Early Life in England

• Asbury was born on either August 20/21, 1745 to Joseph and Elizabeth Asbury near Birmingham, England.

• He had little formal education.

• At 13 years old he takes an apprenticeship at the Old Forge owned by Foxall, a prominent Methodist.

Elizabeth Asbury
Methodist Beginnings

- Asbury discovered Methodism at the Wednesbury Society shortly after starting his apprenticeship.

- He becomes a local preacher at 18 years old.

- By 1768, Asbury is granted full connectional status.

- Asbury serves 5 circuits in 6 years. He meets Wesley and other Methodist luminaries.
Sails to America

- Wesley appoints Asbury to America on August 17, 1771.

- He begins to journal his experiences at Wesley’s urging.

- Asbury arrives in Philadelphia on October 27, 1771 and shortly thereafter preaches his first sermon on American soil at St. George’s church.
Begins Circuit Riding

- Asbury visits New York City after ten days in Philadelphia.

- Within three weeks he realizes that Methodism cannot just stay in the cities and survive.

- Asbury starts the first of many circuit rides all over the colonies plus the ever expanding frontier.
First American Conference

- Thomas Rankin opens the first conference for ministers in Philadelphia on July 14, 1773.

- Asbury arrives July 15 from New York. Ten ministers are appointed to 6 circuits for 1,160 church members.

- Asbury appointed the Baltimore circuit with 3 others. There are over 500 members just in Maryland.
The American Revolution

• Methodist loyalties are questioned including Asbury.

• All of Wesley’s British appointees return to England except Asbury.

• By 1778, Asbury refuses to take Maryland’s Oath of Fidelity. He retreats to Judge White’s house near Dover, Delaware.
A New Church is Born

• The Methodist Episcopal Church is born during the 1784 Christmas Conference.

• It is the first Methodist denomination in the world.

• Asbury is unanimously elected and consecrated General Superintendent.

Christmas Conference 1784
Baltimore, Maryland
Lovely Lane Chapel & Old Otterbein Church
Visits to George Washington

• In 1785, Asbury and Coke visit the General at his home in Mount Vernon.

• The next year Washington is presented with a prayer book and Wesley’s sermons.

• The Methodists are the first denominational delegation to congratulate President Washington in New York City.
The Long Road

- Asbury is acknowledged as the greatest circuit rider in American history.

- He rides over 275,000 miles in his 45-year career with an average of 6,000 miles per year.

- His 1797 quote, “Live or die, I must ride” becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.
A Creator of American Heritage

• “His outposts marched with the pioneers, his missionaries visited the hovels of the poor, that all might be brought to a knowledge of the truth … Who shall say where his influence, written on the immortal souls of men, shall end … He is entitled to rank as one of the builders of our nation.”

• President Calvin Coolidge’s speech during the unveiling of Asbury’s statue in Washington D.C., October 15, 1924.

Asbury Portrait – ca. 1813
Dictatorship?

• “Father Asbury” is the primary architect of American Methodist organization and early growth.

• Despite being democratically elected General Superintendent, his administration of the church was not and is called dictator by dissenters.

• Yet he is a benevolent dictator. As bishop, he accepted the same salary, hardships, itinerant life as his preachers endured in traveling ministry.
The Approaching End

• By Spring 1816, he could no longer ride a horse and switch to a chaise determined to reach the Baltimore General Conference.

• Asbury could no longer walk or stand and had to be propped up with pillows.

• He dies on March 31st at 4:00 p.m. at George Arnold’s house. They bury him in Arnold’s yard.
Removal to Baltimore

• On the first day of General Conference a petition passes to bring Asbury’s body to Baltimore.

• His funeral is held at Eutaw Street Church where they reburied his remains.

• In 1854, Asbury completes his funerary circuit when reinterred in Baltimore’s Mt. Olivet Cemetery near other early notable Methodist leaders.
The Asbury information in this power point can be found in Elmer Clark’s booklet, *Francis Asbury*, which is published by the General Commission on Archives and History. The booklet can be purchased through GCAH by contacting Michelle Merkel-Brunskill at mmerkel@gcah.org.

Other resources used are *The Methodist Experience, Volume 1* by Richey, Rowe and Miller Schmidt along with *American Saint: Francis Asbury and the Methodists* by John Wigger. A larger Asbury bibliography can be found at [http://depts.drew.edu/lib/methodist/UMStudies_Bibliography.pdf](http://depts.drew.edu/lib/methodist/UMStudies_Bibliography.pdf).

To view GCAH’s Francis Asbury online museum exhibit go to [http://www.gcah.org/history/asbury](http://www.gcah.org/history/asbury)
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