

EDITORIAL

AFTER TWO HUNDRED YEARS

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Exactly two hundred years ago this past October, an uncommon man reached the shores of the New World. Nationhood was not yet: five years were to pass before the colonies were to declare their independence; seven more anguishing years of war were to come before that independence should be confirmed decisively.

The man, Francis Asbury, came to wage even more decisive battles—battles for the souls of men and women. Seemingly frail in body, and with little “formal” training for the special tasks before him, Asbury penetrated the wilderness that bounded the fringe of colonies along the Coast with a tenacious vigor matched only by the strength of the Message which he bore.

For over forty years, he traversed the Appalachians and the Alleghenies. Horse and saddle were his outward hallmarks. But within his warm heart there burned the distinctive emphases already articulated by the Wesleys—in words by John Wesley, in song by the gentler Minnesinger, Charles. By the miracle which only the Holy Spirit could work in his own heart, Francis Asbury made the message of the Wesleys to match the urgent and compelling needs of the American frontier.

To men and women faced by the harsh contingencies of frontier life, Asbury laid ceaseless emphasis upon the certainty of the Witness of the Spirit. To those who had sought and found peace with God in Christ, and who were confronted by the impurity and coarseness which accompanied the cutting edge of civilization, he offered purity of heart through the sanctifying ministry of that same Spirit who had borne testimony “with their spirits,” to sonship.

Reading the Chronicle of Francis Asbury’s itinerant ministry almost wearies the modern, comfort-loving reader. The establishing of

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Churches, the inauguration of Camp Meetings, the organizing and holding of Annual Conferences—these were Asbury's meat and drink. There followed in the wake of his ministry a quality of life—of sainthood if you will—which made Methodists to stand out amid the harshness and vulgarity of the times.

It was fitting that the Asbury institutions should give special recognition to the advent of Francis Asbury in America. Asbury College and Asbury Theological Seminary paused in their appointed instructional tasks for two days as on October 26–28, a surprisingly large group of visitors joined the Asbury community to hear distinguished speakers remind them of their legacy from the Preacher on Horseback—and from his black co-worker.

The Asbury Seminarian is privileged to bring to its readers the messages which thrilled those who shared in the Bicentennial Convocation. We commend to all who wish to look into the dynamics of the grand little Englishman, Francis Asbury, the keynote sermon by President Stanger of the Seminary, and the carefully drawn messages of the distinguished visitors who came to our campuses to remind us at Asbury of our heritage. This legacy was portrayed not as a museum piece, but as both living and adequate for our time.