

**Reisterstown United Methodist Church  
Church Records, United Methodist, Baltimore Annual  
Conference  
1985**

**Church History**

**MdHR D 2210-1-1  
M 7265-1**

Reisterstown United Methodist Church  
Town of Reisterstown  
County of Baltimore  
State of Maryland

In order to fully appreciate the part that the Reisterstown United Methodist Church (Asbury Chapel and Wesley Chapel) has played in our community, it is important that we know a little of the history of Reisters Town. The founding of our town antedated by a number of years the signing of the Declaration of Independence, for it was on March 2, 1758 that John Reister secured from the Calvert family a grant of twenty acres of land, lying immediately south of the present Cockeysmill Road, and shortly thereafter came with his family to what is now Reisterstown. John Reister was born in Germany, and we find that the majority of persons residing in this area during this time were from either Germany or England.

It is related that John Reister originally considered buying land in what is now the Howard Park section of Baltimore. After due consideration, he obtained the above mentioned twenty acres which he named "Reister's Desire," and thus became one of the very first residents of this area (although it is known that Indians lived within a twenty mile radius.) At first he raised corn and tobacco, later he operated a tavern. All but one of his six children built homes on his land, and so it followed that a good number of the earliest families in our town were Reisters or relatives of that family -- and as the area flourished, it became known as "Reister's Town." Besides raising corn and tobacco, some of the first settlers found that the fur pelts, from the many beavers in the locale, brought in a fine income.

One of the first landmarks of the locality was a pack horse trail that ran from Baltimore City to Carlisle, and an Indian trail that wound from Patapsco Falls, following roughly the present Cockeysmill Road and went winding on to Chestnut Ridge. Between 1793 and 1808, this pack horse road was widened and stoned for the use of wagons, the first work being done by convicts. Later, private individuals (who paid \$2000 for the road) finished the work and then dotted it with toll houses.

The first homes were made of logs -- some of these still stand but are covered with brick or shingles or have been roughcoated. Families occupying the first log homes were the Reisters, Beckleys, Choates, Bowers, Forneys, Dixons, Duckers, Moales and Worthingtons.

And so it was in times such as these that Methodism was introduced into Reister's Town .. when a town was just beginning, when houses were made of logs and were lighted with oil lamps, when transportation was by horse, carriage or wagon, and when the unpaved roads were practically impassable during the winter months .. and when prayer meetings were a very important part of the lives of the towns-people.

On December 24, 1784, the organizing Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church of Lovely Lane, Baltimore, sent our seventy itinerants and two missionaries to preach the gospel. They followed the trails of the early settlers; thus the Circuit Rider began his career as evangelist, pastor, organizer, builder. Sometimes he was also a schoolmaster, founder of schools and colleges. Usually a single man, living on a salary of \$64 a year, he traveled on horseback and preached in homes (most of the log cabin type), at camp meetings, and in small one-room chapels. Reister's Town became one of the regular monthly stops for these riders, and we find that stops were also made at Owings Mills, West Point (1½ miles west of present Main Street, north side of Cockeysmill Road), Deer Park, Freedom, Oakland, and Stoney Ridge. When weather did not permit the Circuit Rider to reach his destination, the local lay leaders took over the worship service.

Some years after Bishop Francis Asbury preached his first sermon in Reister's Town, "Asbury Chapel" (a log cabin, one room) was erected (1791) for the use of the Methodists, and ground behind the Chapel was designated for a burial ground. The Chapel was located on what is now the easternmost line of our cemetery. A brick from the Methodists in England was used for the cornerstone.

A second church was built in 1830, directly in front of the the cabin site, with the brick from England serving as a cornerstone for that building also. Henry Elicer and John H. Baker were two of the pastors. (The brick used as the cornerstone is on display in the Narthex of the 1974 building.)

In 1833 colored slaves requested and received permission to use Asbury Chapel. A class of twenty-seven members met for many years in the Chapel, and later built their own Church, known as the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church of Baltimore County, on Bond Avenue, not too far from Asbury. The Bi-Centennial Celebration by its members (in 1980), many of whom are descendents of the original class members, was evidence of their on-going faith and work for their Lord. The land on which the Church (now called St. Luke's United Methodist Church) was built was given by George Rephart, and this included a parcel to be used for a cemetery also.

A third church, a well built brick structure started in 1868, served the Methodist congregation from January 1870 to 1974. Set back from the Main Street (#246), it is said that the edifice was patterned after a "foundry" in London (which served as the headquarters of English Methodism, starting in 1739.) Churchgoers entered the second floor church by climbing steps constructed on a steep bank of earth. And because of this, Asbury Church was often referred to as the "Old North Side Church." In order to have a proper entrance (on the first floor, front) to the Lecture and Audience Room, the bank was removed about 1906.

Our former Church Parsonage (406 Main Street) was given to Asbury Chapel by John Sumwalt (lay leader) in 1845 and was first occupied in that year by Reverend William Hanks. This Parsonage was used for our ministers for approximately 130 years.

The question of Slavery and State Rights leading to the Civil War entered the Church and, in 1845, the Methodist Episcopal Church-South was organized on a national basis. A defection from the Methodist Episcopal Church in Reisterstown took place in connection with this movement, and about 100 members set up the ME Church-South (Wesley Chapel) in 1866. This congregation worshipped in the Grace Building (on the east and opposite side of street from Asbury.) On May 10, 1939, at Kansas City, Missouri, the three principal branches of the Methodist Church were united under the name of Methodist Church, and the local congregations were combined under one denominational name, Reisterstown Methodist Church, and it was determined that the people would now use the Asbury property (because of the possible availability of land for future expansion.) This union was accomplished in May 1941 under the leadership of District Superintendent Reverend Robert L. Wood, and pastors of the Grace and Asbury Churches, Reverends Ernest R. Harrison and Charles D. Taylor, respectively.

Highlights of the continuing expansion program to accommodate a growing congregation:

- 1950 Addition to west side of basic 1868 building
- 1955 Purchase of Samuel Yingling home (north of church) to be used as Annex. (Having served its purpose as church office and classrooms, Annex was dismantled in 1968.)
- 1961 Purchase of portion of Mediary land, for parking lot
- 1965 Completion of Asbury Fellowship Hall, Sunday School rooms, modern kitchen. (Ladies of Church, well-known for their fine foods, held first oyster supper in 1892 - 25¢ per adult, in a public hall, and later in Adam Debaugh's warehouse.)
- 1966 Purchased Bruehl property (home and former grocery store), south of Church; shortly thereafter, house and outbuildings razed. (Site of 1974 Church.)
- 1972 Mortgages on Bruehl property and 1965 addition paid, leaving church debt-free.

Plans for a fourth church (south of and adjoining the 1868 edifice) started in the 1960's, and the building was completed in the Spring of 1974. The contemporary-style building consists of a sanctuary, church parlor, offices, and choir room .. cost \$350,000.

The official "closing" of the old Asbury ME Church (built in 1868-70) and the consecration of the new building took place on Sunday, May 5, 1974. Former Pastors Harold B. Wright, Robert W. Current and R. Eugene Funk were active in the formulation of plans for the two most recent additions to our Church complex.



February 6, 1977 - we celebrated the Bi-Centennial of Francis Asbury's first visit to Reisters Town. Special activities were planned for this occasion, and a commemorative worship service, entitled "A Methodist Meeting," was held. A life-sized statue of circuit rider Asbury on his horse, with Bible in hand, was constructed and placed on the roof, between the old (1870) and new (1974) church buildings ... there he kept watch for nearly two years, over the place he had visited 200 years before.

With the departure of Director Rick Buckingham (July 1985), Hea Sun Kim who was born in Korea in 1954, joined our church family as Associate Minister. As our town and congregation continues to flourish at a rapid pace, our present Pastor Reverend Dr. Frank E. Trotter, Jr. welcomes assistance with the many facets of his ministry. During recent years more and more women have joined the ranks of ministers and associates, and we are pleased to have Hea Sun Kim as a part of our "family."

From 1777 to 1985, we have had 253 pastors (Asbury and Grace). For 208 years the people called Methodists have met in worship ... they are the recipients of a blessed heritage from all those who have worshipped before them. We are the proud possessors of written records and memorials of past generations which we have retained for over 100 years, and these are also a cherished part of our heritage.

So, as it was in the beginning, the Reisterstown United Methodist Church moves forward and continues to intertwine itself into the life of the community. History truly walks here .. "Forever Beginning."

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*Helen L. Geist*

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July 1985