

# A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE MEMPHIS ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE METHODIST CHURCH AND OF THE FIRST METHODIST CHURCH OF MAYFIELD

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The first beginnings of the Methodist Church in Kentucky and Tennessee in the Western parts of our states goes back to the early days of Francis Asbury and William McKendree whose early visits resulted in the formation of the Western Conference at the Bethel Academy in what is now Russellville, Kentucky. This was in 1800. It included all of the territory west of the Appalachian Mountains and extended to the Mississippi River west and south of Spanish Florida.

By 1808, the Western Conference had expanded to a membership of 16,000 and was divided into five districts. They were the Holston, Cumberland, Kentucky-Tennessee, Ohio, and Mississippi.

In 1812, the Kentucky-Tennessee District and Ohio District were made into separate conferences. Bishop Asbury presided at these conferences and William McKendree was elected as a Bishop, also. The Tennessee Conference was organized at a place called Fountain Head near the present city of Portland. It included what is now the state of Tennessee, Southern and Western Kentucky west of the Tennessee River which later became a part of the Jackson Purchase of October 19, 1818, in a treaty negotiated by Andrew Jackson and former Governor Isacc Shelby of Kentucky, which involved what is now three states, Kentucky, Tennessee, and northern Mississippi and cleared the title to these lands from the Chickashaw Indian Nation to the United States and these individual States. This is another link in the chain of events which parallels the growth of the Methodist Church in America with the Nation as a whole. This conference was just getting under way when the War of 1812, began and created the heroic deeds of Andrew Jackson at the Battle of New Orleans.

Between 1812 and 1820, Methodism grew very rapidly and several new conferences were formed. They were Indians, Kentucky, Mississippi, Arkansas, and Louisiana. By 1829, the Tennessee Conference contained West Tennessee, Western Kentucky, west of the Tennessee River, and Northern Alabama, and Northern Mississippi to approximately the Yazoo River. In 1820, the first appointments were made in what is now West Tennessee, and the seeds were planted which resulted in the growth of Methodism.

Until 1818, the Western part of the Conference was left largely to the Chickashaw Nation. Jackson and Shelby concluded a treaty with them and it



includes what is now the Memphis Conference and a later treaty included the portion in North Mississippi with the Choctaws. Although some preaching had been conducted to the Indians and a few whites that lived in the area not much work was done until 1820, and afterwards. At the Hopkinsville session of the Tennessee Conference in 1820, Hezekiah Holland and Lewis Garrett were appointed as missionaries to what is now the Jackson Purchase. Holland did not go but Garrett did and Benjamin F. Peeples was appointed to take Holland's place.

By 1831, there were two districts in the Memphis area—the Memphis and the Paris Districts. The first church to be organized was at Manleyville to be known as Manley's Chapel. It was located in what is now the southern part of Henry County and is the oldest church in what is now our Memphis Conference. In 1831, the Tennessee Conference met for the first time west of the Tennessee River at Paris and again in 1837, at Somerville. It was scheduled to meet at Jackson in 1840; but by that time, the General Conference had approved the creation of the Memphis Conference, to be separated from the Tennessee Conference by creating all the land from the Tennessee to the Mississippi River and from the Ohio to the Yazoo in Mississippi.

By 1840, the Memphis Conference was organized into a conference of its own and it consisted of the entire Jackson Purchase Area from Tennessee to the Mississippi River and from the Ohio to the Yazoo in northern Mississippi and this portion remained a part of the Memphis Conference until 1870. So the meeting in Jackson in 1840, was the organizational meeting of the Memphis Conference with two Districts—the Paris District and the Memphis District. These represented the northern and southern portions of the Memphis Conference. Methodism grew rapidly with the growth of the Nation and its population.

The Tennessee Conference had been founded in 1812, by a division of the original Western Conference. In 1820, the Tennessee Conference was divided into the Kentucky Conference but the Tennessee Conference retained portions of Southern Kentucky and West Kentucky west of the Tennessee River. In 1840, the Memphis Conference was created by taking the Jackson Purchase portion out of the Tennessee Conference and creating it into a Conference of its own. In addition to the Paris and Memphis Districts, from the former Tennessee Conference, three new Districts were created. They were the Wesley, located between Memphis and Jackson, and the Mississippi Districts of Holly Springs and Ponotoch. J.B. McFerrin in the History of Methodism outlined the boundaries of the new Conference.

In 1841, the Jackson District was added and in 1842, the Paducah District was created for the Kentucky portion of the Conference. Membership in the conference had grown to a little over twenty-eight thousand at this time. By that time, there were ninety-two preachers who travelled and rotated over the



conference. In 1870, the Mississippi Conference was removed from the Memphis Conference and placed in the Mississippi Conference. So by 1870, the Memphis Conference had reached the form that now exists.

In the General Conference which met in New York in 1844, Bishop Andrew was suspended because he and his wife owned slaves. The Southern delegates withdrew from the Conference and organized the Methodist-Episcopal Church South. So in 1844, the Memphis Conference became a part of the Southern Methodist Church and remained a part of the South until the Reunification Conference of 1939, which combined the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Methodist Episcopal Church South and the Methodist Protestant Group into a new church called the Methodist Church.

The Methodist Church remained this way until 1968, when it merged with the United Brethren Church which was founded by Albright and Otterbein, who were friends of Francis Asbury and, in effect, were German speaking Methodists. By 1968, language barriers were overcome and so the Memphis Conference is now a part of the United Methodist Church.

As for Methodism in Mayfield, it was organized in 1834, as a part of the Wadesboro Circuit which was then a part of the Paris District but before the Paducah District was organized in 1842. Hiram Glass and Calvin Thompson were the first pastors of the newly founded church of Mayfield. The church was founded by four Georges: George W. Casey, George W. Martin, George W. Casey, and George W. Yarbrough. The latter also founded Burnett's Chapel in South Graves County and is the ancestor of Mayfield's Herbert McNeilly.

The history of First Methodist Church of Mayfield can be divided into the following eras. In the circuit and pre-conference days, this area was a part of the Paris District in the Tennessee Conference. George W. Kelsaw and T. L. Boswell were the first pastors of the Mayfield Circuit with George W. Harris as the first Presiding Elder or District Superintendent as they are now called. Other churches on the Mayfield Circuit were Pryorsburg in 1824, Spence Chapel in 1826, Mobley Camp Ground, Holifield and Jordan Station. The Pryorsburg Church is the oldest Methodist Church in Graves County.

In 1837, three years after being organized as a part of the Wadesboro Circuit, Mayfield became a full time station with George W. Kelsaw, T.L. Boswell, and J.M. Major as their pastors. This was in the days when the Memphis Conference was in the Methodist Episcopal Church.

The next era begins in 1844, when the Church became a part of the Methodist Episcopal Church South because of the slavery issue. Mayfield Methodist Church became a part of the Clinton Circuit in the new Southern Church from 1844-1866. It was during this era that the church moved from its



building which was a log cabin located on West Broadway between 8th and 9th Streets today to its second building which stood on what is the parking lot of the Baptist Church on South 8th Street. This was in 1856.

In 1871, Mayfield became a part of a two station charge known as Mayfield and Wrights Chapel, located on what is now Kentucky 80 between Mayfield and Fancy Farm.

In 1875, it became a full time station and was known briefly as St. John's and was located on the corner across from what is now Stone's Drug Store also a part of what is now the parking lot.

This was the third building in the history of the church. In 1891, the church moved into its fourth building which was the only brick building in its history and was where Penneys is now located. It remained in this building from 1882 until 1919. The last service in this building was on June 15, 1919. From that time until December 21, 1919, services were held in the Circuit Court Room until a new church was partially completed enough to be moved into and have services. The first service in the new, the fifth and present church was on December 21, 1919. The sanctuary was completed by April 1920. My father the late Ed B. Ligon, and I were among the first members to be received into the newly finished sanctuary on April 25, 1920.

I interviewed a Mrs. R.L. Mahan who informed me that the first service was held on December 24, 1920, and it was a prayer meeting. Those present were John T. Myers, our pastor, Mrs. R.L. Mahan, Harry Wright, C.S. Waller, and C.W. Carruthers. This is a little trivia I am introducing into our church history.

The church has continued to grow and develop through the days of the Southern Church, the Unified Church when North and South reunited, and days of the present United Methodist Church from 1968 to the present time. In the last ten years, the church has been remodeled and recently installed a new sound system at a cost of one hundred ninety thousand dollars. Cecil Kirk is the present pastor.