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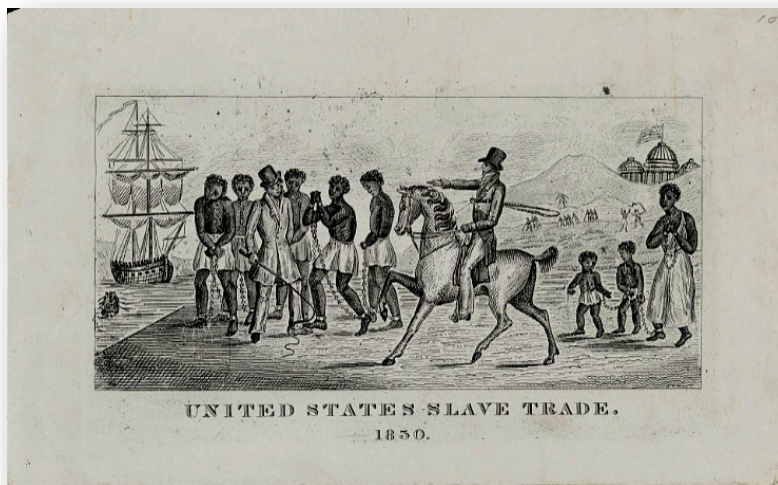
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“Preserving—Sharing—Caring”

Crossroads

The 1844 Debates on Slavery and the Beginning of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South: Part II, The Bishop Andrew Case

By Pamela C. Crosby



“United States Slave Trade, 1830.” (n.d.). LOT 4422. Library of Congress.
<https://www.loc.gov/resource/ds.13992/>

As we saw in Part I of this series on the 1844 Debates, the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church met on May 1, 1844, in New York City and continued until June 11 (Sledge, 2010). It was to be six weeks of alternating periods of civil discourse and angry pronouncements among the Northern and Southern delegates in attendance. Almost 200 male delegates—ministers from all across the United States—arrived in the city. Traveling by transit (boat, train, carriage) as well as horseback, they would board in the homes of local church members throughout their stay (Sledge, 2010, pp. 94, 98). The effect of slavery on the lives of the enslaved was rarely mentioned at the conference, and no enslaved person attended the six-week gathering or had any say as

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to who would decide the issue; in sum, their voices were not heard within the Methodist Church (Sledge, 2010, p. 93).

The conflict between proslavery and antislavery factions had its beginning in the late 1700s (Lawrence, 2020). Later at the General Conference of 1804, episcopacy would continue to be regarded as “unconnected with slavery.” As a result of the itinerant policy that included all regions of the country, Northerners declared that it would not be appropriate for any slaveholding bishop to be “presiding” at annual conferences in the North (Campbell, 2023, p. 75).

But the once strong language in the *Discipline* regarding the banning of ministers as enslavers became weaker and weaker throughout the early 19th century when Southern delegates gained more power in policymaking (Campbell, 2023, p. 75).

Methodist leaders from the Southern states added exceptions to the policies on slavery, including watered-down rules for ministers in states where emancipation was difficult or illegal. The result of adding these rules was that the ministers in some Southern states were able to own enslaved people and not violate the *Discipline*. On the other hand, these rules were not applicable to Northern preachers because slavery was forbidden in those states. In 1844, the majority changed, with the Northern delegates at that time in the advantage (Campbell, 2023, p. 80).

The primary concern relating to slavery that the General Conference addressed was itinerancy (Sledge, 2010, p. 98). In Part One, I examined the details and implications of the first of two cases at the 1844 Conference concerned with this issue. It was the case of **Rev. Francis Harding**, traveling preacher of the Baltimore Conference, who was relieved of his itinerancy in that district (Crosby, 2024).

The Baltimore Conference consisted of churches in both slave states (Maryland and Virginia) and a free state (Pennsylvania). Harding’s offense was marrying a woman who owned enslaved people, thus becoming an enslaver himself, making it impossible for him to serve in all of the conference churches (Sledge, 2010, pp. 98-99).

Bishop James O. Andrew from Georgia was the subject of the second case. He had become the owner of enslaved people by marriage but also by the former owner’s bequest to him. Because he was expected to travel throughout the denomination’s connection as member of the episcopacy, being an enslaver posed immense obstacles. For one thing, as we saw earlier, he likely could not preside over any Northern conference: The New

England Conference would most certainly not receive him. In addition, there had been a broad understanding among the Northern conferences that no enslaver could hold the office of bishop (Sledge, 2010, p. 99).

Andrew’s case at the conference commenced on May 20, 1844. The delegates passed a resolution that was presented by John A. Collins of the Baltimore Conference, which stated,

Whereas, it is currently reported and generally understood, that one of the bishops of the M.E. Church has become connected with slavery; and whereas, it is due to the General Conference to have a proper understanding of the matter: therefore,

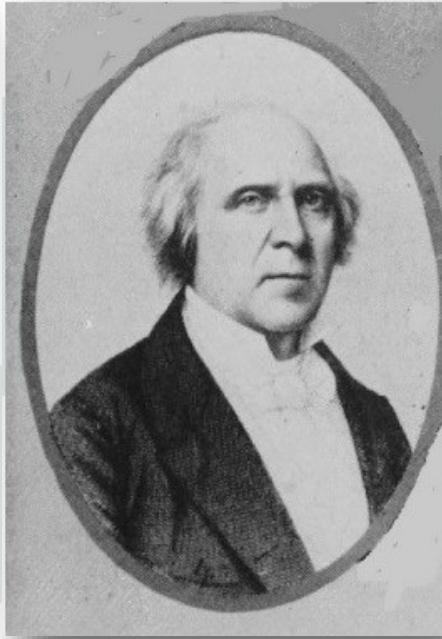
Resolved, That the Committee on the Episcopacy be instructed to ascertain the facts in the case, and report the result of their investigation to this body tomorrow morning. (West, 1844, p. 68)

Three Important Questions

Three important questions arose in the Bishop Andrew debates: 1. What was the relationship of administrative power of the bishops to the Conference? Were the bishops equal, less, or more powerful than the Conference? 2. How should relevant passages in the *Discipline* be interpreted? 3. What do the Constitutional rules say about slavery? (Norwood, 1923, p. 73).



“James Osgood Andrew.” J. M. Buckley. (1898). *A History of Methodists in the United States Volume 1*. Harper & Brothers, 453.



“William A. Smith.” M. L. Gray, & W. M. Baker. (1907). *The Centennial Volume of Missouri Methodism, Methodist Episcopal Church, South*. Burd & Fletcher, 19.

1. Bishop and Conference

Leaders from the South argued that the Conference was equal in power with the episcopacy; they tended to believe that “once a bishop, always a bishop.” Leaders from the North argued that the bishop was an officer of the Conference; he was subject to the Conference and its decisions—not the other way around (Norwood, 1923, pp. 73-74).

2. Interpretation of the *Discipline*

Southern delegates held a narrow interpretation of the *Discipline*. They contended that Bishop Andrew had not broken any tenet of the *Discipline* and was compliant with the 1840 resolution, which allowed enslavement in certain circumstances for all Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC) officers (Norwood, 1923, p. 74).

Northern delegates on the other hand argued that the bishop had committed “improper conduct,” a term used in the *Discipline*, which was foundational in calling for the bishop’s resignation. Just because the *Discipline* did not specify slave ownership as an impediment to the bishop’s holding office did not mean that he did not commit any wrongdoing. If he had married a Black woman, for example, as Northerners argued, his actions would have been deemed “improper conduct” by Southern leaders as was the case of his being an enslaver was “improper conduct” to Northern leaders (Norwood, 1923, p. 74).

3. Constitutional Powers

Some Southern delegates, notably **William A. Smith**, interpreted the Constitution of the MEC as reflective of the U. S. government with the possibility of a compromise resulting from the powers involved. However, Northern delegates said the Constitution consisted of malleable rules which were approved simply by a vote of delegates (Norwood, 1923, p. 74).

Both sides argued for what they termed expediency (practical outcome). The North said if the bishop continued to serve, he would destroy the Northern church because Bishop Andrew would never be able to govern in his official capacity in that region (Norwood, 1923, p. 74). The South, in contrast, said that if he were forced to resign, it would send the message that no minister, regardless of the appointment, who was an enslaver could serve (p. 75).

One perspective (as expressed by **George Foster Pierce**) was that the main question concerned the “constitutional rights and equality of privileges belonging to [S]outhern ministers.” In other words, the focus was directed toward the plight of the Southern preachers rather than the living conditions and human rights of the enslaved (West, 1844, p. 110).

On Wednesday, May 22, the Committee on Episcopacy presented a written statement by Bishop Andrew submitted to the Committee on all of the “facts bearing on [his] connection with slavery.” The first remarks concerned his becoming an enslaver by bequest:

Several years since an old lady, of Augusta, Georgia, bequeathed to me a mulatto girl, in trust that I should take care of her until she should be nineteen years of age; that with her consent I should then send her to Liberia; and that in case of her refusal, I should keep her, and make her as free as the laws of the state of Georgia would permit.

When the time arrived, she refused to go to Liberia, and of her own choice remains legally my slave, although I derive no pecuniary profit from her. She continues to live in her own house on my lot; and has been and is at present at perfect liberty to go to a free state at her pleasure; but the laws of the state will not permit her emancipation, nor admit such deed of emancipation to record, and she refuses to leave the state. In her case, therefore, I have been made a slaveholder legally, but not with my own consent. (*Journal* . . . , 1844, p. 63)

He then described how he acquired another enslaved person—this time by the death of his wife:

About five years since, the mother of my former wife left to her daughter, not to me, a negro boy; and as my wife died without a will more than

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two years since, by the laws of the state he becomes legally my property. In this case, as in the former, emancipation is impracticable in the state; but he shall be at liberty to leave the state whenever I shall be satisfied that he is prepared to provide for himself, or I can have sufficient security that he will be protected and provided for in the place to which he may go. (*Journal*. . . , 1844, pp. 63-64)

He gave an explanation for the second situation relating to marriage:

In the month of January last I married my present wife, she being at the time possessed of slaves, inherited from her former husband's estate, and belonging to her. Shortly after my marriage, being unwilling to become their owner, regarding them as strictly hers, and the law not permitting their emancipation, I secured them to her by a deed of trust. (*Journal*, 1844, p. 64)

Next, Bishop Andrew pleaded not guilty:

It will be obvious to you, from the above statement of facts, that I have neither bought nor sold a slave; that in the only two instances in which I am legally a slaveholder, emancipation is impracticable. As to the servants owned by my wife, I have no legal responsibility in the premises, nor could my wife emancipate them if she desired to do so. (*Journal*. . . , 1844, p. 64)

Bishop Andrew said at some point during the Conference,

I am a slave-holder for conscience sake.... I believe the providence of God has thrown these creatures into my hands and holds me responsible for their proper treatment. (Campbell, 2023, p. 78)

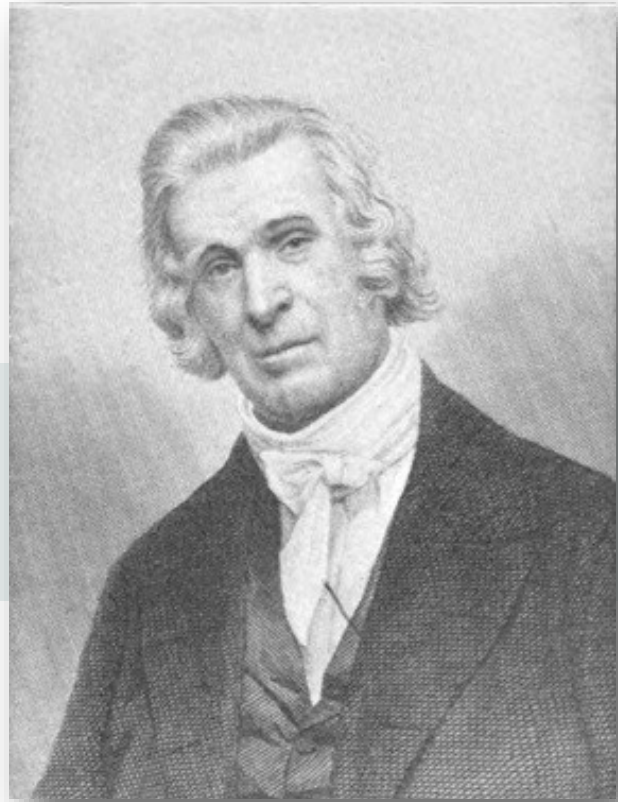
He argued that he had never purchased nor sold any enslaved person and that Georgia law outlawed the emancipation of slaves within the state. In this way, according to the *Discipline*, Bishop Andrew's claims regarding travelling ministers as enslavers were technically correct (Campbell, 2023, pp. 79-80).

A Choice Not to Marry

Responding to Bishop Andrew's pleas, **Rev. Dr. Nathan Bangs** from the New York Conference cited a Biblical passage to support the claim that the bishop could have indeed avoided this controversy. Not marrying the two women who owned slaves would have been the most practical option to have prevented the conflict. He pointed to the Apostle Paul, who said,

If meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend. (1 Corinthians 8:13; West, 1844, p. 98)

Bangs admitted that the bishop was not responsible for ownership of the enslaved mulatto



"Nathan Bangs." J. M. Buckley. (1898). *A History of Methodists in the United States Volume 1*. Harper & brothers, 377.

girl, who was bequeathed to him; however, he argued that in the other two circumstances, the bishop was completely free not to marry (West, 1844, p. 98).

Biblical Case for Slavery

Northerners made the case that the enslavement of human beings was immoral while Southerners made the case that the Bible supported the institution of slavery (Sledge, 2010, p. 93).

Rev. Samuel Dunwoody, originally from Pennsylvania, later moved to the South, and was a member of the South Carolina Conference. Rev. Dunwoody frequently used a Biblical defense of slavery by recounting the story of Abraham, who was an enslaver (West, 1844, p. 164).

Dunwoody also made his case by pointing to Jewish history, saying that according to the "law of Moses," the Jews were given permission to buy slaves from the godless people who lived in other nations, and these were to be their "servants for ever after...." Plainly, God "had authorized the practice of slavery." Dunwoody then turned to the New Testament and, specifically, to the Apostle Paul. According to Dunwoody, the Apostle Paul admonished Christians to follow the law that "all should be obedient to the higher powers, and



“Decorated initial with Paul, Onesimus (delivering letter) and Philemon.” (n.d.). Wikipedia. Public domain. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Onesimus_and_Philemon.jpg

whoever resisted those powers resisted the power of God.” And, in turn, anyone who defied this law would be condemned (West, 1844, p. 165).

Moving on to another passage of the New Testament, Dunwoody referred to Philemon, who owned enslaved people. Paul was aware that Philemon was an enslaver but never rebuked him, and Dunwoody claimed that Philemon had gone to heaven which proved that God did not condemn him. Another passage used to claim that the Bible supported slavery was 1 Timothy:6. Dunwoody said that St. Paul “recognized the relationship between master and servant, and showed that a brother might be a slaveholder” (West, 1855, p. 165).

Furthermore, it was not the role of the “Christian religion” or other religious institutions to interfere with civil laws even if they perceived slavery to be a “moral evil.” Rev. Dunwoody highlighted other Biblical passages to show how religion had not intervened in the “civil rights of mankind” while “slavery was recognized and tolerated in all ages of the world” (West, 1855, p. 165).

The Griffith and Davis Resolution

Rev. Alfred Griffith and Rev. John Davis from the Baltimore Conference introduced a resolution at the Conference (*Journal...*, 1844, p. 4; Campbell, 2023, p. 80) that would draw the attention of the delegates for about 11 days

(Norwood, 1923, p. 72).

The resolution directing Bishop Andrew to resign was the following:

Whereas, the Rev. James O. Andrew, one of the bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church, has become a slaveholder, and whereas it has been, from the origin of said Church, a settled policy and the invariable usage to elect no person to the office of bishop who was embarrassed with this ‘great evil,’ as under such circumstances it would be impossible for a bishop to exercise the functions and perform the duties assigned to a general superintendent with acceptance in that large portion of his charge in which slavery does not exist; and whereas Bishop Andrew was himself nominated by our brethren of the slaveholding states, and elected by the General Conference of 1832, as a candidate who, though living in the midst of a slaveholding population, was nevertheless free from all personal connection with slavery; and whereas, this is of all periods in our history as a Church, the one least favorable to such an innovation upon the practice and usage of Methodism as confiding a part of the itinerant general superintendency to a slaveholder; therefore,

Resolved. That the Rev. James O. Andrew be, and he is hereby affectionately requested to resign his office as one of the bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church. (*Journal...*, 1844 p. 64)

The ultimate question he asserted was whether Bishop Andrew could serve the whole General Conference if he could not serve each

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“Rev. Alfred Griffith.” (n.d.). Find a Grave. <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/27535273/alfred-griffith>

annual conference “with acceptability to the [whole] people” (West, 1844, p. 85).

Northern opposition to his occupying the office did not convince Bishop Andrew he should resign. He refused to step down as we see in his words in a letter to his wife:

These good people have found out that I am a slaveholder, and as they are too religious to hold any sort of communion with such a sinner as a slaveholder, they are exceedingly anxious to get clear of me. But the entire delegations from the twelve slave-holding Conferences have met, and through a committee, have earnestly protested against my resignation under any circumstances, as inevitably destructive to the Southern Church; and for the sake of that Church I have resolved to maintain this position. (Campbell, 2023, pp. 82-83)

Mississippian **Rev. William Winans** said he did not agree that the Church had officially declined to allow an enslaver to be bishop. While not electing a bishop who owned slaves had been the case for decades, it was not an official policy (Campbell, 2023, p. 83).

Winans also said that the bishop had not committed an evil act; instead, he had provided for the needs of the enslaved persons under his care. He could not emancipate them because it was illegal in Georgia to do so. In addition, he was already an enslaver when he married the woman “who was to become the mother of his children and the companion of his declining years” (West, 1844, p. 89).

Winans blamed the abolitionists for preventing the enslaved from hearing the gospel and sending

these benighted persons to damnation because they would not be exposed to Christian preaching and evangelizing. He asked, “Will you throw the blackness and darkness of death over [them] by your vote?” (West, 1844, p. 90).

He also argued that there was no reason that Bishop Andrew would be serving a Northern annual conference at any time, so using that reason as an excuse to force him to resign was not logical. However, if Northerners insisted on his resignation, it would precipitate the Southern conferences of “1300 preachers and 450,000 lay members” to split from the Northern conferences (Campbell, 2023, p. 84).

A Georgia delegate, Rev. George Foster Pierce, who did not necessarily see himself as a pro-slavery supporter, argued, like Dunwoody, that the church should not be in the business of legislating any policies that related to civil laws which meant that the MEC had no business focusing on slavery, a civil matter; instead the Church was charged with addressing the religious development of its members (Campbell, 2023, pp. 84-85).

He declared,

I say, pass this resolution, and the whole of the southern states are hurled into confusion at once; and the brother that would lie down to be trampled upon by such an act of this body, would be regarded as unworthy the office he held, and unworthy to preach the Gospel of Jesus. I am against the resolution, and am glad to make it known that I am against it on principles pure as those that kindle the glory of high heaven—not because I am a pro-



“William Winans.” (n.d.). “People in Louisiana.” United Methodist History. Louisiana Conference, The United Methodist Church. <https://www.la-umc.org/williamwinans>

slavery man, but because God did not call me to legislate on these matters. (West, 1844, p. 92)

Some delegates both from the North and the South expressed their disagreement with the resolution, assenting with Pierce that (1) the church should not be involved in civic matters and (2) the resolution conflicted with the terms of the *Discipline*. If Bishop Andrew would be forced to resign, then ministers of lower rank in the Connection would need to resign, yet the *Discipline* allowed traveling ministers to be enslavers. In addition, the *Discipline* did not explicitly prohibit bishops from owning slaves (Campbell, 2023, p.85).

According to the 1800 *Discipline*,

(2). When any travelling preacher becomes an owner of a slave—or slaves—by any means, he shall forfeit his ministerial character in our church, unless he execute, if it be practicable, a legal emancipation of such slaves, conformably to the laws of the state in which he lives. (Emory, 1857, pp. 329-330)

The 1808 *Discipline* said,

(3). The General Conference authorizes each annual conference to form their own regulations relative to buying and selling slaves. (Emory, 1857, p. 331)

The 1812 *Discipline* said,

Paragraph 3 of 1808 was altered so as to read,



“Rev. George Foster Pierce.” Lee, J.W., Luccock, N., & Dixon, J. M. (1900). *The Illustrated History of the Methodist Church: The Story of the Origin and Progress of the Methodist Church, from its Foundation by John Wesley to the Present Day*. Methodist Magazine Publishing Co., 530.

(3). Whereas the laws of some of the states do not admit of emancipating of slaves, without a special act of the legislature; the General Conference authorizes each annual conference to form their own regulations relative to buying and selling slaves. (Emory, 1857, p. 331)

The 1820 *Discipline* said,

Paragraph 3, (see 1812,) leaving it to

the annual conferences "to form their own regulations about buying and selling slaves," was struck out. (Emory, 1857, p. 331; "In 1820 the paragraph leaving it to the Annual Conferences 'to form their own regulations about buying and selling slaves' was cancelled," see description and background at <https://www.biblicalcyclopedia.com/M/methodist-episcopal-church-south.html>).

Directing attention to this passage of the *Discipline*, the Southern delegates maintained that the bishop should not leave office. If he were forced to resign, Southern delegates would interpret it to mean an assault on his character and would lead to a separation of the Southern conferences from the Northern conferences (Campbell, 2023, p. 86).

With talk about separation causing fear and distress and with the resolve to preserve unity, **Rev. James Bradley Finley** and **Rev. Joseph M. Trimble** of the Ohio Conference proposed this resolution as a substitute for the resolution proposed by Griffith and Davis:

Whereas, the Discipline of our Church forbids the doing [of] anything calculated to destroy our itinerant general superintendency, and whereas, Bishop Andrew has become connected with slavery by marriage and otherwise, and this act having drawn after it circumstances which, in the estimation of the General Conference, will greatly embarrass the exercise of his office as an itinerant general superintendent, if not in some places entirely prevent it; therefore,

Resolved, That it is the sense of this General Conference that he desist from the exercise of this office so long as this impediment remains.

(Signed)

J. B. FINLEY,

J. M. TRIMBLE. (West, 1844, p. 100)

This resolution offered a compromise that recognized Bishop Andrew as an enslaver but did not defame his character. The compromise alluded to a continual theme throughout the debates: Slavery is a moral evil, but when unavoidable, it is not a sin. Therefore, Bishop Andrew should desist

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from serving in the episcopacy while he was associated with the moral evil of slavery, but would not be dismissed permanently. He had not committed a sin because he had not wished to become an enslaver. Once he would no longer have ownership of the enslaved, he could return to office (West, 1844, p. 100).

Rev. Stephen Olin, a New York delegate, supported Finley's recommendation, warning that if it did not gain approval, a divided church would be the result (Campbell, 2023, p. 89).

Olin was a former enslaver and Southerner. He said that matters of defense of the resolution could not be found in the official "record." It was assumed, he [Olin] argued, that enslavement was opposed to what had been the "settled policy and usage" of the MEC:

Since the organization of the federal government on its present basis, the office of president has been occupied during thirty-five years by citizens of Virginia, and forty-three [years] by slaveholders, while that high honour has been enjoyed only twelve years by northern statesmen. Would it be a proper use of language to say that it is the "settled policy and usage" of our country, that the office of president should be for the most part confined to southern men? (West, 1844, p. 101)

Rev. Olin explained that before Bishop Andrew, there had been no enslaving bishop in the history of the General Conference who had been elected



"Stephen Olin." Lee, J.W., Luccock, N., & Dixon, J. M. (1900). *The Illustrated History of the Methodist Church: The Story of the Origin and Progress of the Methodist Church, from its Foundation by John Wesley to the Present Day*. Methodist Magazine Publishing Co., 502.



"Rev. James Bradley Finley." Finley, J. B. (1854). *Sketches of Western Methodism: Biographical, Historical, And Miscellaneous. Illustrative of Pioneer Life*. Methodist Book Concern.

to serve the Church. Olin reasoned that it was simply because voters had elected those men who happened not to own enslaved people. Having a law prohibiting a bishop from owning slaves would have made no difference (West, 1844, p. 101).

Olin considered that the Finley resolution, which was not requiring Bishop Andrew to leave office permanently or requiring that he receive "punishment" or "censure," was a compromise that would "palliate and diminish" the "dangers" rather than "wholly avert" them. Therefore, it was best for the bishop to "refrain from the exercise of his episcopal functions" as the resolution stated (West, 1844, p. 103).

Rev. Henry Slicer from the Baltimore Conference supported the amended resolution proposed by Finley because he thought it would benefit the enslaved. The benefits would ensue from the fact that this version of the resolution did not favor slavery, nor did it favor the abolitionists who

advocated for immediate emancipation that many thought would cause chaos (Campbell, 2023, p. 90; West, 1844, p. 107).

A New Hampshire Conference delegate, **Rev. William D. Cass**, was among the first to address the subject of moral evil at the debates. He noted that Wesley and Asbury were advocates for the eradication of all slavery (Campbell, 2023, p. 90).

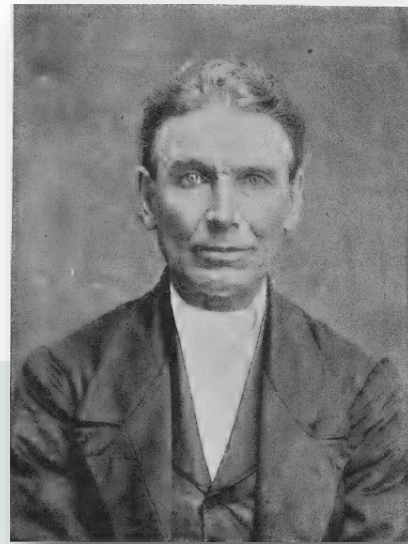
Because Bishop Andrew by his “voluntary act” and “with his eyes open” brought a “dark cloud” of “trouble” to the Church by becoming an enslaver, Cass announced that he was going to read a passage from John Wesley regarding slavery. One person in the audience responded with a disapproving attitude by moving to adjourn. This suggestion never came to a vote. Rev. Cass explained that “they do not like to hear John Wesley speak.” Wesley would “weep in view of the connection of the dark subject of slavery with the Church” (West, 1844, p. 109).

Cass proceeded to read Wesley’s words on the subject:

Men-buyers are exactly on a level with men-stealers. But perhaps you will say, I do not buy any negroes, I only use those left me by my father. So far very good. But is it enough to satisfy your conscience? Had your father—have you—has any man living, a right to use another as a slave? It cannot be, setting Revelation aside, it cannot be that either war or contract can give any man such property in another as he has in his sheep or oxen, much less is it possible that any child of man should be born a slave.

Liberty is the right of every human being as soon as he breathes the vital air, and no human law can deprive him of that right which he derives from the law of nature. Therefore if you have any regard for justice, to say nothing of mercy nor the revealed law of God, render unto all their due. Give liberty unto whom liberty is due, that is, to every child of man—to every partaker of human nature. I strike at the root of this complicated villainy. I absolutely deny all slaveholding to be consistent with any degree of justice. (West, 1844, p. 109)

Cass made clear that thousands of Methodists from the “New-Hampshire” Conference had submitted memorials (petitions) to oppose slavery, indicating that Bishop Andrew could not “sit in the episcopal chair in an annual conference in New-England.” If Andrew retains his office, “whole conferences” would “leave” (West, 1844, p. 109).



“Rev. William D. Cass.” Cole, O., & Baketel, O. S. (Eds.). (1929). *History of the New Hampshire Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church*. Methodist Book Concern, 79.

A Tennessee delegate, **Rev. Alexander Little Page Green**, said that he had educated himself concerning the slavery issue and had read various reports about slavery in the West Indies. He understood the primary question to be whether the General Conference has the right to remove a bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church for being connected with slavery, with the constitution and the *Discipline* being judge (West, 1844, p. 123).

Green contended that a bishop was responsible only to other bishops. Officers, who included editors, treasurers, etc., had term limits, while bishops served for their lifetime. He also argued that according to the *Discipline*, traveling ministers had no ability to emancipate because of state laws that forbade it. Bishop Andrew, was in effect a traveling preacher who was also a bishop (Campbell, 2023, p. 92).

Green remarked that it had been said during the debates that a bishop was just an officer of the General Conference, and, therefore, the conference could remove him from office without a trial. Green denied that this was the case, for a bishop was not “on the same ground” as other officers, such as a book agent, an editor of a newspaper, or the secretary, who are elected for a term-limit while a bishop is elected for life. Therefore, when

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an officer is no longer in office, it is because his term has ended—not because he has proven that he has an immoral character (West, 1844, p. 123).

Green went on to say that unlike an officer, a bishop is ordained “by the imposition of hands” and must attest that he is “moved by the Holy Ghost.” The bishop “is not the officer of the conference but of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America.” Instead of suspending him, he is either “worthy” to hold office or he is not (West, 1844, p. 124).

In addition, the civil decree had always overridden the church law as laid out in the *Discipline*. So if the U. S. government permitted enslaved persons in particular states such as Georgia, then Bishop Andrew’s ownership of enslaved people was not illegal (Campbell, 2023, p. 92).

Rev. Green presented the hypothetical scenario:

Suppose a brother voting to depose Bishop Andrew was to be elected to fill his place, and go south to attend our conferences, and we were to sustain him, and thereby [sustain] the action of this conference in deposing Bishop Andrew; I do not know, sir, but the people would rise en masse, and escort us out of town in a genteel dress of tar and feathers. (West, 1844, pp. 126-127)

Rev. Green denied that Bishop Andrew had broken any law, according to the *Discipline*. He also added that Bishop Andrew was not asked before he was ordained if he was an enslaver or if he would ever become an enslaver (West, 1844, pp. 124-125).

Although he was accused of owning slaves by his brothers of the church, he would not be considered an enslaver “in the sight of God,” said Green. Furthermore, Bishop Andrew could not emancipate those bound to him because the state would not permit it. Green maintained that although it had been claimed in the debates the day before that no one could force another person to be an enslaver, he believed that a “man may become a slaveholder without his knowledge or consent” (West, 1844, p. 125).

In fact, Rev. Green recounted an example when an older Black man had asked to become his legal slave so that he “might be permitted to do as he pleased” while having “some one to pro-



“Rev. Alexander Little Page Green.” (circa 1870). W. B. Cooper. Wikipedia. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rev._Alexander_Little_Page_Green_by_Washington_B._Cooper.jpg

tect him.” Green claimed that giving the Black man away or selling him would not have guaranteed that he would be treated humanely, arguing that,

there is a difference, sir, between a man holding slaves, and slaves holding on to a man. Some masters hold on to their slaves, while slaves, at other times, hold on to the masters, or owners. (West, 1844, p. 125)

This was a situation similar to that of Bishop Andrew. The young girl who was left to Bishop Andrew by a bequest in a will, as well as the young boy who had been left to him when his wife died, wanted only to remain with the bishop, although they both were completely free to leave (West, 1844, p. 125).

Rev. Green said that he could foresee that if the Church insisted that Bishop Andrew rid himself of his slaves, the Church would demand that

all of the ministers in the denomination release themselves from slaveholding (West, 1844, p. 126).

Green next alleged that Bishop Asbury, himself, had wanted to buy a young Black slave as a servant. However, this story has never been proven in the biographical research of Asbury (West, 1844, p. 126).

He also posed the argument that Bishop Andrew had been the reason for “hundreds” who had gone to “heaven” while “thousands” currently living “are ready to stand up and call him blessed.” Yet, those who are supporting the resolution—though they love him—are ready to “crucify him” while finding “no fault in him” (West, 1844, p. 127).

...

Later, the voting results of the Finley resolution indicated that a large majority of support came from the non-slaveholding conferences. Not surprisingly, the substitute resolution proposed by Finley passed—with 111 yeas to 60 nays (Norwood, 1923, p. 87).

What's Next?

On the evening of June 10, 1844, the General Conference adjourned (Norwood, 1923, p. 87). Much would happen following the Finley resolution vote and before the adjournment, however. How would the Southern delegates react to the passage of the substitute resolution proposed by Finley? How would the Northern delegates respond to the Southern delegates' reaction? Although it seems obvious to us in the twenty-first century that slavery would be considered unequivocally wrong, our Southern ancestors at the General Conference, as we have noted, saw the issue as far more complex.

In the next and last part of this series on slavery and American Methodism, we will see the particular stages leading up to the Great Schism of the Methodist Episcopal Church as the delegates proceeded toward the final hours of the 1844 General Conference in New York City.

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Crossroads Call for Stories and Articles

Firsthand stories: Individuals may submit stories based on their firsthand experience at Trinity.

Research Articles: Criteria for formal articles include **relevance** to the purpose of the newsletter, which is to publish articles that pertain to the history of Trinity in a substantial way; **quality of writing; historical accuracy; clarity; conciseness; coherence;** and **readability**.

- Articles should be original works and not excerpts.
- The word limit for articles **is usually around 500 words, but can be longer**.
- A list of resources used for historical research may be requested. **Original** sources are preferred when possible.

General Guidelines

- Writing should be free of disrespectful language.
- Photos and information should not violate privacy, copyright, or other established laws.
- All accepted works are subject to editing in compliance with all *Crossroads* guidelines, including style guide standards, and **must pass editorial approval** before publication.

Submit your Word document to **Dr. Pamela Crosby**, editor, at pcrosby@tumct.org

Making History: News from the Trinity Historical Society and the Committee for the Preservation of Church History

By Leadership Team



Amy Jones, lead archivist, organizes documents in the preparation room (310), helping to ensure that researchers and others interested in historical records have access to the items they need.

Amy Jones Leads Preservation Efforts

The prep room (room 310) of Trinity's Yates Center has been transformed by the church's preservationists with **Amy Jones** as lead archivist and primary organizer of materials in this indispensable workspace. Documents stored in this prep room include items of all sorts, such as financial documents, correspondence, worship bulletins, membership records, charge conference minutes, and photographs. A mapping scheme, which will assist in location of these items, is on the docket for the coming year. The Committee for the Preservation of Church History and the Historical Society recognize the extensive value of Amy's expertise, diligence, and leadership in archiving materials that will be readily available for church visitors and researchers.

Service of Remembering, Honoring, and Reflecting

In a special ceremony of prayers, hymns, reflections, historical narratives, and communion, Trinity members acknowledged the church's past fail-

ures by addressing its relationship to those enslaved and others who had been denied basic human rights throughout its history. The event, "The Service of Remembering, Honoring, and Reflecting" took place in the chapel on March 27, 2025, and was led by members of the Historical and Justice Committees. The program emphasized a past as well as a renewed commitment to love and justice in combating racism. Those taking part were **Dr. Bob Gibbs, Rev. Dick Woodward, Rev. Anna Brook Opalinski, Rachael Diaz, Daniel Diaz, Margie Clay, Gloria Colvin, Dr. Lynn McLarty, Dr. Pamela Crosby, Susan Stephens, Kathy Drake, and Diane Jacobs.** An especially moving portion of the service of lament was the lighting of candles representing the 40 enslaved persons who lived on the forced labor plantation of the family of **Miles Blake**, one of the founders of the church.

History Addendum Publication

Marti Chumbler has completed the final draft of an addendum to the 1999 history volume, edited by Linda Yates. The addendum covers years at Trinity from 2000 to 2024 and marks the observance of the church's Bicentennial year, while the 1999 book, *United Methodist Church: Tallahassee's First Church 1824-1999*, contains ten chapters and was published in honor of the 175th anniversary of Trinity. The short history booklet, which will include one chapter of historical narrative, errata of the 1999 book, a bibliography, and photographs, will be published separately.

Sections under the title "A Heart for the City: 2000-2024" mark the pastorates of **John Willis, Wayne Curry, Wayne Wiatt, and Matthew Williams**, and include national events such as the September 11, 2001, attack on the Twin Towers and Pentagon, and the COVID-19 pandemic. The publication ends with the church's observance of its 200th year—a celebration that was postponed from the third Sunday in September 2024 to January 12, 2025, due to the project- (cont. on p. 14)



Service of Remembering, Honoring, and Reflecting. Upper Left: Dr. Pamela Crosby shares research revealing how the church's founders rejected the anti-slavery principles of John Wesley. Upper right, Gloria Colvin reports on original research based on interviews with those who were activists (or had relatives who were activists) in the civil rights movement from the 1950s—1970s and those who experienced its consequences. Second row: Gloria Colvin lights candles in the spirit of lament and recognition of the enslaved persons of the family of Miles Blacke who was Trinity's first recording steward. Left: Dr. Lynn McLarty illustrates and tells the story of St. James Church, an African American congregation that was organized under the auspices of Trinity.



Susan Mick and Cecile Baker discuss plans for the Bicentennial memory books.

Miles Blake was the first recording steward of Trinity's history.

Historical Society Launches New Website

Church leaders have provided support and guidance for the online preservation of Trinity's history pages that have been collected and displayed in a website of its own. The new website (<https://www.tumcthistory.org>) includes historical overview, description of the Yates Center, expansive archives of documents, audio-video media, extensive timeline, back issues of *Crossroads* and *Tidings*, and reports and photos of the Bicentennial Observance. Special appreciation goes to **Susan Koehler**, director of communications, for her assistance in the project and **Rev. Dr. Matthew Williams** for his ongoing support of Trinity's historical mission. **Dr. Pamela Crosby** designed the pages and will be its webmaster. **Ryan Kline** of WPTallahassee is the web developer, and he and his team have done a superb job in building the site and patiently working with Pam to customize the pages.

A Finish Line for the Timeline

Brett Ingram, facilities director and "resident artist," is putting the finishing touches on the wall display of Trinity's timeline. The timeline illustrates a pictorial history of Trinity, and the display is made out of wallpaper with photo layout designed by Trinity historians. The segment that will be added includes photographs

from 2000-2024, signifying the recent decades leading up to the Bicentennial observance. **Gloria Colvin, Susan Mick, and Mike Melder** along with Brett have overseen the newest addition to the display.

Volunteer Openings for Historical Society Announced

The Leadership Team of Trinity's Historical Society announce that the following volunteer opportunities are available:

- **Researching for, writing, and/or copy editing** *Crossroads* articles
- **Copy editing and updating** history website
- **Designing** sanctuary and chapel windows pamphlet
- **Developing** a Trinity walking tour
- **Filing and archiving** of weekly bulletins and inserts
- **Filing and archiving** *Crossroads* and *Tidings* collections.
- **Indexing** *Crossroads* and *Tidings* collections
- **Sorting** photographs into categories (youth; music; preschool; missions; special events; etc.)
- **Updating** memory scrapbooks
- **Managing, cataloging, and storing** of recordings (cassettes, VCRs, CDs, videos)

Opportunities can be a one-time commitment or longer as preferred. Send statement of interest to Dr. Pamela Crosby at pcrosby@tumct.org



These wooden bookends were part of some cutoffs of millwork used in construction of the present sanctuary, completed in 1964. The wood was made into bookends by woodworking hobbyist and senior pastor (1965-1972) Dr. George Foster. They are on display in the Yates Center.

ed landfall of Hurricane Helene in the Big Bend area.

We are hoping to see the publication of this special addition to Trinity's history sometime this year and commend Marti's work in its realization.

Planning for Bicentennial Memory Books

Susan Mick and **Lynn McLarty** will be designing and constructing memory scrapbooks of the Bicentennial observance for display in the Yates Center. One memory book will be composed of *Tidings* (Trinity's newsletter) articles, and the other one will be focused on special events, including guest speakers who spoke monthly at worship services. **Amy Jones** and **Cecile Baker** will be assisting with the project.

Description of Blake Brothers Found in Civil War Letters and Records

Historical Society member **Mike Melder** has broken through years of church silence regarding Trinity's link to Civil War history. For decades, church historians have been unable to locate specific information regarding those in the church's community who had fought in the armed conflict.

Currently, Mike has located documents and letters that provide details about the sons of Trinity member **Miles Blake**. Among his three sons who served in the Confederate army was **Lieutenant Joel Clifton Blake** who was killed on the second day of the Battle of Gettysburg. Lt. Blake fought in the Florida Fifth Infantry Regiment, Company "K."



Pictured above is Cecile Baker, auditing church registers.

Church Rolls Updated

Lynn McLarty and his cadre of assistants can now see the culmination of months of work on the newly updated series of church registers that was published online in July. The extensive array of records dates from 1828 to the present. These documents include membership, pastors, baptisms, marriages, and deaths. The process involves data entry, introductory essays of the process, auditing, scanning, organizing, and uploading in the online archives. Those who have been involved in this effort are Lynn (locating, data entry, scanning, introducing descriptions, and auditing), **Cecile Baker** (auditing), **Earline Adkison** (auditing), **Cindy McDuffie** (auditing), **Amy Henderson** (auditing and transcribing), **Judy Levy** (transcribing and auditing) and **Pamela Crosby** (reorganizing pages and website planning and updates). To see the updated files, go to <https://www.tumcthistory.org/church-registers/>

From the Editor: A Tipping Point Leads to a Broken Denomination

By Pamela C. Crosby, Crossroads Editor

John Wesley, along with the titans of American Methodism, **Francis Asbury** and **Thomas Coke**, strongly opposed the institution of slavery, although Asbury and Coke would eventually soften their views when Southern voices supporting slavery became more demanding (Purifoy, 1966, p. 14; Bascom, 1845, p. 6). Formidable language opposing slavery in the Methodist Episcopal Church's (MEC) first *Discipline* would continually weaken in later editions of the rulebook by the time the 1844 debates took place at the General Conference in New York (Purifoy, 1966; Bascom, 1845; Emory & Strickland, 1857).

The breaking up of American Methodism in 1844 seemed at first to have little effect on Trinity: The church's historians so far have found few references to it in the church records or other documents. We do know that church leaders who met at the first official business meeting were enslavers, and it is most likely that the substance of the arguments for slavery at the 1844 Conference reflect the viewpoints of Trinity's church fathers. Throughout the debates, Southern delegates evoked Biblical references to Abraham and

St. Paul as—in their view—undeniable proof that God sanctioned the institution. In recent years, Biblical references have also been used by those seeking disaffiliation from the United Methodist Church to support arguments against inclusion relating to issues of human sexuality.

In this issue, we present the second part in a three-part series on the debates taking place in 1844 at the General Conference in New York, which led to the schism of the Methodist Episcopal Church and the beginning of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South—the denomination to which Trinity belonged—until the two denominations unified in 1939. The third part of the series focuses on the last days of the six-week Conference and the organizing of the new Southern church. Also included in an upcoming issue is a historical analysis of John Wesley's *Thoughts Upon Slavery*, published in 1774.

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