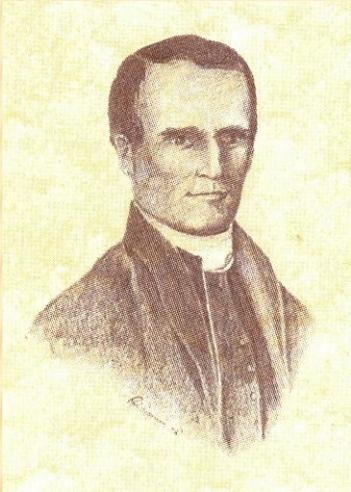


ORANGE SCOTT

Our Wesleyan History



A CHURCH IS BORN

By Lee Haines

Historian of The Wesleyan Church

The leader among the founders of what became the Wesleyan Methodist Church was Orange Scott. He was born in Vermont, February 13, 1800, the eldest of eight children. The family was very poor, moving frequently, and even children had to work. Orange was working full-time when he was twelve.

His childhood gave him few natural advantages. Formal schooling totaled only thirteen months, spread over more than fifteen years, from the time he was six until he was twenty-one. And he never had suitable clothes for church, so he never attended.

Even so, Orange was conscious that God's Spirit was dealing with his heart. In the summer of 1820 he determined to see God until he found Him. He began, as best he could, to read the Bible, to pray, and to attend church. In a camp meeting in August 1820, he experienced what he called "the great victory."

The new convert was a zealous one. He would work all day in the fields and then walk five or six miles each way to service at night. He joined the Methodists and within six months was a class leader.

A little over one year after his conversion, at the age of twenty-one, this semiliterate laborer was invited to serve as an assistant on a Methodist circuit.

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Scott later said that he had no books but the Bible and a hymnal, no clothing but what he wore or carried over his arm, no horse or carriage, and he was in debt thirty dollars. The circuit included 200 miles' travel around thirty different preaching points, and at first he had to do it on foot.

At the age of twenty-five, Scott was given a town pastorate. Here he found time to study. His grammar, arithmetic, and speller lay on the table with his Bible and commentary. The housekeeper reported that his light was never out until after midnight, and one or two nights a week he did not sleep at all as his hungry mind devoured book after book.

By age thirty he was appointed presiding elder, equivalent to district superintendent. By age thirty-two he was a delegate to General Conference. The unlettered lumberjack from Vermont had come a long way in twelve years!

A turning point came for Scott in 1833. Up to this time he had concentrated on evangelism, paying virtually no attention to public or social moral issues. In a conversation with one of his pastors, Scott became aware of the evil of American slavery and heard for the first time of abolitionism – a radical movement calling for the immediate freeing of the slaves. He studied the issues involved, became an ardent abolitionist, and began writing and speaking on the subject.

Orange Scott was embarrassed to learn that while John Wesley had been a bitter enemy of slavery, and early American Methodists had been outspoken in opposition to it, the church had now compromised on the matter. So he purchased one hundred subscriptions to the *Liberator*, an abolitionist newspaper, and sent them to Methodist pastors in new England for three months. Within six months he had swept the majority of the conferences into the abolitionist fold.

For the first time Scott found himself facing opposition within his own church. While serving as a delegate to the General Conference of 1836 at Cincinnati, he was accused of lying and was described as either a “reckless incendiary” or a “mental incompetent. He said he could hardly have been treated more severely

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if he had set fire to the city! Later that summer his bishop told him he must cease promoting abolition or cease being presiding elder. Scott refused to compromise on a matter of conscience and was returned to the pastorate at Lowell, Massachusetts.

Orange Scott became convinced that holy hearts should result in holy lives and that holy men should seek to bring an end to social evils such as slavery and intemperance. When his efforts to reform the existing church were rejected, he took the lead in establishing the Wesleyan Methodist Connection of America.

Four years later, Orange Scott retired in ill health to his farm in Vermont, seeking to restore his strength and to contemplate the future. Increasingly, he saw the need for the practical application of holiness, for the church's opposition to sin in every form. And he saw that this might necessitate a new church with a different form of government.

Finally, on November 8, 1842, Orange Scott and two other ministers withdrew from the Methodist Episcopal Church and began publication of *The True Wesleyan*. Beginning on May 31, 1843, Scott presided over a convention assembled at Utica, New York, to establish a new church – known at first as the Wesleyan Methodist Connection. In derision, the opponents of the Wesleyans nicknamed them “Scottites.” At the first General Conference in 1844, the denomination took over publication of *The True Wesleyan* and named Scott as the publisher, with offices in New York City.

Since the new denomination had no bishops or superintendents, there fell to the new publisher the duty of visiting the annual conferences. An especially noteworthy tour in 1845 covered the country from New England to Iowa. Scott wrote from Fountain City, Indiana, to tell how hundreds of people flocked in from sparsely populated frontier to catch a glimpse of the “king of radicals,” as he was called.

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When Scott returned to New York City, he wrote a series of articles entitled, in a paraphrase of John Wesley, *Advice to the People Called Wesleyans*. Outstanding in the series was the article on “holiness of heart.” He declared that inward and outward holiness must be the “adorning” of the church, the best defense of the Wesleyans.

By this time Orange Scott was in his mid-forties and should have been in the prime of life with at least two decades of fruitful ministry awaiting him. But such was not the case. His biographers admit that his greatest fault was his reckless expenditure of himself. His neglect of rest apparently brought on some periods of ill health even in his twenties. At forty another break came while he was still a Methodist.

When the new church was established, he simply redoubled his efforts in spite of the fact that he apparently had already contracted tuberculosis. Just as he had sacrificed sleep for learning, and position for conscience' sake, he now sacrificed health and property and life itself to establish a new church.

During the last few months before death came on July 31, 1847, Orange Scott simply wasted away. In spite of regret over his ministry being cut short, he was filled with optimism for the church. He spoke of its prosperous and growing congregations, its annual conferences, its publishing enterprise. And he left a last word of exhortation: “Let all our ministries and people keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of perfectness, and there is nothing to fear.”