THE SMITHFIELD STREET METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH, PITTSBURGH, PENNA.

The first introduction of Methodism into Western Pennsylvania, of which we have any knowledge, was in 1772. Reason Pumphreys, a convert of Robert Strawbridge, came across the mountains from Anne Arundel County, Maryland, and settled at the head of Chartiers Creek, near the Indian village of Catfish, and where Washington now stands, he had a grant of thousand acres, which he called "Reason's Choice." He was a man of means, and with him were his wife, eight sons, seven servants, and four slaves. A number of his Maryland neighbors accompanied him, among them Eli Schle, a young man, another convert of Strawbridge. Whether he had authority from the church to do so we know not, but when the travellers halted on their journey he would preach to them and to any settlers that might be near their camping places. Settling in the new place he continued to preach to the settlers, going up the Monongahela valley, across to the home of Thomas Lackey on Ten Mile Creek, and very possibly coming down to the village called Pittsburgh, at the forks of the Monongahela and Allegheny rivers. He returned to Maryland in 1776 and shortly afterward died. Sometime between 1778 and 1780, Robert Wooster, an Englishman by birth and an itinerant minister, settled near Uniontown, by the advice of Bishop Asbury, and preached in various parts of western Pennsylvania. In 1784, the year of the organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Redstone Circuit appears among the appointments of the Church, with John Cooper and Samuel Breeze as preachers.

At the Conference held in Uniontown in 1788, the Pittsburgh Circuit was formed, with Charles Conoway as preacher in charge. The territory entering into it was taken from the Ohio Circuit in the west and Redstone Circuit in the south. Pittsburgh then was a small place, having in 1786, according to Judge Brackenridge, about one hundred houses. The religious work could not have been very great, as
Arthur Lee, one of the Virginia Lees, writing in 1784, said, "There are in the town four attorneys, two doctors, and not a priest of any persuasion, church, or chapel." This must have been an exaggerated statement, as the German Evangelical Church, located at the corner of Smithfield Street and Sixth Avenue, was organized in 1782, and the records of the Redstone Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church show a Rev. Mr. Smith being sent to preach in Pittsburgh on the fourth Sunday in August, 1784. Rev. Wilson Lee, of the Redstone Circuit, preached in a tavern on Water Street, near Ferry, in 1785. On September 29, 1787, the legislature incorporated the "Presbyterian Congregation of the town of Pittsburgh." When Mr. Conoway came to Pittsburgh this congregation had a "church of square timbers and moderate dimensions," located on or near the site of the present First Presbyterian Church, and a pastor, the Rev. Samuel Barr. There was no Methodist society organized at this time, possibly no Methodist in the town, even in name. Where Mr. Conoway preached we have no record, nor at the end of the year were any members reported to Conference. During this first year of Mr. Conoway's pastorate, Bishop Asbury for the first time visited Pittsburgh, coming on Saturday, July 19th, 1789. He records, "I preached in the evening to a serious audience. This is the day of small things. What can we hope? Yet what can we fear!" Though no members were reported, the outlook must have been more hopeful, and Mr. Conoway was returned for another year, with Pemberton Smith as assistant, or, in Methodist parlance, junior preacher. At the end of this year ninety-seven members were reported. The next year, 1790, Mr. Conoway was made presiding elder, or, as now designated, district superintendent of a district, but the following year was again in charge of the circuit, and in the succeeding year was placed again on the district. Different preachers were appointed in following years, among them Daniel Hitt and Valentine Cook, who afterwards were very prominent in the Methodist Episcopal Church.

The real force of Methodism as an organized body began in 1796, for in that year, John Wrenshall came to
Pittsburgh to engage in the mercantile business, and became one of the most prominent business men of the town, his store being located at what now is the corner of Market Street and Fourth Avenue. He was an Englishman by birth, a man of culture and piety, and held a license as a local preacher. Subsequently he was ordained by Bishop Asbury, across the border line of Ohio, the first Methodist ordination to take place in that state. One of his daughters married Judge Dent and was the mother of Julia Dent, the wife of Gen. U. S. Grant. It seems at this time there were no regular religious services in the town, and the Presbyterians were without a pastor, or supplies from 1795 to 1799. Dr. F. S. DeHass writes, "Soon after his (Wrenshall's) arrival as there was no minister or preaching of any kind in the place, he commenced holding services in an old deserted log church belonging to the Presbyterians, which stood on Wood Street, near Sixth Avenue, where Dr. Herron's church was afterward erected. His first sermon was from the text, "Worship God," and appeared to be greatly enjoyed by all in attendance, many of whom were officers and soldiers from the garrison. The congregations continued to increase, but after a few Sabbaths a padlock was placed upon the door, and a notice served upon Mr. Wrenshall that he could not have use of the building any longer. In this emergency, Mr. Peter Shiras who lived at the Point and owned the site of Fort Pitt, kindly offered a room in the barracks of the old fort, which was gladly accepted. Thus Fort Pitt which cost Great Britain over $250,000 became the first regular place for Methodist preaching in Pittsburgh. The society consisting at first of John Wrenshall, wife and daughter, Peter Shiras and wife, Robert McElhaney and wife, Mrs. Ward, Mrs. Chess, and James Kerr, continued their meetings here for seven years, when Mr. Shiras in 1802 sold the Fort to Gen. James O'Hara and returned to his former home in New Jersey. The removal of Mr. Shiras, their class leader, was a great loss to the church in the wilderness, but shortly after, in the summer of 1803, Thomas Cooper, Sr., and his family, all Methodists, settled in Pittsburgh, and proved a great acquisition to the little flock now without a fold."
Mr. Cooper took the place of Mr. Shiras as class leader, and the reorganized band began to increase. Services were held in a one story frame building or kitchen back of Mr. Wrenshall’s store on Fourth and Market Streets. But it was too inconvenient and contracted. Other places were tried but with the same results, and in 1806 Sabbath preaching was changed from Pittsburgh to McKeesport. In October 1807, Nathaniel Holmes and Edward Heazelton came from Ireland and located in Pittsburgh, and united with the little band. They were men of ability and piety and had much to do with the subsequent growth of the church. Mr. Holmes was the founder of the N. Holmes banking house, and Mr. Heazelton became prominent in business affairs.

Thomas Cooper, Jr., lived in a large stone dwelling on Smithfield and Water Streets, opposite to where the Monongahela House is now located. He offered a room in his house for services and, in 1808, Sabbath preaching was resumed in Pittsburgh, half the time by the regular ministers, and half the time by local preachers. Bishop Asbury visiting the town in 1803, writes under date of August 27, “In the Court House I spoke on Sabbath day to about four-hundred people. I would have preached again but the Episcopalians occupied the house. It is time we have had a house of our own.” It was seven years after the Bishop wrote before a house was possessed. In 1810 a lot was purchased from Thomas Cooper on Front Street, now First Avenue at a cost of $300. It was opposite the lower end of the present Monongahela House, and had a frontage of 30 feet on Front Street, and ran back 80, parallel with Smithfield Street. The deed is dated June 21, 1810, and conveys the property to John Wrenshall, Robert McElhenney, Edward Hazelton, John Phillips, R. McElhenny, Jr., Nathaniel Holmes and Thomas Cooper, Jr., Trustees of the Methodist Episcopal Church of Pittsburgh. On this lot was erected a plain brick building, 30 by 40 feet. The building must have been commenced upon the obtaining of the ground, as Bishop Asbury records in his journal of August 26, 1810, “Preached on the foundation of the new chapel to about five hundred souls. I spoke again at five o’clock to about twice as many. The society here is lively and increasing in
numbers." The preachers then were William Knox and Joseph Lanston. Mr. Knox was the grand father of the late Senator Philander C. Knox. At this time the Pittsburgh Circuit reported 524 members, how many of whom were located in Pittsburgh proper we cannot say. The circuit was divided in 1811, and as newly constituted had 167 members. When this building was abandoned it was used for a time by the colored people. The congregation grew and in 1817 the membership had reached 280, and the church records show fifteen different classes. The need of a more commodious building was felt. At the Conference session in 1817, Andrew Hemphill was appointed to the pastorate, and immediate steps were taken to supply the need. Three lots on the corner of Smithfield and Seventh Streets were purchased from George Wiltenberger. The deed bears date of May 30, 1817, and the trustees were the same mentioned in the deed for the Front Street property. It was in the nature of a land lease, the trustees paying Mr. Miltenberger $300 annually, he agreeing to give them a deed in fee simple when they pay him $5,000. This was done seven years later, and the deed for the property is dated September 28, 1824, and is conveyed to Charles Avery, Nathaniel Holmes, John Phillips, Charles Craig, Samuel K. Page and James Verner as trustees. The building was commenced in 1817 and completed in 1818. It was a brick structure, large for that time, and had a gallery running around the rear and two sides of the building. The society increased in numbers, and under the pastorate of the Rev. Samuel Davis an extensive revival prevailed, bringing the membership to 597. Thomas Kennedy was appointed to the circuit in 1820, and this was the last time that Pittsburgh was associated with other churches in a circuit, henceforward it was a station. In 1821 John Baer was appointed pastor having associated with him Thomas J. Dorsey. Mr. Baer preached the first sermon in the new church, and in 1848, when the building was abandoned to make way for the present structure, he was sent for and preached the last sermon in the building.

When Conference boundaries were formed Pittsburgh was within the bounds of the Baltimore Conference, until
the formation of the Pittsburgh Conference, the first session of which was held in the new church, September 15-21, 1825. In the troubles that took place in the Methodist Episcopal Church, that led to the formation of the Methodist Protestant Church Pittsburgh was one of the centers of the strife. It was a revolt against the economy of the Church, particularly in regard to episcopal government, and the absence of lay representation. The Church was incorporated March 5, 1828. The corporate name was "The Methodist Church of Pittsburgh." The Rev. George Brown, who was one of the leaders in the new movement, claimed that "Episcopal" was left out because of the reform feeling prevalent in the congregation. Rev. Robert Hopkins, who presided at the congregational meeting at which the charter was adopted, said that serious objection was made to the omission of the word "Episcopal," but Charles Avery claimed that the legislature would not grant a charter with the word Episcopal in it as it was sectarian, and that several churches that had been incorporated had omitted the word for that reason. This statement was afterward found to be incorrect. It was made the basis of a charge against Mr. Avery by Nathaniel Holmes, but, upon the presentation of the charges, Mr. Avery notified the pastor that he was no longer a member of the Methodist Episcopal Church. The feeling grew very bitter and the Rev. George Brown was called to be the pastor of the "Reformers." For a time both elements occupied the Smithfield Street Church, holding services at different hours, but the new element desired full possession, and took possession and debarred the other pastors from the pulpit at the time allotted to them. The pastors then were the Revs. Z. H. Coston and Homer J. Clarke, they withdrew and, followed by those who were loyal to the church, marched down to the building on Front Street where Mr. Clarke preached. It was carried into the courts, and finally to the Supreme Court, and a new trial was ordered, but with the hope it would be amicably settled. This was followed, and in August 1833 a division was made, the Smithfield property being returned to the Methodist Episcopal Church, and the burying ground located where the Pennsylvania Station now stands, and $2,000 were given to the Methodist Protest-
The Smithfield Methodist Episcopal Church

Other church organizations were being formed in Alleghenytown, Birmingham, on Liberty Street, and Bayardstown, and for several years they constituted a circuit, being served by all the preachers. In 1835 they were separated and the appointments for that year were, Smithfield Street, Charles Cooke, Liberty Street, Matthew Simpson, Birmingham, Gideon D. Kinnear.

In the passing years the growth of the Smithfield Street congregation demanded a larger and better building. During the pastorate of Dr. William Cox, one morning in a sermon he made mention of the need. The next evening at a meeting of the Official Board, Mr. William Birmingham, said he felt they needed a new church building, and that he would give $1,000 toward it. It is said that up to that date that was the largest subscription ever made in Pittsburgh, by an individual toward the building of a church. With this as an incentive the project was carried forward. As already stated the last sermon in the old building was preached by the Rev. John Baer, which occurred on the last Sabbath in May, 1848. On Christmas Day, 1848, the new building was dedicated, the sermon being preached by Bishop L. L. Hamline. Two incidents connected with the coming into the new church show the difference of views then and now. Up to that time there had been no instrumental music used in any church in the bounds of the Pittsburgh Conference. The chorister, Mr. Samuel McKinley, proposed to use in connection with the music on the day of dedication, a bass viol and, possibly, another instrument. It created such a contention that it was abandoned. In all Methodist churches, outside of New England, the men and women sat apart in time of worship. The trustees recommended family sittings, which created a great stir, even the Bishop desiring the action be rescinded, but the pastor favored it and the proposition was carried out.

Now after three quarters of a century of use, and the great changes in the down town section of Pittsburgh, it is felt that a new church building, equipped to meet present conditions should be built, and under the leadership of Dr. Daniel L. Marsh, Superintendent of the Pittsburgh Church Union, and pastor of the church, the plans have been pre-
pared and arrangements are being made for the building. It is not definitely decided as to size, but most likely it will be a twenty story structure. The basement will be used for a thoroughly equipped gymnasium. The first floor will be rented for business purposes, the Methodist Book Concern occupying a portion of it. The second floor, and the equivalent of the floor above it will be used for the church auditorium. Dr. Marsh has a scheme to make it a memorial room by placing in a bronze frieze, the names suggested by any one contributing twenty-five dollars toward the building. The next floor above the auditorium will be used for the educational and recreational work of the church. The next floor will be used for the headquarters of various Methodist agencies and organizations, including the offices of the Bishop, the Centenary work, the *Pittsburgh Christian Advocate* and the Church Union, and the chapel to be used for the Preachers' Meetings. The other floors will be rented producing an income for the maintenance of the building. The growth of the Methodist Episcopal Church in this section from the humble beginnings herein narrated is seen in the current reports of the Pittsburgh District of the Pittsburgh Conference. In it there are 45 congregations with a membership of 25,891, and a Sunday School enrollment of 25,209, and a church property valued at $3,585,496, and paying for ministerial support $171,344, while in the Conference there are appointments with a membership of 116,606 and a church property valued at $10,919,606.

In the long list of ministers that filled the pulpit of the Smithfield Street Church, first as the only congregation in the city, then as the Smithfield Street organization, there have been some of the most distinguished ministers of the Church. In the early days the authorities changed the pastors every year, then the limit was made two years, then later it was extended to three, and again to five, and in 1900 the limit was entirely removed. Among them were seven who became Bishops, Robert R. Roberts; Henry B. Bascom, who was the first president of Madison College, Uniontown, the third collegiate institution under the control of the Methodist Episcopal Church, a man of great eloquence, who served as chaplain to Congress, who, in the division on the
slavery question in 1844, went with the southern section and was elected bishop; Matthew Simpson, the friend of Abraham Lincoln, whose lecture on "Our Country" and addresses in this country and abroad during the time of the Civil War, did much to maintain the cause of the Union; Charles W. Smith, for twenty-four years editor of the *Pittsburgh Christian Advocate*, who then was elected Bishop, serving six years, until his death; Naptali Luccock, whose Episcopal life was brief; dying three years after he was consecrated to that office; Charles Bayard Mitchell, at the head of the St. Paul area, now making a tour around the world; Charles Edward Locke in charge of the work in the Philippine Islands. Others are, Martin Ruter, the first Methodist minister in this country to receive the degree of Doctor of Divinity, and the first president of Allegheny College, Meadville; Asa Shinn, a profound thinker, author of several theological works, and one of the founders of the Methodist Protestant Church; Charles Elliott, at various times editor of the *Pittsburgh*, the *Western* and the *Central Christian Advocate*; William Hunter, editor, professor, poet; and numerous others which space will not permit to enumerate. In two instances father and son have both served as pastors, George S. Holmes in 1833, and Charles A. Holmes 1864-66, Wesley Smith in 1836, and his son Charles W. Smith, 1876-1878. Today Dr. Marsh and his associate, the Rev. W. L. Hogg, are measuring up to the high standard of their predecessors.

GRAFTON E. REYNOLDS.