



THE FIRST METHODIST CHURCH IN GERMANTOWN.

The first building erected by Methodists in Germantown, dedicated in 1806. Samuel Harvey was among the trustees who took possession of the land from Jacob and Dorothy Reger in 1804.
(From Robert Thomas, *A Century of Methodism in Germantown*, 1895)

The Autobiography of Samuel Harvey

Samuel Harvey (1847)

Editor's Note: Samuel Harvey (1770-1848) was a pioneer Methodist lay leader, local preacher and civic leader in Philadelphia. He was among the founders of the old Union Methodist Episcopal Church on Fourth Street, and one of the trustees for the Methodist Society in Germantown at the time its first church building was erected in the early 1800s; known for many years as the Haines Street ME Church, this is the ancestor of today's First United Methodist Church of Germantown. Harvey Street in Germantown is also named for him. As indicated in the opening paragraph, this brief autobiography was evidently inserted into an old record book, but the original could not be located. The text is taken from the June 5, 1879 issue of the Philadelphia Methodist, the conference paper, and had been discovered and transcribed by Rev. George W. Lybrand, who was then the historian of the Philadelphia Conference.

I, Samuel Harvey, now of Germantown, in the county of Philadelphia, and the State of Pennsylvania, present this book to the Stewards of the Methodist Episcopal Church, worshipping in the Union Methodist meeting-house, on Fourth Street between Market and Mulberry Streets, in the city of Philadelphia, which building stands on a part of the foundation of a building erected by the energies and donations procured by George Whitefield, (one of John Wesley's students at Oxford University) and in which was established the Pennsylvania Academy. I present this book as a precious memento of the origin of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America. It came into my hands amongst the account books of Jacob Baker, who was one of the earliest Methodists of Philadelphia, and one of the most respectable importing merchants, who, in the year 1807, failed in business, and by him Thomas Allibone, Henry Pratt and myself

were appointed his assignees; the active part of the assignment was committed to me. This ancient record is precious to me, as it commenced a few months before I was born.

My birth occurred on the 10th day of June, 1770, in the township of Charlestown, in the county of Chester, near Yellow Springs. I, supposing this book will be accepted and carefully preserved, and perhaps looked over when I am no more among men on earth, add the following memorials of myself:

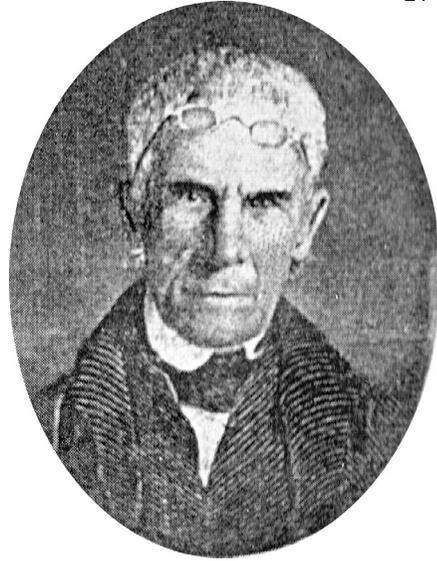
The first Methodist sermon that I heard was my eighth year of age, and delivered at the house of John David by Robert Cloud. His text was the 16th verse of the 3rd chapter of the Gospel by St. John: "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." At this time Methodism was universally despised.

In the year 1792 I was converted, having no person with me. I communicated my change to no person, nor did I belong to any branch of the Christian church; and by standing aloof from profession of religion, I soon fell back into sin, until the year 1795, when I was admitted into the Methodist Episcopal Church worshipping at St. George's, Rev. John McClaskey the minister in charge at that time.¹ Shortly after, I was appointed Secretary and Treasurer for the Board of Trustees, and was in these offices until about the year 1801, when difficulties occurred in the Board of Trustees about repairing the church building, and spread into the whole society, and resulted in the withdrawal of about one hundred members.² The most leading of these were: Thomas Haskins, Lemuel Greer, Charles Cavender and John Gouge, ministers; Lambert Wilmer,

¹Rev. John McClaskey (1756-1814) immigrated to America from Ireland at 16, was converted to Christ under Methodism in 1782, and became a travelling preacher in 1786. He had charge of St. George's 1795-1796, and again 1802-1803, and also served as a Presiding Elder in Pennsylvania and New Jersey. Laban Clark recalled him as "a very large, portly man, of full face, ruddy complexion, fine countenance, and his raven black hair parted, and hung down loosely upon his shoulders...[whose] preaching was full of solid instruction ...[with] a fine manly voice." William B. Sprague, *Annals of the American Pulpit* (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1859), 125-126.

²The division in St. George's which led to the creation of the Union ME Church was a source of great grief to Francis Asbury, as indicated in his journal and several letters. While Harvey characterizes it as originating in a property dispute, Ezekiel Cooper described it as a class conflict between poorer and more affluent members; while one laywoman's recollection maintained that the dispute was "between the shouting members and the quiet members." See "Spiritual Narrative of Mary Harmstead," in *Annals of Eastern Pennsylvania*, No. 5 (2008), 48-49.

A photograph of Samuel
Harvey, from the 1895
book, *A Century of
Methodism in Germantown*,
by Robert Thomas.



John Hood, Joseph L. Ingles and myself, class leaders; Jacob Baker, Col. Caleb North, Benton Wallis, Thomas and Philip Kelly. John Hood and Lambert Wilmer were amongst the earliest members of the Methodist Episcopal Church in this country – men of great piety.

We associated together under the doctrines and discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and obtained permission of the Trustees of the Academy to worship in an upstairs room in the building, calling ourselves the United Society of Methodists. Our Society increased rapidly by conversions and others coming to us. The society purchased the south end of the Academy, and converted it into a place of worship, where I was again Treasurer and Steward.³ In the year 1802, I received of the society a license to preach, and preached my first sermon in the Walnut Street prison, which was supplied by our preachers with preaching every morning and afternoon on Sabbath days, and was the first regular preaching in prison in this country. My first text was: “Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of me.”⁴

I was first appointed a class leader in the year 1797, while a member in St. George’s, by Ezekiel Cooper, and have been ever since to

³The Academy had been erected in 1740 as a preaching house for George Whitefield, and later became a school which developed into University of Pennsylvania.

⁴John 5:39. Harvey preached extensively in the region, and was ordained a local Deacon in 1812. Harvey preached the first Methodist sermon in the Olney section of Philadelphia in 1815; this was the origin of the St. James United Methodist Church, today continued as the Solid Rock United Methodist Church.

this day in that office. I formed a class of about twelve persons in this prison of the prisoners, some of whom I know died in the faith. I obtained permission of the inspectors of the prison to establish a library for the prisoners, and win the aid of John Magoppin, Captain James Moore, John Markoe and Thomas Bradford, Jr., collected two to three hundred volumes of books, for which the inspectors furnished a place and cases; and every Sabbath day one of us attended to the exchanging the books with the prisoners. A library now is an appendage to the penitentiaries of our state, at least the Eastern and Western. The benefit to the institutions was at first, and now is, acknowledged to be essential to prisons. In reading a late report of the Eastern Penitentiary, I note that it is stated that Robert Vaux introduced the library; this is not true.

As this paper may be read after my departure hence, I will further add: I have been a member of the Pennsylvania Society for the Abolition of Slavery, and one of the Acting Committee. One of the first managers of the Magdalen Society; also of the Bible Society, the first established in this country, established in Philadelphia, and also of the first missionary society of the Methodist Episcopal Church in this country, established in Philadelphia. I was one of the first trustees of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Germantown, and presided at the Board. Am yet a local preacher and deacon, a class leader; was many years Recording Steward of Bristol Circuit,⁵ the last resigned for a younger person to fill. Have been many years a trustee of the Chartered Fund of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and had for my colleagues Thomas F. Sargent, Caleb North, Alexander Cook, Joseph L. Ingles, and others. Being now the oldest man on the Board.⁶ I am now the president, which office I have filled many years.

Let me further add a little of my relation to the things of the world: I was a successful importing merchant from the fall of 1796 to the spring of 1813, under the firm name of Harvey and Worth, a man of the most noble and amiable character I ever knew. I was the first, and still

⁵The Bristol Circuit minute books are still in the possession of the First United Methodist Church of Germantown, and show Harvey's handwriting and detailed reports as recording secretary from 1816 to 1832. The Bristol Circuit was probably named for Bristol Township in Philadelphia County, and covered an extensive territory for many years, from Philadelphia up into the Pocono Mountains.

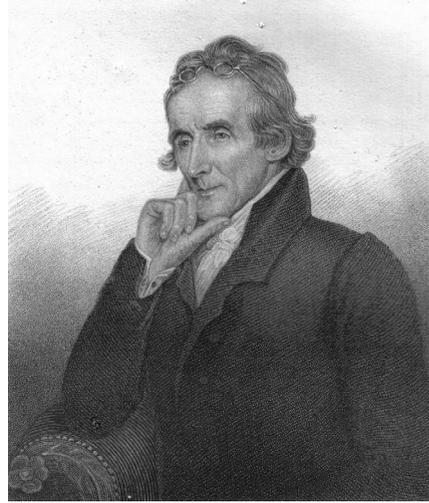
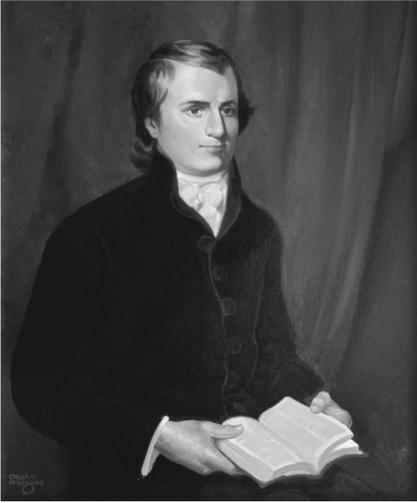
⁶The Chartered Fund, created in Philadelphia in 1797 to provide financial support for retired or disabled Methodist ministers and their families, was the first pension program for the denomination. See Francis Tees, et al, *Pioneering in Penn's Woods* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Conference Tract Society, 1937), 27-28.



Philadelphia's Walnut Street Jail, where America's penitentiary system was born, and Samuel Harvey ministered among the prisoners.

am, president of the Bank of Germantown, which commenced August, 1814. I am president of the board of trustees of the Academy in Germantown; was the first burgess of the Borough of Germantown under its present act of incorporation.

I was intimately acquainted with John Dickins, Thomas Haskins and Thomas F. Sargent, ministers, and well acquainted with Francis Asbury, William McKendree, Enoch George and Beverly Waugh, Bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church. I received in my family a visit from Richard Reese and John Hannah, of the British Conference. John Dickins was one of the most holy men I ever knew. It was he who originated the Book Fund of the Methodist Episcopal Church – commenced printing hymn books, the *Arminian Magazine*, and Minutes of Conferences all on his own funds. There was a fund raised by the contributions of the traveling preachers, perhaps one or two thousand dollars, which they placed with Mr. Dickins to establish the Book Fund; other capital I think it never had. The General Conference sanctioned it, and it progressed in Philadelphia. From thence it was removed to New York. I settled the accounts of it after Mr. Dickins' death and opened a new set of books for Mr. Ezekiel Cooper, his successor.



Left, John Dickins (1747-1798), a close friend of Samuel Harvey, and who founded Methodist publishing in America in the basement of St. George's, Philadelphia; right, Ezekiel Cooper (1763-1847) who first appointed Harvey as class leader, and later succeeded Dickins in the publishing business.

I am now in my 78th year of age, my natural strength and mental faculties but little abated. I was one of the persons of a meeting of the official men of the church who met Bishop Coke in Philadelphia on a visit he made to this country. He proposed a scheme which was suggested to him in New York, the effect of which would have paralyzed the Chartered Fund. The meeting rejected it. Francis Asbury was a tall man, stern countenance; Thomas Coke a short, thick-bodied man, florid countenance; William McKendree, Enoch George and Beverly Waugh were well sized and fine-looking men; John Dickins a small man, holy countenance; Richard Reese and John Hannah fine-looking, plain men, Reese of cheerful deportment, Hannah sedate. I myself middle sized, head white of age; yesterday was my birthday.

Sam'l Harvey
June 11, 1847