

ANNUAL METHODIST CONFERENCE
Herald Citizen Newspaper, Cookeville,
Sunday, 21 August 2005

Area leaders and clergy prepare for the first Tennessee Annual Conference of the Methodist Church in Cookeville in the fall of 1913. Allison Ensor researched the historic session and wrote an article in the August 29, 1955 Herald while attending Tennessee Tech. The 1955 photo caption says the photo was taken at “the old Freeze place, now the Stacy Wilhite home on Dixie Avenue. Pictured, from left, are Jere Whitson, Oscar King Holladay, L.M. Bullington, John Chilcutt, Rev. W. W. Baxter, Willie Holladay, Rev. W. M. McClearn, an unidentified man, and J. N. Cox. The conference was held in the Methodist Church at Cookeville, October 8-13, 1913. The 1955 conference was held on Labor Day weekend, Thursday to Sunday and was the subject of Allison’s front page story.



TENNESSEE METHODIST CONFERENCE HELD HERE THIS WEEK RECALLS
SESSION HELD HERE IN 1913: By Allison Ensor, Jr., Putnam County Herald
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Editor’s Note: (Four members of the writer’s family attended the 1913 conference here, his grandfather, the late Rev. Dow Ensor, and two great uncles, Rev. John and Rev. Simon Ensor. A fourth member of his family is also a member of the conference, the Rev. Wendell Ensor.)

At 9 a.m. Thursday morning, September 1, 1955, Bishop Roy H. Short will open the seventeenth session of the Tennessee Annual Conference of the Methodist Church, the 154th session of Methodism in Tennessee in the First Methodist Church of Cookeville. This is the second time that the Conference has met here since its first meeting at Bethel Academy, Kentucky, October 5-7, 1800. Sessions have been held each year since that time except in 1863, and 1864, when the Civil War prevented the holding of sessions. The first session of the annual conference of the Methodist Church was held in Nashville, October 12-16, 1939, after the union of The Methodist Episcopal Church, The M. e. Church, South, and The Methodist Protestant Church.

The 112th session of the Conference (including sessions of the Western Conference) was held at Cookeville, October 8-13, 1913. Since some forty-two years have passed since that time, this writer felt that a number of readers might be interested in some of the details of that conference.

The decision to hold the conference at Cookeville was made at the session held at McKendree Methodist Church in Nashville, October 9-14, 1912. Invitations for the next session were extended by Pulaski, Shelbyville, and Cookeville. Pulaski had already been host to the conference six times, and Shelbyville had entertained it five times, but Cookeville had never had the honor. Rev. John H. Nichols, great-uncle of Rev. Alex Nichols of Cookeville, who graduated from Tech last spring and who will enter Southern Methodist University this fall, extended the invitation to the conference to come to Cookeville. In his speech, Rev. Nichols stated that the entire town, regardless of denomination, would join in entertaining the conference. He said that his was not just a formal invitation; the people really wanted to entertain the conference. In conclusion Nichols said that he knew the people here, for he was from this section, and had "killed snakes all over Putnam County."

Cookeville Favored:

Some of the conference delegates raised a question as to whether Cookeville would be able to entertain so great a crowd of visitors. O.K. Holladay and other lay delegates from this section then pressed the invitation with the assurance that everyone would be well taken care of here. A vote was taken, and a majority of the delegates were in favor of Cookeville. Rev. J. J. Stowe, Presiding Elder of the Franklin District, moved that the Cookeville invitation be accepted, and the motion was unanimously adopted.

In 1913 the Cookeville Methodist Church was a station in the Lebanon District, of which Rev. J. T. Blackwood was Presiding Elder. (This title was changed to District Superintendent in 1939.) The Cookeville District was not established until 1920. The pastor here in 1913 was Rev. W. M. McVClaren. The church had 318 members at that time, as compared with 1122 now. The church building in which the Conference met was the same as it was when torn down in 1950 to make way for the present structure, except that it had no basement and the pipe organ had not yet been installed.

A great deal of preparation was required for the delegates, who came from all parts of the Conference, most of them coming by railroad. They were assigned to the homes of various townspeople, who gave them their meals and lodging for the night. To show its appreciation for all that was done for it, the Conference voted on October 11 resolutions expressing appreciation for the "courtesy and hospitality of the people of Cookeville, for their lavish entertainment, and to the railroads and daily papers for their kindness."

The long-awaited day came on October 8, 1913 at 8:30 a.m. Bishop, Collins Denny of Richmond, Virginia, later to be known as one of the leading opponents of church unification, presided. The session began with the singing of the hymn, "Come Hold Spirit Heavenly Dove." The Bishop offered a prayer which was followed by his reading and commenting on Ephesians 3:14-21. The roll was called, and 158 preachers answered to their names. Rev. George L. Beale of Springfield, secretary for twenty-five conferences, was elected secretary. His assistants were Rev. A. M. Trawick and Rev. Paul B. Kern, who later became a bishop and presided over fourteen sessions of the Tennessee Conference. Rev. J. F. Tinnon was elected railroad secretary, and Mrs. James M. Vaden was chosen statistical secretary.

One of the first items of business was the adoption of a paper approving the action of the College of Bishops in refusing to accept a million-dollar gift by Andrew Carnegie to the medical department of Vanderbilt University. The bishops had felt that the conditions for accepting the gift were such that it could not be done with honor.

A resolution was made that sermons should be delivered each afternoon and night during the conference session. This was one of the distinguishing features of the Cookeville conference. On the first day, Rev. J. Allison Molloy of Mt. Pleasant and Rev. W. T. Haggard of Columbia spoke at the Methodist church, which Rev. A. J. Morgan of Winchester preached at the U. S. A. Presbyterian church.

On the second day, Thursday, Bishop E. E. Hoss, who had presided over the Tennessee Conference for three years (1907-1909), visited the Conference. He brought his personal greetings and those of the General Board of Education, which he represented. In the afternoon, Bishop Hoss spoke at the church. He delivered a sermon so impressive that when, after he had been preaching for over an hour, he referred to the length of his sermon, his audience responded with emotion, "Go on, go on, go on." That night Dr. E. B. Chappell, editor and ex officio chairman of the General Sunday School Board, spoke at the Methodist church while Rev. W. J. Collier of Dickson spoke at the Church of Christ.

One of the items of business of the third day, Friday, October 10, was consideration of the proposal to change the name of the church from The Methodist Episcopal Church, South to The Methodist Episcopal Church in America. The proposal was defeated 157-46. Other conferences also disapproved, and the name remained unchanged until 1939, when the three Methodist churches merged to form The Methodist Church.

Holladay Named Delegate:

Election of delegates to the General Conference, to be held in Oklahoma City in May, 1914, was begun on the third day. After a number of ballots, some taken on succeeding days, these were elected: Clerical delegates: E. B. Chappell, W. B. Taylor, G. A. Morgan, J. J. Stowe, and W. F. Tillett. Lay delegates: O. K. Holladay, P. D. Maddin, R. M. Rowell, J. G. Pickering, and A. A. Patterson.

Temperance Meeting:

In the afternoon there was a temperance mass meeting, which was addressed by Senator, W. R. Webb of Bell Buckle. That night Rev. J. W. Cherry of Fayetteville preached in the Methodist church, and Rev. Paul B. Kern of Murfreesboro spoke at the U. S. A. Presbyterian Church.

The fourth day, October 11, was marked by the reports of numerous committees. The preachers at the Methodist church for this day were Rev. T. B. Fisher of Hendersonville, and Dr. W. W. Pinson, general secretary of the General Board of Missions, who addressed the missionary anniversary meeting.

Fill Local Pulpits:

Conference ministers filled a number of pulpits in Cookeville on Sunday morning, October 12. Bishop Denny preached to a great crowd in the Methodist Church. In the afternoon a memorial service was held for the six ministers who had died during the previous year. This service is now held on Thursday morning, Sunday afternoon brings the reading of the appointments for next year and the end of the conference under the present schedule.

In 1913, however, conferences ended on Monday. On Monday morning, October 13, Bishop Denny ordained ten preachers as deacons and ten as elders. Various reports were made, and the appointments for next year were read in the afternoon. Rev. J. F. Tinnon was assigned to Cookeville. The conference adjourned and Bishop Denny pronounced the benediction. Thus ended the first Tennessee Conference session to be held in Cookeville. Of it Rev. Cullen T. Carter said, "Everything conspired to make this a great session." We sincerely hope that the same statement may be made about the second Cookeville conference.

(Material for this article was obtained from the 1913 Journal of the Tennessee Conference, Cullen T. Carter's History of the Tennessee Conference, G. B. McGee's "Cookeville Pastor's" in The Cookeville Methodist, March, 1951 and from the personal recollections of Mrs. Walter Carlen and Mrs. Robert Greenwood.

Roll: Cookeville (20) Putnam County Herald, sec. 2 p. 3:

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