Methodism Began In Queen Anne's At Old Dudley's

Visit Of William Watters Paved Way For Erection Of 1st Church

Joseph Hartley, Early Minister, Forbidden To Preach. Records Show Church Started In 1783. Many Changes Made During Passage Of Century

The first Methodist service held on the American continent was in 1766. Embury that year began to preach in New York City, and the same year or the year following Strawbridge began to preach in Maryland.

At the first conference, which was held July 14-16, 1773, at old St. George's Church, Philadelphia, there were eight preachers present, and the societies numbered 1560 members, more than one-half of whom were in Maryland. That year Francis Asbury was appointed to Baltimore Circuit. His associates were Strawbridge, Whitworth and Yearbry. The circuit included Frederick, Baltimore, Harford, Cecil and Kent counties. Mr. William Watters was not present at the first conference, but was appointed to New Jersey circuit. The circuits that year were by colonies.

In November, 1773, Mr. Watters left New Jersey, at the request of Mr. Rankin, Mr. Wesley's superintendent in America, and came to Kent county, Maryland, where he preached with greater success and liberty than ever before. The people of Queen Anne's also opened their doors, and Mr. Watters came forth to preach to them. That was in the fall of 1773, and the beginning of the Methodist revival from which sprang the society which built Dudley's Chapel.

One of the first to receive the preachers was Mr. John Fogwell, who lived on a farm east of Sudlersville, on which Mr. Richard Higman now resides. Mr. Fogwell had been much under the influence of strong drink, and a benevolent lady who knew something of the power and usefulness of Methodist preachers sent for them to come and preach at his house. Mr. Watters responded. On this farm Mr. Watters was met by Parson Cain, of the English Church, who threatened to prosecute Mr. Fogwell if he allowed Mr. Watters to preach in his house, which was not licensed, as the law of that day required. Not wishing to involve his new friend in difficulty, Mr. Watters invited the people out of the house, where he preached to them in the open air. A society was formed at Mr. Fogwell's the following year. A Mr. Peters was the first class leader, and a blind woman, a Mrs. Rogers, who also preached here, traditions holds to have been the first active missionary in spreading Methodism in the county.

From the visit of Mr. Watters to Queen Anne's, and from such humble beginnings came forth Dudley's society and all the mother churches of Methodism in the county. The evidence this indicates that the society which built Dudley's was in existence in 1774, and its first members listened to Watters in 1773. Surely a building of the proportions of this structure had back of it from the first a society and classes of considerable strength. The second conference, which was also held at Phiadelphia, and which met May 25, 1774, appointed Abraham Whitworth to Kent county, which not only included the work in Queen Anne's, but also was the only appointment on the peninsula.

In 1776, 1778 and 1779 Joseph Hartley was among those appointed to Queen Anne's and it was while in Queen Anne's that he was forbidden to preach and compelled to give bond for his appearance at the next court. While forbidden to preach, he attended his appointments, of which the society at Dudley's was one, and after singing and prayer, stood upon his knees and exhorted the people. From Queen Anne's, Hartley introduced Methodism into Talbot, where he was seized and committed to Easton jail for preaching Christ and Him crucified. His work went on, so the enemies of religion said "Unless Hartley is released from prison he will convert the whole town of Easton." He was, therefore, released, but a powerful revival broke out and a Methodist society was formed in Easton.

While Hartley was on this circuit, Freeborn Garretson, the first native American Methodist minister, was also sent to the circuit in the year 1778. Garretson was beaten at Brown's Branch, between Church Hill and Chestertown, then "Newtown," by a Mr. Brown. It is from Garretson's journal that we learn that he was pastor of this society more than five years before the congregation began to build the present church. After a lapse of twenty-nine years Garretson returns to Queen Anne's to visit his old societies. On Tuesday afternoon, July 25, 1809, about four o'clock, he reaches Dudley's. He remarks that the children and grandchildren of his old friends show him the same respect that their parents would if alive. He preaches with mighty soul bending power to a great audience that filled church and gallery. His subject was, "Peter's Denial of Christ." The portrayal was vivid and elctrifying. A colored man in the gallery cried aloud, stripped, struck his fists together and exclaimed: "I ain't going to see my blessed Massa treated in no such sorts; I will fight for him till I die on the spot."

A few years after Garretson and Hartley's pastorate, and as the Revolutionary War grew to a close and peace and freedom of worship were assuerd, the society started subscriptions to build "a meeting house for the people called Methodists." They appear to have selected their side on Red Lyon Branch, which was a part of tract of land belonging to Joshua Dudley, who traveled West Jersey circuit, in 1782, with a preacher who had been in Queen Anne's the year before. Dr. Dudley generously offered to donate a piece of ground, about an acre and a half, and the society began to build their meeting house, raising the walls in 1783, and roofing the building and putting the glass in the windows the following year.

In February of the following year, that is 1785, Bishop Coke, the first and only bishop ever ordained by John Wesley, and the first Methodist bishop in the world pased through Sudlersville, then called "Saddler's-X-Roads," where he appears to have preached his only sermon to members of his society. He was probably accompanied by Bishop Asbury, whom he had ordained to the bishopric about two months before. Bishop Asbury was in Queen Anne's in 1784, and from the practical completion of Dudley's in 1786, our first American bishop preached for several years an annual sermon at Dudley's. Asbury himself describes his visits to Dudley's (which because of its prominence was called Queen Anne's Chapel) as melting times. His last visit to Dudley's was on a beautiful Sunday in April, 1811, less than five years before his death, and he dined that day with Mr. John Elliott, a trustee, whom Asbury pays a beautiful compliment in his journal.

In 1786, two of the great men of Methodism were sent as pastors to the circuit, they were Richard Whatcoat and Jesse Lee and during their pastorate the first floor and benches were put in Dudley's Chapel. Fourteen years after their appointment to Dudley's and this circuit, Whatcoat and Lee ran against each other for bishop, Whatcoat defeating Lee by four votes, though Lee ranks as the greater man. So to the people of Dudley's within the first three years of the history of the present building there ministered the first three Bishops of Methodism and Jesse Lee, the first Methodist historian and missionary to New England.

Let us now look at some of the laymen of these early days. As I have already stated, the ground upon which the chapel stands was donated by Joshua Dudley. But the man to whom Dudley's must look as her greatest benefactor was Benjamin Elliott, who spent 278 pounsd, 9s, 2p on the building and to whom there was due eleven years after the sum of 146 pounds, 11s, 9p.

On March 19, 1794, a memorable meeting of all subscriptions was held at the house of Benjamin Elliott. There was wanted at that time 25 pounds to finish the building and subscriptions taken that day netted only 8 pound, 13s, 4p. The society was evidently poor, but had undertaken one of the largest propositions undertaken by any Methodist society of that day, a building to cost when properly finished and furnished more than $3000. The society proposed a meeting of eight questions with their answers, was adopted as the constitution of the society, and elected the first board of trustees. Their names are, Benjamin Elliott, Thomas Sugar, Edmond Ferrill, Charles Burgess, William Sugar, John Smith, Benjamin Sugar, John Ruth and William Ferrill, sr.

That meeting caused to be recorded the only history in existence of the building of the chapel. It reads: "The house was raised in 1783, covered with cypress shingles in 1784, glassed in August 1784, floored and seated in 1786 and since that the windows have been broken by hail etc."

On the 21st day April, 1794, the new board met at the vestry, the purpose of the meeting being to obtain a deed from Joshua Dudley for the ground upon which the meeting house stood. Joshua Dudley failed to meet them, and it was two years afterward that Mr. Dudley deeded the ground to the first trustees. At the trustee meeting, April 6, 1706, the death of Benjamin Elliott was reported, and the hard-pressed board offered $200 for the account of Mr. Elliott against the building, and if that was refused the executors might sue and sell the property. Subscriptions were at once set on foot to raise money to finish the gallery and to buy plank for that purpose. After seven years of effort $336 was subscribed, $119 of which was in hand and the trustees ordered the material, 3,500 feet of lumber, to be put in the church to dry. Thus the gallery was finished.

In 1811 the trustees secured subscriptions to the amount of $481, and that year made repairs and completed the building in as good style as their funds permitted. The building thus completed more than twenty-five years after the first bricks were laid, appeared quite a little different from what you see today. There stood these four walls, a plain red brick building with wide, low windows; to the rear was a vestry about 16x20 feet, a low building with open fire-place, chimney and benches without backs, used most of the time from 1809 to 1865 as the "little red brick school house" of the community. On the inside of the main building the ceiling was arched and about eight feet higher than now, the gallery was open, the pulpit about four feet higher than now, with about ten steps leading to it; over the pulpit was a window and a hat rack. The hat rack also ran above the pulpit stairs and along the entire length of the men's side of the church; it consisted of a strip with wooden pegs projecting about five inches. A door to the minister's right entered the vestry; long brick aisles ran about the church floor of the vestibule; the floor was bare, the benches, plain with a narrow strip for a back; there were no flues, and stove pipes ran from wood stoves to the ceiling, on either side of the church to flues yet seen above the roof; a stairway ran from the vestibule to the gallery, and from under the stairway there opened a door into the church which admitted the sexton to a dark closet, sometimes filled with dry wood. There were no chandeliers, and the big rod which runs through the center of the church was not there. To either side of the sacred desk on the outer corners of the pulpit gallery stood square paneled posts about four feet high with flat tops upon which rested lamps. Two similar lamp posts stood, one near each end of the chancel.

In this structure worshipped a people swayed by mighty waves of religious emotion; sometimes the walls shook to the shouts, again, the floor was wet with tears, while men, many of them untrained in the schools, preached heaven and hell, sin and salvation, pardon and mercy, as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. In the gallery sat another audience of black-faced slaves and some free negroes, who uttered moans or amens as their feeling prompted. On communion day, melting days they were, after the congregation below had communed, a line of colored people filed down the gallery stairs and up the aisles to the altar; and on Love Feast occasions, after the people below had spoken of their ups and downs of fresh baptisms, and of the love of God, the colored folk in the gallery were given ten or fifteen minutes, when they often spoke tenderly and affectionately of "my dear old Massa, sitting down tha'." This is a picture of Dudley's a hundred years ago and so she remained in general during the first half century or more of her history.

Now, let us note a few changes. In 1840 and 1841, the first extensive alterations were made. It was at that time that the brick, aisles and brick floor in the vestibule, much worn with time, were removed. About this time the present pews supplanted the original benches. On a Friday, in November, the trustees, Mathias George, George N. Newnam and others, met at the church and forced through the building that great iron rod which now supplants the central chandelier. This rod has saved the church, not only by keeping the walls from spreading farther beneath the weight of the massive roof, but in the winter of 1869, upon this rod stood a man who saved this church from being destroyed by fire. It was the winter after the great division in Dudley's, while the three trustees who were left after that division were in the church ,on a cold day, putting glass in the windows, the stove was hot, and the stove pipe set fire to the rafters on the north side of the building. While the trustees were making vain efforts to check the fire, in the providence of God, there came riding past a man by the name of Knotts, who lived near Busick's Church. He offered to go up and put out the fire. A pew was stood on end; Knotts removed his shoes, climbed the bench, got hold of the rod and stood upon it, balancing himself by resting one hand against the wall of the church—the ceiling was much higher then so he could not steadiy himself by it; with a bucket on a pair of carriage reins, the trustees drew up water while Knotts extinguished the fire by throwing the water with a tin cup.

In 1856, a new roof was put on, and $3000 expended. In 1869, when there remained only seven male members, the trustees made the most extensive repairs of the church's history. They tore down the old vestry; they built brick flues in the church; the old, low windows with 6x10 panes were torn out and the present modern windows substituted. The pulpit was lowered, chandelier supplanted lamp posts and all at an expense of $650. When the church was about a hundred years old, in 1883, $310 was expended, the pulpit was again lowered, general repairs made, and the red brick walls, stained with a century of wear, were covered with the coat of cement which now protects the exterior of the building. The congregation opened a new century of history by a great day of celebration, for which the first organ ever seen in the church was borrowed from the Sudlersville Church. They evidently liked the innovation, for during the next pastorate, that of Rev. John D. Rigg, Dudley's purchased her first organ. In the year 1900, the old arched ceiling was lowered perhaps eight feet or more in the center and six feet on the sides, the old gallery closed, the interior painted, and the window to the speaker's right replaced

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