

"Methodists Honor Robert Strawbridge in 1934"
Carroll County Times article for 10 October 1999
By Jay A. Graybeal

The Sesquicentennial of American Methodism in October 1934 attracted considerable local interest. The roots of the church can be traced to the Sam's Creek area of Carroll County and the preaching of Robert Strawbridge. A description of the earliest years of the church appeared in the October 5 issue of this newspaper:

"Eleven Million Methodists To Honor Name of Robert Strawbridge, the Founder of Methodism in America
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FIRST METHODIST CHURCH AT SAM'S CREEK IN THIS COUNTY

The one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the formation of the Methodist Episcopal Church will be celebrated in Baltimore, Wednesday, October 10 to Sunday, October 14 inclusive.

The Christian Conference of 1784 and the Lovely Lane Meeting House, Baltimore, was the time and place for this most important epoch in the history of American Methodism. But we must go twenty-four years beyond that date to the very beginning of Methodism for our story which is laid in the Sam's Creek neighborhood of Carroll county (then Frederick county), and distant only a few miles from Westminster. There came into that sparsely settled country in 1760 Robert Strawbridge, late of Drumsnaugh, Leitrim, Ireland. Immediately upon completion of his log home and the establishing of his family therein, he opened its doors for preaching and his labors as a minister of the gospel began. It was in this house that the first class and first society of Methodism was organized.

Finding his home inadequate for public worship he built in 1764 the first Methodist Church in America. It was just at this time an Englishman, William Winchester, had laid out the town of Winchester (now Westminster). The structure known as the "log Meeting House" was twenty-four by twenty-four and one quarter feet. The building was of two story height, had one door and ten windows. A floor was never laid nor was there a stove for comfort in the colder months.

Among the first converts to the faith was John Evans, a great-great-grandfather of Mrs. Annie Goodwin, this city, and the late George W. Albaugh. Those in the first class of Methodism were John Evans, his wife Eleanor, Job Evans, his wife, Mary Evans, Nancy Murphy and a Mrs. Hay. Numbered in the first society were John Evans, Andrew Poulson, William Durbin, John England, William Snader, Richard Smith, Philip Nicodemus, Jacob Cassell, Alexander Warfield and others. Many of these names are prominent in the Sam's Creek and Pipe Creek neighborhoods today as well as in Methodism.

Records show that Jacob Cassell was a member of the Pipe Creek Reformed congregation (now Krider's Reformed Church, Westminster) but later united with the Strawbridge Society. It will be found in the records that he did not unite with the Methodist Society until after 1771.

The old homes of Robert Strawbridge, the Evans, Warfield, Cassell, Poulson, and Maynard families are still standing and will on the coming occasion attract thousands of visitors. It was at the home of Andrew Poulson, near Medford, that the second class was formed.

The original meeting house gave way to Bethel Chapel, built in 1821 about a mile distant. It was rebuilt in 1860 near the Warfield house. On the site of Poulson's chapel was built a second chapel in 1783. It was rebuilt of stone in 1800 and therefore took the name of Stone Chapel. This church is still standing and is one of the shrines of Methodism. This chapel in its day had figured largely in the establishment and perpetuation of the church. The church at new Windsor was the third in line.

The first Methodist baptism was that of Henry Maynard (Maignard) in 1762 by Strawbridge at the Maynard home along the creek.

Bishop Asbury was a frequent visitor to this neighborhood and on each occasion would preach to large crowds. He visited with Alexander Warfield on Sam's Creek and Henry Willis on Pipe Creek. It was at the latter home that he held conference. In his journal will be found 'This settlement of Pipe Creek is the richest in the state; here Mr. Strawbridge formed the first society in Maryland and America'."

The Evans home is now in the hands of the Methodist Historical Society. It was built in 1764 about three and one half miles from the "old log meeting house." It was built of unhewn logs and rafters and is one and a half stories high with shed roof. It became a regular preaching appointments in 1768 and continued as such for forty-one years. Bishop Asbury as well as sixty-eight itinerants preached in this house. One hundred years after it became a place of worship the old Strawbridge pulpit was removed to Baltimore by the Methodist Historical Society. For a century the Evans family occupied the home. Samuel Evans, a grandson, followed as owner. Francina, a daughter of Samuel Evans, married George Peter Albaugh. Of that marriage there were two children, Annie Albaugh and George Washington Albaugh. Mr. Albaugh some years ago purchased the property and deeded it to the society in memory of his great-great-grandfather, the first convert to Methodism.

It is true that the Methodist Episcopal Church had its beginning in Baltimore but all Methodism in America must face that little area along Sam's Creek and Pipe Creek for [its] cradle of the faith. Carroll county is rich in the early history of this Great Church."

The Sesquicentennial observance provided an opportunity for local residents and visitors to rediscover the historic sites related to the founding of Methodism in America. Although the 1930s are best remembered for the Great Depression, the decade was especially rich in historical celebration. In addition to the 1934 Methodist observance, local residents participated in the Washington Bicentennial (1932); Maryland Tricentennial (1934) and the Carroll County Centennial (1937). These celebrations fostered an interest in local history and contributed to the founding of the Historical Society of Carroll County in 1939.

Photo caption: This lithographic image of the 1764 Strawbridge Church, after a painting by T. C. Ruckle, appeared in an 1866 history of the Methodist Church. Historical Society of Carroll County Collection.