

A Letter of Rev. John Hagerty

Editor's note: Rev. John Hagerty (1747–1823) was a native of Prince George's County, Maryland. He was converted to Christ and Methodism through the preaching of John King, who had arrived in the colonies in 1769 as one of the “unofficial” Wesleyan missionaries from England. Hagerty became a full-time traveling preacher in 1779, and he was ordained an elder at the Christmas Conference of 1784. Hagerty was acquainted with all the early pioneers, including Francis Asbury and Thomas Rankin, as well as Martin Rodda, who was instrumental in Hagerty accepting the call to preach.

At the time he wrote this letter, he was serving as an “Elder” in charge of several circuits on the Eastern Shore. The 1786 minutes show his name over Caroline and Dorchester Circuits, though in this early stage of the development of the Presiding Eldership, there was evidently some fluidity, as Hagerty's letter mentions Talbot, Dover and Kent Circuits, which appear under the name of Richard Whatcoat. Later in 1787, Hagerty was reassigned to Philadelphia and Little York. Bishop Joshua Soule remembered Hagerty as “about the middle sized, straight and well-proportioned... [with a] fine retreating forehead and in profile [he] resembled the best prints we have of that admirable man, John Fletcher... [H]is preaching was clear, pointed and commanding. His voice was manly, and there was a fervor and unction in his manner, well-fitted to work a passage to the heart.”¹

The letter is addressed to Edward Dromgoole (1751-1835), a planter and merchant of Brunswick County, Virginia, and also a Methodist preacher. It is part of the Edward Dromgoole Papers #230, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

¹Quoted in William B. Sprague, *Annals of the American Pulpit Vol. VII: Methodist* (Robert Carter and Brothers, 1859), 67.

Dover Circuit
March 3, 1787

Very Dear Brother,

Grace, mercy and peace be multiplied to you and yours. Although I have been long silent, and have not wrote [sic] to you, I have not forgotten you, but as ever do feel a cordial affection for you and wish you all happiness in this and the world to come. Hope you keep your head above water and are going on your way to the kingdom, laying aside every weight and urging your way straight forward.

I have gone through many trials since I saw you, and have had many blessings. For the first part of this year, my trials were great, having lost my dear friend, George Stoyer. He died the 10th of June suddenly, and I verily believe is at rest in Abraham's bosom. But my inward trials were greater than my outward; but through mercy the cloud broke, and for these six months past have been very happy, and have the pleasure to inform you the work of the Lord prospers much in my round.

We have had a very great outpouring of Spirit in Talbot. Between five and six hundred have joined the Society.² The work begins to break out in Dorchester Circuit, last Sunday and Tuesday a week ago. I never saw such a work. I do not know how many were converted to God but I guess between 30 and 40. In Kent on the 2nd [quarterly] meeting the power of the Lord came down in a wonderful way among the people. The door is opening in Cecil County, blessed be God. We have comfortable times here among us.

I hope my dear wife is well, but I have not seen her these seven weeks, but expect to see her in a few days. I am disordered with a cold, but am resigned to the will of God. You'll excuse my scrawl, but I have but a short time [to] write. Accept of this a token of love and believe me to [be] your very affectionate friend and brother in Christ.

Jno Hagerty, Jr.

²The minutes show the membership of Talbot Circuit in 1786 at 632 white and 332 black members; a year later the numbers are 1077 whites and 524 blacks.