



REV. ANTHONY DIBRELL
Served Trinity 1849-1851

Anthony Dibrell was of French Huguenot descent. His grandfather, Jean Antoine du Breuil, was born in 1728 Manakintown, Henrico County, Virginia, where he experienced a difficult childhood, his father having died around the time that he was born. Jean Antoine worked to save money for an education and, as a young man, Americanized his name, becoming the first Anthony Dibrell. In 1756 he married Elizabeth Lee, daughter of Thomas and Ann Lee of the Cobb's Hall branch of the prominent Lee family of Virginia.

Our Anthony Dibrell, son of Anthony Jr. and Wilmuth Watson Dibrell, was born August 19, 1805, in Buckingham County, Virginia. His parents were noted for their 13 children. After losing his father in 1816, he left home and moved to Lynchburg in 1819. Anthony's older brother, Charles, financed his college training at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and thereafter at Staunton, Virginia, where Anthony completed the study of law under the direction of General Baldwin. He obtained a license to practice law in Bedford County in 1827. He continued at the bar in Lynchburg about 12 months and was influenced by the ministry of the Rev. William A. Smith. As a result, "He was arrested by the Spirit of God, as an awakened sinner. His conviction of sin was deep and pungent, and his repentance was bitter and protracted. After much wrestling with God, on July 4, 1828, he obtained deliverance, and rejoiced in the clear and triumphant sense of pardoning love. He was very soon strongly impressed with the duty of preaching the gospel and conferring 'not with flesh and blood.'"¹ Immediately he abandoned all worldly plans and commenced the study of theology to prepare for entry into the Christian ministry. He was admitted on trial into the Virginia Conference in 1830 and was ordained elder in 1834. His first appointment was the Greenville Circuit in 1830. From circuits he was placed in responsible stations, including Richmond's Shockoe Hill in 1837. "He was distinguished by the same quenchless love of souls and a great amount of usefulness."²

Rev. Dibrell was elevated to the office of presiding elder, an office that he discharged with marked ability. He was appointed presiding elder to the Charlottesville District in 1841 and the Lynchburg District in 1844 and 1845. About this time his health was declining, so he took a leave of absence in 1846. Upon regaining his health, he sold his farm, made arrangements for his servants and resumed his previous work in the church. Rev. Dibrell was appointed presiding elder of the Randolph-Macon District in 1848. The following year, he was appointed to the board of trustees of Randolph-Macon College.

He served as minister of Richmond's Trinity Church from November 1849 to November 1851. His mother, who resided in his home, died in June of 1851. She was buried in Shockoe Hill Cemetery, Richmond. From a sketch written by his brother Charles, "She [their mother] had been deaf for

¹ W. D. Keene Jr., ed., *Memoirs – 200 Years! Soldiers of the Cross 1785-1987* (Decorah, Iowa: Amundsen Publishing Co., 1998), p. 121.

² Ibid.

many years and usually conversed with her children by means of a small porcelain slate and pencil which she kept near her.”³

Being held in high esteem by his peers, Rev. Dibrell was elected as a delegate to the 1838 General Conference and later the Louisville Conference in May 1845, as one of eight delegates from the Virginia Conference. At the Louisville Conference delegates resolved not to propose a dissolution of their connection with the Methodist Episcopal Church but only with the General Conference of the church. The result was the creation of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.

Rev. Dibrell was a delegate to the General Conference in Petersburg on May 1, 1846, which was the first General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Later he was delegate to the General Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1850 and Columbus, Georgia, in 1854. He served Alexandria, Virginia, prior to his last appointment to Granby Street Church, Norfolk, Virginia, in 1854-55.

In 1855, an epidemic outbreak of yellow fever spread throughout Norfolk and Portsmouth, “and within three months it swept hundreds of the population into an untimely grave. Amidst the universal panic and desolation which prevailed, he [Anthony] calmly resolved to remain at his post, committing the issues of the awful tragedy to that God to whom he had consecrated his entire being. He attended not only to his ordinary duties but administered the consolations of the gospel to the sick and dying. He, too, must fall; for ‘the time of his departure was at hand.’”⁴ He died September 1, 1855, and his burial was in Hollywood Cemetery, Richmond.

A teenage son, Thomas, likewise fell victim to the fever. Rev. Dibrell’s wife, Marietta, was also stricken with yellow fever but recovered. Rev. Dibrell and his wife had several sons and a daughter.

Rev. Anthony Dibrell was regarded as “a man of extraordinary piety. He breathed the spirit and lived the life of holiness. His preaching was of a highly intellectual cast and was attended by a demonstration and power of the Holy Spirit.”⁵

³ “Find A Grave Memorial #5081598”, created by PL, record added October 18, 2000.

⁴ Keene, p. 121.

⁵ Ibid, p. 122.

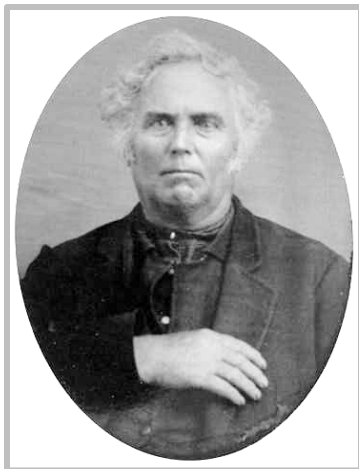
OTHER SOURCES:

Matthew Simpson, *Cyclopaedia of Methodism* (Philadelphia: Everts & Stewart, 1878).

William Warren Sweet, *Virginia Methodism, A History* (Richmond, Va.: Whittet & Shepperson, 1955).

http://www.hill-ky.org/wp_flood/dibrell-family

www.usgwarchives.net/va/yellow-fever/yftoc.html



REV. THOMAS H. WHEELER
Served Trinity 1851-1852

Rev. Thomas Wheeler's life journey as traveling minister and postmaster began in 1811 in Annapolis, Maryland. Precocious in matters religious, he joined the Methodist Episcopal Church at age 12, was a class leader at 15, began preaching at 18, joined the Baltimore Conference and was ordained elder in 1836.

As Thomas's ecclesiastical responsibilities grew, so did his familial ones. He married Hester Bryan around 1836, and they welcomed a daughter, Mary Elizabeth Wheeler, that same year and a son, John Emory Wheeler, in 1838. Hester was listed with Thomas and the two children in the 1850 federal census in Brunswick County, Virginia, so she must have died between 1850 and a second marriage to Mariah Louisa Rives in May of 1853. Mariah was born in 1831 in Brunswick County, Virginia, where Thomas served an appointment from 1849 to 1850. Mariah and Thomas had three children: Thomas Andrew in 1854, Thomas Rives in 1859, and Julia Mariah in 1867. The father, nearly two decades senior to his wife, died in 1866 and did not witness the birth of his second daughter.

Rev. Wheeler's ministry illustrated what it meant to be a traveling or "itinerant" Methodist elder. John Wesley set the pattern: "We have found by long and consistent experience that a frequent exchange of preachers is best. This preacher has one talent, that another; no one whom I ever yet knew has all the talents which are needful for a beginning, continuing, and perfecting the work of grace in a whole congregation."¹ Itinerancy was well-suited for the spread of Methodism in the westward expansion of the American colonies. Wheeler's ministry testifies to the continuation of the practice well into the nineteenth century.

During the early years of Rev. Wheeler's ministry, the area of the Baltimore Conference arched around the Virginia Conference on the north and west, and many charges in the Commonwealth of Virginia were in the Conference of Baltimore. The newly ordained Wheeler went in 1832 to the Pendleton appointment in what is now the eastern panhandle of West Virginia. Next came Fincastle, a village in the narrow valley between the Appalachian range and the Blue Ridge, north of Roanoke, Virginia. Christiansburg, west of Roanoke, was his charge in 1834. Rock Creek charge in the Washington, D. C. area was his next calling to "a greater field of service." Then came Westmoreland on the Potomac River; Augusta, westward in the northern Shenandoah Valley; and Rockingham in the same vicinity. Coming back east he served Fairfax, Lancaster on the Rappahannock River, and Bladensburg, Maryland, a suburb of Washington. The traveling minister headed west again to Jefferson, near the confluence of the Shenandoah and Potomac Rivers. His

¹ Nolan B. Harmon, ed., *The Encyclopedia of World Methodism: Vol.1.* (Nashville, Tenn.: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1974), p.1243.

final appointment in the Baltimore Conference before withdrawing membership in 1848 was the Carlisle Circuit near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. He signed on with the Virginia Conference as an elder in full connection in 1848 and was appointed to Charles City.

The conference geography in which Wheeler served was a controversial arena involving the Baltimore Conference (some preachers and churches favoring abolition of slavery, others not), the Philadelphia Conference and the Virginia Conference. The central issue for all was slavery. When the church divided north and south in 1844, at least 200 traveling preachers owned a total of 1,600 slaves, 1,000 local preachers owned 10,000 slaves, while some 25,000 Methodist laymen owned 200,000 slaves.² The trigger was slavery, but the "Border War" soon evolved into a struggle over church properties and membership.³ Rev. Wheeler was apparently a willing recruit in that war.

His next appointment was in Brunswick County for the 1849 to 1850 term. The 1850 report of the Brunswick County Commissioner of Revenue lists his property as one gold watch, one horse, one wagon, one slave above 16 years of age, and two slaves above 12 years.⁴ His wife Hester and their two teenaged children are numbered as Free Inhabitants of Brunswick County in the 1850 census.

Rev. Wheeler's final appointments were in Richmond: 1851 at Trinity and 1852 at Clay Street. Clay Street Church had made the transition from a Sabbath School sponsored by Centenary Church to a stand-alone charge between 1844 and 1848.⁵ Minutes of the Trinity Board of Stewards, while Rev. Wheeler was serving the church in early 1852, document congregational interest in raising funds for "the building of a church for the coloured people." In spite of, or perhaps because of, the number of slaves owned by loyal followers of the *Discipline*, the southern church earnestly desired to bring the Gospel to "the coloured people."⁶ The Journal of the Virginia House of Delegates from early in the first quarter of 1852, reports three occasions of "Prayer of the Rev. Thomas Wheeler of the Methodist church" to open the sessions.

To close his career as a Methodist minister Rev. Wheeler exited the traveling ministry in 1853. The official records of Dinwiddie County show that he, served as the postmaster beginning in 1857 and after a one-year hiatus resumed that job in 1860. His life journey was marked by dualities. He had two careers; two marriages; even two sets of children. He served his church in two conferences. Looking back, he could truthfully say: "The postman always rings twice."

² W. W. Sweet, *Virginia Methodism A History*. (Richmond, Va.: Whittet & Shepperson, 1955). p. 245.

³ Ibid, pp. 247-250.

⁴ 1850 Brunswick County Personal Property Tax Records. Virginia State Library.

⁵ Floyd S. Bennett, *Methodist Church on Shockoe Hill: A History of Centenary Methodist Church Richmond, 1810-1960*. (Richmond, VA: Whittet & Shepperson, 1962), p. 42.

⁶ Sweet, pp 245-247.

OTHER SOURCES:

Hendricks and Hamilton Families papers, Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries.

<http://hdl.handle.net/1903.1/1713> Accessed April 03, 2024.

Albert G. Wheeler, Jr., *History of the Wheeler Family in America*. (Boston, Mass.: American College of Genealogy, 1914), p. 950.

James Edward Armstrong, *History of the Old Baltimore Conference from the Planting of Methodism in 1773 to the Division of the Conference in 1857*. (Baltimore, Md: King Brothers, Printers, 1907), p. 495.

Commission on Archives & History, United Methodist Historical Society of the Baltimore-Washington Conference (www.lovelylandmuseum.org/our-conference-history.html)



REV. GEORGE WASHINGTON LANGHORNE
Served Trinity 1852-1853

A modest gravestone in Richmond's Hollywood Cemetery marks the last earthly home of Rev. G. W. Langhorne. Inscribed on the stone is his birth date, November 27, 1808, and a death date of February 3, 1875. Although cast in stone, the year of death should be 1876.¹ More important information follows on the gravestone: "For 45 years minister of the Virginia Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church South." Those 45 years of George Washington Langhorne's ministry in the Virginia Conference of the Church

designated as "South" were years of critical importance.

The Memorial for Rev. Langhorne in the 1876 Conference Minutes recorded that Langhorne was born and matured to young adulthood in Warwick County, Virginia. He began to study law, but a conversion experience in 1827 curtailed his legal education. He joined the Methodist Church, felt a call to preach and began studying religious literature. Temporarily struggling with the vocation of ministry, he began clerking in a grocery store. He sought counsel with Dr. R. A. Armistead, a Methodist elder in Portsmouth, Virginia, and followed his advice to answer the call to preach. His initial appointment was to the Camden Circuit.² Ordained deacon in 1832, he subsequently enjoyed a double blessing of elder ordination and marriage to Elizabeth Watters Moore in 1835. Elizabeth Langhorne of New Hanover, North Carolina, was in the lineage of a former governor of Carolina, prior to the state's division into North and South, and was the granddaughter of Brigadier General James Moore of the Continental Army of the American Revolution. An obituary in the *Richmond Advocate* of 1887 described her as being of "lofty lineage, related to many of the wealthy and aristocratic families of the Carolinas." Elizabeth and George were married at the Moore family plantation, Belmont, in Chatham County, North Carolina.

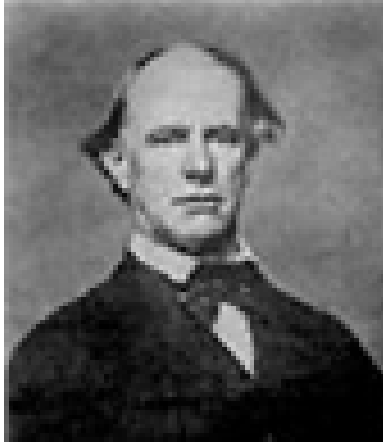
The majority of Rev. Langhorne's early appointments were in the North Carolina Conference. In 1839 he transferred to the Virginia Conference and continued a career that included service in Portsmouth, Petersburg, Lynchburg, Alexandria and Richmond. In Richmond, he was appointed to Trinity from 1852 to 1853, Centenary in 1862 and Broad Street in 1867. During the "critical 45-year era" he served his individual appointments, tenures as presiding elder, and was elected four times a delegate to the General Conference. In addition, Whitehead affirms that, "He was a frequent speaker in the debates of Conference, and always commanded attention, often influencing decidedly the action of the body."³

Some examples of "action of the body" had roots deep in the economic and cultural soil of the South. Bishop Francis Asbury's *Journal* entry of January 9, 1798, is expressive of the later conflict

¹ W.D. Keene, Jr., Ed., *Memoirs – 200 Years! Soldiers of the Cross: 1785-1987* (Decorah, Iowa: Amundsen Publishing, 1988) p. 156.

² Minutes of the Eighty-Second Session of the Virginia Annual Conference of the Methodist Church, South, Richmond, VA, November 15-23, 1876, p.28.

³ Ibid, p. 28



REV. CHARLES ATKINSON DAVIS
Served Trinity 1854-1855

Charles Atkinson Davis was born October 7, 1802, in Portsmouth, Virginia, and died February 20, 1867, in Norfolk, Virginia. What little is known of his life shows the complexity of his times. Although a Virginian, most of his ministry was served outside of Virginia. He was instrumental in raising funds for the establishment of an African Methodist Episcopal Church in Virginia but sided with the Methodist Episcopal Church, South after the split over slavery. And yet, he served with the Union during the Civil War, leading to expulsion from the Virginia Conference, to which he was re-admitted shortly before his death.

At age 21, Davis was admitted into the Baltimore Conference and was eventually ordained an elder in 1825. He served the first 19 years of his ministry with the Baltimore Conference before transferring and serving for two years in New York City. Davis returned to the Baltimore Conference in 1841 and stayed until his transfer to Virginia in 1854. His appointment to Trinity Church in Richmond was his first assignment in the Virginia Conference.

Davis appears to have been well thought of in his time. Bishop Matthew Simpson said Davis was “a popular and useful preacher.”¹ He was elected a delegate from the Baltimore Conference to the General Conference in 1832 and thence elected one of the secretaries. While pastor at Trinity Church in Alexandria in 1834, Davis raised considerable revenue for the building of what is now the oldest African American United Methodist Church in Virginia.² The church originally was named the Charles A. Davis Chapel. However, when the Methodist Church split in 1845 in the dispute over slavery, Davis “aligned himself with the Southern Church to the chagrin of the parishioners,”³ who changed the name to Roberts Chapel, and it is now Roberts Memorial United Methodist Church.

After leaving Richmond’s Trinity Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Davis was assigned to Portsmouth, Virginia, where in 1857 he became a chaplain in the U.S. Navy. In 1862 Davis was expelled from the Virginia Conference. “Davis had seen a long career of service to parishioners throughout Virginia, but his insistence on remaining as a Chaplain in U.S. service was more than the Southern Methodists could endure.”⁴ Davis served on the USS Wabash until 1865. He was readmitted to the Virginia and North Carolina Methodist Episcopal Conference, South in 1867 while serving as Chaplain, U.S. Navy, at the Naval Hospital in Portsmouth. In February 1867 Davis died and was buried near the Naval Hospital.

¹ Matthew Simpson, *Cyclopaedia of Methodism* (Philadelphia, PA: Everts & Stewart, 1878), pg. 277.

² *The History of Roberts Memorial United Methodist Church*, written by the History Committee, pg. 1

³ Ibid.

⁴ John C. Rigdon, *This Week in the Civil War – November 16th – 22nd, 1862*, Vol. 86 (Cartersville, GA: Eastern Digital Resources, 2012).

facing the church and her pastors: “I am brought to conclude that slavery will exist in Virginia for ages: there is not a sufficient sense of religion nor of liberty to destroy it; Methodists, Baptists and Presbyterians, in the highest flights of rapturous piety, still maintain and defend it.”⁴

Newly ordained elder and recently wed, Langhorne was probably involved in the General Conference of 1836 only as a distant witness, not a participant. By the time the gavel fell to convene the Conference, the question of slavery was an important moral issue to certain northern, especially New England, Methodists.⁵ In response to their concern, a majority of delegates resolved: “that it is inexpedient to. . .change. . .[the] Discipline respecting slavery, and we deem it improper to agitate the subject. . .at present.” The slavery issue was entwined with changing the Discipline, and “outside agitation” was judged “improper.” Delegates also resolved a statement of condemnation of “modern abolitionism” and disclaimed any intent to “interfere in the civil and political relationship between master and servant in slaveholding states. . .” The concepts of “States’ Rights” and civil law meshed into the discussion of slavery. (XLI, p. 601)

The General Conference of 1840 was a reiteration of the questions and arguments of the previous Conference, with a further emphasis on “states’ rights” and civil law among slave and free states in response to the challenge from English Wesleyans. It was impossible to frame a rule that was proper for all states: some slave, some free. Attempts from the delegates from the New York and New England Conferences to amend the Discipline to make non-slave holding a condition for church membership bore fruit among New England delegates but had little support otherwise. (XLI, pp. 607-612)

By the General Conference of 1844, George Washington Langhorne was the presiding elder of Norfolk—no longer a neophyte preacher. The Conference in 1844 dealt with many of the issues of the previous two General Conferences, but this time the issue became personal. Elder Francis H. Harding of the Baltimore Conference had been suspended because he had not manumitted slaves that he had obtained through marriage to a woman who had inherited the slaves. Bishop James Andrews of Georgia had also married a woman who had inherited slaves. The issue was an ethical question for northern delegates: slavery was immoral, and therefore one could not be a member, preacher, or—certainly not—a bishop in the Methodist Episcopal Church and own slaves. Delegates from southern conferences viewed the issue from dual perspectives: first, whether the Episcopal office (bishop) or the General Conference had superior authority, and second, how to resolve conflicts with freed slaves and state laws prohibiting them from remaining in the state as free people. (XLIII, pp. 618-640)

Bishop Holland N. McTyeire in his *A History of Methodism* described the result of the Conference of 1844:

⁴ *The Journal of the Rev. Francis Asbury, Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, from Aug. 7, 1771, to Dec. 7, 1815*, Vol. II

⁵ Holland N. McTyeire, DD, *A History of Methodism: Comprising a View of the Rise of Spiritual Religion in the First Half of the Eighteenth Century, and of the Principal Agents by Whom It Was Promoted in Europe and America*, etc. in Three Volumes (Nashville, TN: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1884. McTyeire’s detailed account of the Church “Separation” will be cited in the text by chapter and page numbers.

The time to work apart had come. The situation was unmanageable, and every year, on account of certain growing secular influences, it was becoming worse. For this a large proportion of the Northern delegates were not to be blamed; they had done what they could, but had failed to keep their section of the Church free from the encroachments of “modern abolitionism.” Necessity was upon them. It was a life or death issue, and having a majority they felt they had a right to live. Now, having saved themselves, they were disposed to do all in their power to relieve those who had been driven to the wall, standing on the “Discipline as it is.” The Plan of Separation, as conceived and agreed on, was honorable to both parties; it was a healing measure; a fitting farewell to the fifteenth General Conference of united Episcopal Methodism, and the last. (XVIII, p. 640)

It was the last General Conference of united Episcopal Methodism and the derivation of the word “South” on Langhorne’s gravestone, but “a healing measure” it was not. The 45 years engraved on the stone had 33 years of the “critical era” coincident with Langhorne’s ministry.

After the division of the Methodist Episcopal Church into South and North bitter disagreement regarding slavery and whether ownership should be a block in service or membership in the church remained. The Emancipation Proclamation of January 1863 and the Confederate surrender of April 1865 finally officially settled the legal argument between the separated churches in reference to slavery. The division of assets, physical and financial, between the separated churches was also a problem to be confronted by the leadership of each conference.. This problem was solved to the benefit of the Church, South, by the United States Supreme Court in April of 1854.

The 45-year ministry of Rev. Langhorne in the “critical era” encompassed the Civil War years, 1861 to 1865. He was a presiding elder in Lynchburg in 1861; served in Richmond’s Centenary Church from 1862 to 1863; and ministered in camps and hospitals in and around Richmond in 1863.

The Confederate States of America offered little pay and scant uniforms, but preachers from every major denomination still served.⁶ Colporteurs and concerned faculty members joined with ordained clergy, such as Rev. Langhorne, and worked the camps as missionaries, assisting the chaplains in a markedly ecumenical ministry. Rev. Langhorne’s son, also named George W., enlisted at age 19 in March 1862. He was discharged by a surgeon’s certificate four months later.

Revivals in the Army of the Confederacy were common enough to warrant coverage by the secular press. On August 10, 1863, the *Richmond Daily Dispatch* reported, “A revival of religion is now progressing in the 46th Va., under the ministration of Rev. W. Gaines Miller, the Chaplain...”. In *Virginia Methodism—A history*, W. W. Sweet enumerates reasons for the acceptance of revivals in the southern army: 1) the southern churches distributed numerous tracts warning of the evils of alcohol, gambling, and the dangers of “lewd behavior”; 2) the soldiers came from communities where revivals and camp meetings were commonplace; 3) after the battles of Antietam, Gettysburg, and Vicksburg the fortunes of war turned negatively for the

⁶ William Warren Sweet, *Virginia Methodism-A History* (Richmond, VA: Whittet & Shepperson, 1955). Sweet devotes three chapters to this historic era: “Virginia and the Southern Church,” “The Fratricidal War,” and “The Tragic Era— 1875-1890.” Further documentation will be by page number citations in the text.

Confederacy and divine help was requested; and 4) the imminent and constant threat of death sharpened the soldier's sense of need for religion. (pp. 273-274)

A retrospective appraisal of the time in which Langhorne served much of his 45-year ministry speaks to the challenges of any Methodist Church, South pastor: "The years from 1844 to 1865 constitute the most distressing period in the history of American Methodism. They were years of gathering storm, of widening abyss." (Sweet, p. 161) Sweet goes on to describe the time in which Langhorne served the final decade of his ministry: "The Tragic Era—1865-1890." (p. 277). During this time of Virginia's struggle up from post-war ruin and dealing with the political ramifications of Reconstruction, Rev. Langhorne was serving at Broad Street Church in Richmond, Centenary in Lynchburg and the Alexandria Station. His final appointment was to the Farmville Station in 1874. Paul Whitehead's memorial in the Conference minutes of 1876 reveal that, "in the winter of 1874...a sudden and heart-breaking bereavement in effect laid at rest his tender and true soul." This cryptic note apparently refers to the death of his firstborn, daughter Julia Catherine, in May of 1875. He retired shortly thereafter.

Answering the call to ministry in Virginia during the critical 45 years of his active service involved meeting challenges imposed on both a conference delegate and a church pastor: dealing with slavery, the separation of the church—north and south, the Civil War and Reconstruction. Langhorne was also adept in the calmer aspects of ministry. In 1850 he preached a sermon at the funeral of a colleague who had been under his supervision when presiding elder in Lynchburg. The sermon became an addendum to his friend's biography, published in 1852, while Langhorne was at Trinity.⁷ The erudite, articulate, tightly organized sermon stretches for a full 30 pages concerned with the Christian ministry. He insists that the ministry is the result of answering a divine call. The call is of such an imperative that it must be answered despite direct opposition of the opinion of men. The acceptance of the call may involve personal sacrifice and the loss of temporal prosperity and worldly honor. Having taken up this role, the preacher's "pervading desire and absorbing concern. . .is. . .to testify the Gospel of the grace of God." His opinion is bold as he proclaims: The self-called and humanly authorized preachers, those men who convert the pulpit into a theatre on which to display, not the sanctity of a Jewish prophet, or the purity of a Christian apostle, but merely to excite the eager, it may be idiot, gaze of an undiscerning crowd, the vendings, perhaps, of sectarian bile, or the still more sickly pulings of some pampered favorite or starving sycophant."

The preacher encourages personal piety and prayer. He honors the responsibility of maintaining a bridge for people between heaven and earth, time and eternity. He should avoid lightness and frivolity and, on the other hand, also gloomy moroseness. He should "rule well his own house, having his children in subjection, and thereby avoid the damnable doctrine of priestly celibacy as set forth and maintained by antichristian Rome." The sharply worded view of Catholicism illustrates an appraisal by Paul Whitehead in Langhorne's conference memorial: "There was a tendency at times to be too polemical, but his native relish was for sound

⁷ Rev. G. W. Langhorne, "Funeral sermon of the Rev. John Wesley Childs", addendum to: Rev. John Ellis Edwards, *Life of Rev. John Wesley Childs for Twenty-three Years an Itinerant Methodist Minister* (Richmond, VA and Louisville, KY: Published by John Early for the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1852). The Sermon is in the Library of Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, New Jersey.

proclaiming of 'the Word of reconciliation.'" Also, "He was decided and uncompromising in his views, intense in his convictions, and fearless in the utterance and maintenance of them."

Closing his sermon, he affirms that "the true minister is not diverted from his course by the frowns or smiles of the world, the toils and privations of his work, and the dangers that attend his calling." Finally, the work of the ministry is one of danger, as "the itinerant system adopted and carried out by our church, subjects our ministers to every variety of climate and mode of living; and these changes have their influence on their constitution and health."

After 45 years of ministry in tumultuous, challenging, critical times, George Washington Langhorne's retirement attended rapidly failing health. He died in Richmond February 3, 1876. Whitehead recorded his final words: "Not a fear, not a fear." Then, "I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith; Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord. . ." He could not finish his dying testimony. He did not need to.

REV. FRANCIS S. MITCHELL
Served Trinity 1854-1855

What a time to be born! In 1802, Thomas Jefferson was President; Aaron Burr was Vice President; John Marshall was Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. On April 1 of that year, Francis S. Mitchell entered this earthly life in Gloucester County, Virginia. He would live to see and be a part of great change during his ministry.

At age 17, Mitchell joined the Methodist Episcopal Church where he was later admitted on trial and began serving in 1839. By 1840, he was working in Hanover County. In 1841, he became a deacon and served in New Kent County, achieving full connection later that year. He moved on to serve from 1842 to 1843 in Louisa-Spotsylvania Counties with the assistance of Rev. William Wallace Bennett. Then, in 1844, he labored on the Albemarle Circuit with two assistants, Jacob Manning and B.L. Hume.

This year was turbulent for the church because of differences between the North and South over slavery. Ultimately, the church split, and Rev. Mitchell remained with the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, moving to Caroline County in 1845, Smithfield in 1846, Mathews from 1847 to 1848 and Cumberland in 1849.

In 1851, Rev. Mitchell was stationed at the Bute Street African Church in the City of Norfolk. He moved to Richmond in 1853 to serve at Wesley Chapel, a mission of Trinity. In 1854, he began to minister to the black population of Trinity's congregation. He strove to secure funds and worked diligently to build a separate church for this congregation. He succeeded, but at great cost to his health. Rev. Mitchell became gravely ill and suffered patiently for some time, never losing his strong faith that he would simply be moving to a new place upon his death. He succumbed to his illness in 1856.

The minutes of the Virginia Annual Conference for 1856, written after his death, state:

During this year he undertook to build a church for the accommodation of his charge, and in this enterprise labored most industriously, traversing the city from one extremity to the other to raise money. In this he was eminently successful; and put under contract the Third Street African Church, which has been completed, and now stands as a monument of the zeal and industry of our departed brother.¹

¹ W. D. Keene Jr., Ed., *Memoirs – 200 Years! Soldiers of the Cross 1785-1987* (Decorah, Iowa: Amundsen Publishing Co., 1998), p. 122.

OTHER SOURCES:

John J. Lafferty, *Sketches of the Virginia Conference Methodist Episcopal Church, South*, (Richmond, Va.: Christian Advocate Office, 1880)

"Church History: Ministers at Rodes" (<http://rodesumc.org>, accessed February 15, 2016)

Wesley Arnett Turner, Sr., *Historic Third Street Bethel A.M.E. Church and The First Twenty-Five Years* (Richmond, VA: Third Street Bethel A.M.E. Church)

Frances Tsepho Williams, "Historical Materials about Third Street Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, 1867-1999" (Accession 36905, Church records collection, The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia).

In May 1867, this church, originally Third Street Methodist Episcopal Church, was received into the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, and on January 22, 1874, 18 years after Rev. Mitchell completed his task of overseeing its construction, the church building became the property of the AME church for consideration of one dollar. Today, the building houses an active congregation and was the first black church in Richmond to be placed on the Virginia Historic Landmark Register and the National Register of Historic Places, preserved by the U.S. Department of the Interior.



REV. EDWARD PORTLOCK WILSON
Served Trinity 1855-1857

Edward Portlock Wilson was born near Portsmouth, Virginia, April 28, 1822. He was 17 in November 1839 when, during that centennial year of Methodism, he was converted and received into the Methodist Church during a Portsmouth revival. Some months later, he began to wonder whether he should be a preacher and awaited a call from God. During this time, he was appointed leader of an African-American class, which met every Sunday morning, at Portsmouth's Old Methodist Church on Glasgow Street.

Wilson was licensed to preach in 1841, at the age of 19, and was soon assigned to be a helper at Currituck Mission, Camden Circuit, North Carolina. He preached his first sermon on Roanoke Island and was well received but felt that his sermon at the second stop along the circuit was a failure. Again, he called on God for a sign as to whether he was intended to be a preacher. He later said that as he stepped into the pulpit at his third stop on the circuit he felt that God "unloosed his tongue... When I finished, I invited sinners to come forward to be prayed for, and a number came and bowed at the altar of prayer, among them some of the most hardened and hoary-headed sinners in the community. From that time I took courage and went forward."¹ In the spring, another minister arrived to travel with him. Wilson reported having "waded through swamps and over mud roads – fought mosquitoes and stinging flies, and bilious fever, ague and fever, and slept in open houses, and was in perils often."²

In 1842 he was admitted on probation in the Virginia Conference. He was sent to the Culpeper and Rappahannock Circuit in the Charlottesville District. Over the next few years, he was assigned to the Sussex, Cumberland and Bedford Circuits, the latter in 1846. His pay for that year as a single man was reported to be about \$75. That same year, he was ordained an elder and was married to Miss E. H. Old of Cumberland County. Three children were born of this marriage.

It was said that "he never sought an appointment – was an itinerant in fact as well as in name."³ His next assignments took him to the Hanover, Northampton (North Carolina), and Prince Edward Circuits. He was then sent to Nottoway for two years, then to Prince George, and next to the Randolph-Macon District.

Next, "he was sent to Trinity station, in Richmond, where his labors were blessed, but his health declined."⁴ In 1856, John K. Littleton was assigned to work under Rev. Wilson, overseeing the mission programs at Wesley Chapel and Rocketts. Wilson's service at Trinity ran from 1855 to 1857.

¹ John J. Lafferty, *Sketches of the Virginia Conference Methodist Episcopal Church, South* (Richmond, Va.: Whittet & Shepperson, 1880), p. 34.

² Ibid.

³ W. D. Keene Jr., ed., *Memoirs – 200 Years! Soldiers of the Cross 1785-1987* (Decorah, Iowa: Amundsen Publishing Co., 1998), p. 251

⁴ Lafferty, p. 35.

For the next three years, Wilson traveled the Fredericksburg District, where he served as presiding elder. He then went to Florida for about a year, primarily for his health. The bishop of that conference stationed him in Jacksonville, where he was serving when the Civil War began. His health having improved, he returned to Virginia and was commissioned a chaplain in the Confederate service. Later, he resigned as chaplain, and was sent to Northampton Circuit, NC, where he remained until the close of the war. At the next conference, he was appointed presiding elder to the Norfolk District and then to the Petersburg District, where his wife, who had been in bad health, died.

He traveled the Petersburg District for the next four years. During this time, he married a second time to Miss Onie Prince of Greenville County. They had two children. His service continued in the Hicksford and Sussex Circuits as presiding elder to the Randolph Macon and Petersburg Districts; then Manchester, Nottoway, Hampton; and finally, Elizabeth City in North Carolina. About 1889, he was superannuated, or retired, and settled in Hampton. On June 13, 1895, Rev. Wilson died of heart disease and was buried in Blandford Cemetery, Petersburg, Virginia.