ordained ministers to oversee work in America.



1745-1816

Francis Asbury organized preachers traveling on horseback to ride an assigned route of around 500 miles. They were called "circuit riders."

What we know as Alabama today was called "Mississippi Territory" until the year 1818.