

# Traces of a Forgotten Church

Exploring the historical context behind Andrew's Chapel at Ames Plantation

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## *Introduction*

Spanning over eighteen thousand acres of property between Fayette and Hardeman counties in West Tennessee, Ames Plantation contains numerous Native American villages and Antebellum plantation sites, which the Rhodes Archaeology Field School continues to explore each summer.<sup>1</sup> In the 2011 season, a team of students, faculty, and staff began an excavation on a site where a building known as Andrew's Chapel once stood. In 1847 a group of trustees established the structure as a place of worship for the Methodist Episcopal Church, South denomination.<sup>2</sup> The oral tradition of the area indicates that the church burned down shortly before 1900, and a few gravestones in a cemetery remain as the only visible evidence of the church community. During the 2011 excavation, our team uncovered large amounts of burned brick and glass, as well as a variety of other artifacts in the area. However, due to time constraints and commitment to other projects, the excavation of the Andrew's Chapel site remains unfinished.

In the years leading up to the inception of Andrew's Chapel, Protestantism in the United States experienced a period of religious revival known as the "Second Great Awakening." This movement popularized the notion of a more personal relationship with the divine in the religious experience of the lay population. Due to this call for a more individualized approach to Protestantism, evangelists worked to spread their faith and message of salvation into the settled

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<sup>1</sup> Ames Plantation, Home, <http://www.amesplantation.org/>.

<sup>2</sup> Land Deed of Andrew's Chapel, Fayette County Tenn. Deed Book N, Pg. 29.

areas of the nation.<sup>3</sup> Events known as camp meetings brought emotional services to large audiences to provide every effort for a sinner to convert. Multiple congregations conducted these meetings, and by the middle of the nineteenth century denominations such as Methodists and Baptists benefited from an increased growth of members in churches across the nation.<sup>4</sup>

Methodism quickly became one of the most prominent religions to spread into the new territories in the southern and western areas of the United States. Meeting in conferences at Hopkinsville, Kentucky and Somerville, Tennessee,<sup>5</sup> the Methodist Episcopal Church created a system of “circuits” that established a network among church congregations within the Jackson Purchase region. Also in these conferences, officials gave traveling preachers known as “circuit riders” assignments to visit and preach at each church within a specific circuit or group of circuits. In 1840, a group of Methodist preachers established the Memphis Conference, an annual meeting that dealt with the administrative and doctrinal issues of local church congregations.<sup>6</sup> However, a schism within the Methodist Church in 1844 primarily concerning the ownership of slaves caused the Methodist congregations of the South to separate from the national denomination and form the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.<sup>7</sup> Although the new denomination became involved with “Colored Mission,” providing ministry efforts to the African-American slave population,<sup>8</sup> little evidence point to the systematic integration of whites

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<sup>3</sup> Edwin Scott Gaustad, *A Religious History of America* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1990), 129.

<sup>4</sup> Winthrop S. Hudson and John Corrigan, *Religion in America* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1999), 146-147.

<sup>5</sup> John B. McFerrin, *History of Methodism in Tennessee, Vol. 3* (Nashville: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1873), 183, 463.

<sup>6</sup> Kenneth Wilkerson, ed. *Methodism in the Memphis Conference 1840-1990* (Dallas: Taylor Publishing Company, 1990), 17.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 29.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, 104.

and African-Americans within these congregations. “Tennessee was no exception to the practice of segregation within the Church.”<sup>9</sup>

Built just after the division between the Northern and Southern Methodist Churches, Andrew’s Chapel was a product of its time, serving the local community and residing within a region heavily influenced by the plantation culture. Since the excavation at Andrew’s Chapel remains incomplete, an analysis of the structure’s historical context illuminates the religious forces that heavily impacted the Jackson Purchase region. This project aims to report on the material remains at the church site and provide an extensive overview of the religious movements leading up to the organization of the structure in 1847, ultimately providing a sense of the region’s church history for the use of future excavators on Andrew’s Chapel and additional church sites. While acknowledging the limited number of primary documents and excavated material available for Andrew’s Chapel, an examination of the religious revivalism and the organization of Methodism at the beginning of the nineteenth century establish a social and cultural picture of the church structure within its West Tennessee context. Three sections situate the chapel within its historical context: the religious revival in the Second Awakening, the role of Methodism within the West Tennessee region, and a description of the documented and material evidence available on Ames Plantation.

### *The Emergence of Religious Revivalism*

The period of renewed religious enthusiasm known as the Second Great Awakening heavily impacted the formation of Southern churches in the first half of the nineteenth century. Some historians pinpoint the Second Great Awakening between the years 1780-1830, while the

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*,103.

revival continued to affect the organization of Protestant congregations well into the later 1800s.<sup>10</sup> Like the First Great Awakening in the early eighteenth century, the Second Great Awakening called for individual learning in order to cultivate conceptions of morality and salvation. By rejecting the established hierarchies of church institutions that held a monopoly on salvation, these revivals emphasized the role of the individual in attaining a personal relationship with God and reaching salvation through his or her own methods. “This great outburst of evangelical revivalism marked the democratization of American Protestantism. People rejected formal doctrines and selected their own religious spokesman, who frequently lacked theological education, or even formal education beyond elementary school.”<sup>11</sup>

However, as the principles of the Second Awakening reached popularity with the American people, newly influential denominations, such as the Methodist and Baptist churches, adopted such individualistic attitudes while forming their own hierarchical structures with a central notion of what constitutes salvation among believers. Martin E. Marty describes this spread of new church institutions across the unsettled landscape of the United States in terms of a “righteous empire,” a multid denominational movement to spread Protestantism throughout the new territories of the United States.<sup>12</sup> An examination of this renewed religious fervor at the start of the century ultimately offers an insight into the establishment of Andrew’s Chapel in 1847, just a few years after the climax of the movement.

A series of revivals within college campuses across the United States sparked the Second Awakening by the close of the eighteenth century. At Hampden-Sydney and Washington

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<sup>10</sup> Donald C. Swift, *Religion and the American Experience* (New York: M.E. Sharp, Inc., 1998), 74.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 74.

<sup>12</sup> This theme of a “righteous empire” of Protestantism in the United States is fully explored in: Martin E. Marty, *Protestantism in the United States: Righteous Empire* (New York: Macmillan, Inc., 1986).

colleges in the 1790s, approximately thirty to forty men entered the Presbyterian ministry following a revival event.<sup>13</sup> James McGready of Pennsylvania joined this group, which traveled south to the Carolinas, Tennessee, and Kentucky, ultimately sparking the highly popular camp meeting at Logan County, Kentucky in 1800.<sup>14</sup> This key event sent waves of religious enthusiasm throughout the South, ultimately spreading to the northern states. At Yale in 1802, President Timothy Dwight led a series of chapel sermons that converted a large number of students and attempted to remedy the freethinking, anti-Christian opinions held by several members of the school's population.<sup>15</sup> The Yale revival produced an additional wave of evangelistic efforts, as Dwight sent groups of converted students to other college campuses, further spreading the Awakening to various educational institutions.<sup>16</sup> These college revivals significantly contributed to the expansion of the religious resurgence at the beginning of the nineteenth century. In the South and West, the Second Awakening maintained much of its central characteristics, but included a high degree of emotionalism, particularly in camp meetings, which distinguished the revival from the North.<sup>17</sup>

The Second Awakening expressed a societal change to reject the "truth" declared by Christian institutions in favor of a more individualized method of acquiring religious knowledge. "It was a reaction against religious authority and emphasized the religious experience of the individual and the ability of ordinary people to find religious truth."<sup>18</sup> The movement additionally advocated "Arminian theology," which proclaimed that individuals, although unable to receive salvation without Christ, maintain the ability to develop a personal relationship with

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<sup>13</sup> Hudson and Corrigan, 146.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 146.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 146-147.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 146.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 146-147.

<sup>18</sup> Swift, 70.

God and attain salvation through their own free will. Evangelicals during this revival period used the notion of a more individualized religious experience during conversion efforts, offering a new and more autonomous role for the laity to enjoy.

Swift describes these new roles in terms of the economic development coinciding with the religious resurgence at the beginning of the nineteenth century. With the market revolution shifting the economy so that producers were in conflict with one another in a competitive new structure, a greater concentration of wealth remained at the top of the social structure, causing a great strain to those residing at the bottom of the economic system. Impersonal economic forces now controlled most economic decisions within the society.<sup>19</sup> The evangelical voices of the Second Awakening then reacted to not just authoritative church institutions, but also the market economy that caused hardship for much of the working class. “The evangelical revival that emerged would, in time, serve the purposes of the market by urging people to build character traits that made them efficient producers.”<sup>20</sup> Participating within a religious community that promoted an individualistic religious experience, the model Christian could now operate effectively as a member of the market economy. Many of these converts then understood themselves to be in control of their own fate, both in their spiritual and physical lives. Furthermore, the evangelical efforts of the Second Awakening appealed to issues of the working class, which was both subject to the ecclesiastical authority as well as the new competitive market economy – two forces that often made them feel powerless. The religious revival brought a sense of autonomy back into their lives, allowing believers to maintain a personal relationship with God rather than through the intermediary of the church, as well as instilling vital traits such

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<sup>19</sup> Swift, 72.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 72.

as self-discipline and confidence that enabled working class Christians to compete within the market economy.<sup>21</sup>

Although much of the Second Awakening developed as a reaction against the higher institutions that dominated spiritual and economic life, Marty describes the revival as a formation of the eventual “empire” of Protestantism in the United States. The movement extended westward as the American frontier expanded and regions such as West Tennessee became incorporated into the United States. As settlers moved into these areas, Christian groups recognized the need to spread the religious revival in order to “civilize” the population with their knowledge of salvation. The resurgence of religious fervor brought by the Second Awakening further emphasized the already growing call for Christians to evangelize the newly settled territories of the nation. In spreading the faith, Christians intended to claim the United States as a Protestant nation, an empire brought together by a unified faith and doctrine. As a result, evangelical Protestants under the influence of the Second Awakening developed a new identity as “agents of one nation, one people.”<sup>22</sup> This notion illuminates the mentality of nineteenth-century Protestants, who recognized a duty to conquer the frontier with the Protestant faith and bring the new nation under a united religious empire.

This Protestant empire also brought new roles to Christians participating in the evangelical community. As the evangelical efforts extended to foreign missions, church outreach, and the wildly popular camp meetings, congregations created positions that allowed both the clergy and the laity to participate in the growth of the empire. “To evangelize the world – that was the great goal of empire. . . Ministers, fundraisers, foreign missionaries, heads of benevolent societies, revivalists, and circuit riders were the new heroes of kingdom and

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 72-73.

<sup>22</sup> Marty, 50.

empire.”<sup>23</sup> Although many congregations in the nation grew divided over denomination and doctrinal differences, Protestant churches remained united under the call to evangelize the unenlightened.

Winthrop S. Hudson and John Corrigan further discuss the lack of conventional religion in the population of the new frontier that incited evangelists to spread the Second Awakening westward. Congregationalists and Episcopalians complained of congregants leaving the church in favor of an impious life, while the influence of educated deists such as Thomas Paine and Ethan Allen at the turn of the eighteenth century threatened the notion of a revealed religion like Protestantism.<sup>24</sup> Such opposition prompted the movement to infiltrate the new frontier at a rapid pace in an effort to prevent immoral and anti-Christian ideas from taking hold in the region. “The great fear was that the people of the West, being far removed from the civilizing and Christianizing influence of the settled communities in the East, would revert to ‘barbarism’ and subvert the moral order of society.”<sup>25</sup> Also, a sense of cultural superiority caused evangelists to view the Protestant tradition as the model structure for a moral and just society. As the revival of the Second Awakening motivated Christians to share their doctrinal beliefs and personal relationship with God, all other religions or spiritual viewpoints became inferior and heretical in the eyes of the evangelists. “If in one’s own model was superior, that meant that all others were inferior. The leaders had little difficulty inspiring the masses who were joining their churches to see that.”<sup>26</sup> According to Marty, this sense of unity in religious truth attributed to the formation of the righteous empire across the United States – all worked toward a central cause of winning the frontier for the Protestant faith.

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 55.

<sup>24</sup> Hudson and Corrigan, 143.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 144.

<sup>26</sup> Marty, 52.



Effervescent displays of emotion and conversion mark a key feature of the Second Awakening revivals, particularly in the South and West regions of the United States. Camp meetings, large gatherings where many travel from considerably long distances to attend, consist of lengthy services in which preachers frequently give powerful sermons that call for sinners to repent and convert to Protestantism. Revivalists used this method especially in the South, an area known at the beginning of the century for its rough and impious population. “. . . Revivalists in the West tended to turn on all the heat they could and make a concentrated appeal to the emotions. This was especially true in Kentucky and Tennessee where much of the early population was unusually rough, turbulent, and unlettered.”<sup>27</sup> These meetings lasted for several days, with the intent of reaching as many unbelievers as possible with the time allotted to them. “Preaching, praying, shouting, and singing continued throughout the four days from dusk to dawn. Before these individuals could be converted, they had to be convicted of sin – made to feel absolutely isolated and helpless to do anything about their sinfulness.”<sup>28</sup> Additional forms of emotionalism characterized these meetings, with such unique acts as jerks, yelling, falling, speaking in strange tongues, and ventriloquism. The preachers in charge of the service carefully oversaw the various reactions to the sermons, keeping in mind that losing control meant sending the crowd into mass hysteria once one audience member lost control of his or her emotions.<sup>29</sup> These showy displays of emotion reflect the Second Awakening’s emphasis on individualism and a personal relationship with God. As activities sponsored by Christian communities, camp meetings produced new roles for congregants to display their talents. David T. Bailey suggests that these events presented opportunities for African-Americans to become involved in church

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<sup>27</sup> Hudson and Corrigan, 147.

<sup>28</sup> Swift, 78.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, 79.

leadership. Camp meetings gave African-American preachers a forum to express spiritual beliefs and contribute to the evangelical efforts. Several even received wide recognition for their speaking abilities and emotional sermons.<sup>30</sup> “The meetings were not segregated by sex, nor in many instances race, and several black preachers earned their initial reputations speaking at these gatherings.”<sup>31</sup>

By the 1830s, the resurgence of religious discourse caused by the Second Awakening firmly established a Protestant revival in the American South. The religious tradition brought from the evangelical movement replaced the diversity of religious thought that characterized the region in the early days of settlement. However, Protestantism in the South remained divided over differences of doctrine, and various denominations populated the landscape. By the middle of the century, one-third of churches in the South belonged under the umbrella of Methodism. Meanwhile, one-fourth of the population was Baptist, another one-fourth Roman Catholic, and the remaining belonged Presbyterians and the Disciples of Christ denominations.<sup>32</sup> Methodism in particular benefitted from the massive congregational growth during the Second Awakening, experiencing waves of prosperity in 1838-1844 and 1857-1858. By the 1840s, the affluence of the Methodist Church allowed former camp meeting sites to transform into grand monuments that signified the denomination’s new wealth and “peace with bourgeois America.”<sup>33</sup> As one of the more influential denominations in the Protestant South, an examination of the Methodist Church’s organization in the region of West Tennessee provides a context for the establishment of Andrew’s Chapel in the middle of the century.

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 79.

<sup>31</sup> David T. Bailey, “Frontier Religion,” *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 1287.

<sup>32</sup> Marty, 61.

<sup>33</sup> Swift, 78-82

*Circuit Riders and Quarterly Conferences: Methodism in West Tennessee*

Methodism developed from a movement initiated by brothers John and Charles Wesley within the Church of England in the early eighteenth century. Although ultimately breaking off from the Church of England through the proliferation of Methodist “societies,” these revivalists maintained the Arminian<sup>34</sup> notion of free will and the individual’s ability to control their personal salvation, while remaining fundamentally opposed to the Calvinistic doctrine of predestination. By the 1760s, lay members of the Methodist movement began to spread their doctrine throughout the American Colonies. When the Wesleys started to send trained Methodist ministers to the New World, a conference of preachers met at Philadelphia in 1773. Following the American Revolution, however, John Wesley recognized the need to sever previous ties with the Church of England, and another conference of preachers in 1784 formally organized the new movement as the Methodist Episcopal Church. The church drafted its first constitution in 1808, and quickly became a participant in the religious revivalism developing at that time.<sup>35</sup>

The Methodist Church received considerable growth during the Second Awakening period, becoming one of the most popular Protestant denominations in the South by the middle of the nineteenth century. The new religious experience of camp meetings and emotional conversion experiences drew Methodists to participate and multiply in membership. Within the Methodist Church, a system of congregation networks allowed “circuit rider” preachers to travel and minister to a group of churches within a designated region. Local conferences controlled the

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<sup>34</sup> In Arminian theology, no individual is able to receive salvation without the belief and acceptance of God and the Holy Spirit. However, one may attain salvation through his or her own methods, implementing reason to reach a state of faith. One may additionally lose salvation and grace through a profound excess of sin or a loss of faith. This theology ultimately centers on the decisions and efforts made by the individual.

<sup>35</sup> L. Fitzgerald Reist et al. *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2008), 9-12.

Methodist congregations in an area, delegating administrative and doctrinal matters as well as overseeing the circuit rider process. An analysis of the Memphis Conference and the common Methodist practices taking place in West Tennessee illuminates the circumstances surrounding the organization and usage of Andrew's Chapel as a local plantation Methodist congregation by the mid-nineteenth century.

The stretch of land that encompasses West Tennessee and much of Kentucky west of Louisville reflects the area historically recognized as the Jackson Purchase. This region consisted of primarily unsettled wilderness until the late 1810s due to land grant disputes between the states of Tennessee and North Carolina, as the latter incorporated the territory as a part of its state prior to 1789. Appointed as land negotiators to secure the territory, General Andrew Jackson and Isaac Shelby formed an agreement with the local Chickasaw leaders and by 1819 "the Tennessee State Legislature passed the necessary statutes regularizing land division and title clearance."<sup>36</sup> Following this authorization, legal settlers from Middle Tennessee and several eastern states flooded into the western portion of the state. By 1820, the Tennessee section of the Jackson Purchase reached a population of approximately twenty-five hundred settlers.<sup>37</sup>

Some sources note that settlers relocated to this region primarily to seek out opportunities for economic prosperity. "Few came for religious reasons, a decided contrast with the original settlers on the eastern seaboard."<sup>38</sup> However, religious groups growing under the Second Awakening movement rapidly followed settlers to this newly legalized area. In 1820, the Tennessee Conference for the Methodist Church met at Hopkinsville, Kentucky. During this session, leaders worked to appoint circuit leaders to assigned groups of churches through a

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<sup>36</sup> Wilkerson, 8-9.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 9.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 9.

selection process headed by the Committee on Missions. Prospective preachers typically underwent a “trial” process conducted by these committees, in order to determine their competency to preach in the Methodist tradition. After this period under trial, an appointed candidate received permission to preach under the observation of a presiding elder. Despite this formal process, however, the Methodists generally favored a candidate with a strong moral character rather than considering the extent of their education. The committees often “would appoint virtually any man of . . . willingness to preach who also possessed the zeal to sustain a life of hardship and travel.”<sup>39</sup> Circuit riders spent weeks to months traveling through each individual congregation within a circuit, and constantly faced health issues and long periods of time away from their families. The conference assigned Hezekiah Holland and Lewis Garrett, Jr. to lead the mission process in the Jackson Purchase area and “report in the ensuing spring each the true situation of that country in which he has labored to the Presiding Elders.”<sup>40</sup> The formation of circuits under Garrett resulted in four additional conferences in the area by 1825, where leaders continued to send circuit riders out to the growing congregations in the Jackson Purchase. Wilkerson notes that approximately 3,200 members resided in the circuits of the Forked Deer District, located west of the Jackson, Tennessee area and northwest of Andrew’s Chapel.<sup>41</sup>

In 1837, the second Tennessee Conference met in Somerville, Tennessee, only a few miles from land eventually occupying Andrew’s Chapel and the present-day Ames Plantation property. “Somerville was a young town, located in the heart of a beautiful and fertile region. The citizens were intelligent, refined, and hospitable, and entertained the Conference in the most

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, 14.

<sup>40</sup> McFerrin, 183.

<sup>41</sup> Wilkerson, 10.

elegant style.”<sup>42</sup> This conference formed the Wesley District that housed several local circuits of the area. Unfortunately, records designating which churches belonged to these circuits do not exist, and the specific circuit of which Andrew’s Chapel belonged remains unknown. By the end of the 1830s, the Jackson Purchase consisted of numerous districts and charges, including the Memphis and Somerville circuits in West Tennessee. The circuits became so extensive that traveling preachers were constantly on the move to different congregations, often giving up their ministering positions to return to their families or settle in a circuit’s nearby area with a new wife.<sup>43</sup>

The beginning of Methodism in the Jackson Purchase region successfully developed an administrative system that appealed to settlers living in a frontier society. The establishment of a circuit system united the myriad of churches, scattered over a sparsely settled region, into one network that continually enforced the Methodist doctrine and structure of church activities. The prevalence of revivalism and emotional camp meetings continued to reinforce the principles of the Second Awakening in West Tennessee religious life, using Arminian theology to discuss salvation and an individualized relationship with God among sinners throughout the region. By the 1830s, conferences further worked to establish new circuits, reassuring that all Methodist churches in the area resided under the same jurisdiction. During this period, circuit riders and camp meetings proved an integral part of the Methodist experience. While traveling through Jackson Circuit in 1828, preacher A.L.P. Green commented: “A Methodist preacher who never rode a circuit is without history. He may be a great man, and a good preacher in Jerusalem, but

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<sup>42</sup> McFerrin, 463.

<sup>43</sup> Wilkerson, 12-17.

he came up without fighting Edom and Moab.”<sup>44</sup> The Methodists attempted to create an effective system of administrative control in an effort to preach doctrine and bring salvation to as many listeners as possible. “The aim was conversion, which, aside from eternal implications, was expected to result in adherence to the moral standards and discipline of the church community.”<sup>45</sup>

The General Conference of 1844 marked a drastic change in the history of Methodism in the United States. In this meeting, the primarily Northern group of delegates at the Conference fired Bishop James O. Andrew, who attained ownership of slaves through marriage. The Methodist Episcopal Church through this decision presented a firm anti-slavery stance, determining that bishops who owned slaves no longer maintained the qualifications necessary to perform the duties of their office. As a result, the Southern representatives at the Conference, unsatisfied with the deposition, began to sever ties with the national church. “The Southern Methodists, believing themselves to be acting in accordance with the ‘true discipline of the church’ by not violating laws restricting slave manumissions in Andrew’s state of Georgia, seceded.”<sup>46</sup> Representatives from the Memphis Conference, including church leaders G. W. D. Harris, William McMahan, Thomas Joyner, and Samuel S. Moody, voted with Southern churches on issues regarding slavery, and ultimately initiated the beginning of a new Methodist denomination.<sup>47</sup> As a response to the increasing differences between Northern and Southern churches on the issue of slavery, the General Conference drafted a Plan of Separation, which

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<sup>44</sup> T.O. Summers, D.D., ed. *Life and Papers of A.L.P. Green, D.D.* (Nashville: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1877), 46-47.

<sup>45</sup> Wilkerson, 16.

<sup>46</sup> Bryan Dye, “In Regard for the Cause of God” (Oxford: The University of Mississippi, 1995), 11.

<sup>47</sup> Wilkerson, 28-29.

mandated the complete division of properties held by both sections of the church.<sup>48</sup>

Consequently, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South formed, lasting as the major voice of Southern Methodism until 1939. This new strain of the Methodist tradition came to reflect a distinct religion heavily influenced by Southern culture and values, differing from the Northern Methodism.

The Methodist Episcopal Church, South embraced the social structure, regional pride, and plantation life characteristic of the antebellum South by the mid-1840s. Although retaining much of the doctrine shared by the northern Methodist Episcopal Church, the southern church held soul-saving as its primary mission, and stressed the emotional aspect of the conversion experience. “It accepted the Methodist quadrilateral of the Bible, but tended to emphasize the Bible and religious experience more than its northern counterpart.”<sup>49</sup> The new church formed as tensions between the North and South became heated – the Methodist Episcopal Church, South later actively supported the Confederacy, exhibiting enthusiasm for the “New South” in sermons and religious literature.<sup>50</sup> In the effort to spread its theology and save souls, the church organized missions to evangelize both abroad and locally. The state of African-Americans within the Methodist Episcopal Church, South reflects the complex relationship between race and religion in the years leading up to the Civil War.

Conducting missions was a vital part of the Methodist mandate to reach out and save souls, and African-American slaves were no exception to this practice. “Most of the Southern Methodists who answered the call to serve as plantation missionaries were sincerely committed

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<sup>48</sup> Dwight W. Culver, *Negro Segregation in the Methodist Church* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953), 50.

<sup>49</sup> F. Joseph Mitchell, “Methodist Episcopal Church, South,” *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 1321.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, 1321.



to slaves' salvation and spiritual welfare."<sup>51</sup> In the 1830s, Southern ministers began to preach of the Biblical justifications for slavery. In this reasoning, African-Americans depended on the institution of slavery in order to receive their physical and spiritual needs from the white population. Southern Methodists believed that God ordained slavery so that African-Americans benefited from a frequent exposure to Protestant morals and doctrinal beliefs. Following the Methodist division in 1844, Southern Methodists, no longer associated with the abolitionist view of Northern Methodism, focused on reaching out to plantation slaves. Evangelists from the Methodist Episcopal Church, South organized missionary programs aimed at improving the spiritual standing of the African-American population. The denomination began to provide large plantations throughout the South with ministry leaders, who often became significant individuals to the members of the slave community. "These mission and plantation ministers performed marriage ceremonies for the slaves, visited them in their cabins when they were sick, prayed with them when they were in trouble, baptized them, and conducted their funerals when they died."<sup>52</sup>

Some claimed that these programs exceeded the efforts made by Northern churches, who strongly advocated emancipation. "The Reverend W.G. Brownlow argued in 1858 that the 'Methodist Episcopal Church, South, is dispensing more labor, and expending more money, to improve the spiritual condition of the slaves . . . than all the . . . freedom-shriekers."<sup>53</sup> Moreover, during the time of the schism within the Methodist Church in 1844 and the organization of Andrew's Chapel in 1847, Methodists in the South claimed that the Bible mandated both salvation and slavery, and a number of missionary practices worked to "save" African-American

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<sup>51</sup> Reginald F. Hildebrand, *The Times Were Strange and Stirring: Methodist Preachers and the Crisis of Emancipation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 5.

<sup>52</sup> Bell Irvin Wiley, "Cotton and Slavery in the History of West Tennessee" (Lexington: University of Kentucky, 1929),72.

<sup>53</sup> J.B. Lippincott, ed., *Ought American Slavery To Be Perpetuated? A Debate Between Rev. W.G. Brownlow and Rev. A. Pyrne* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1858), 39.

souls yet keep them under the current social structure. This process of white Methodists concerning themselves with the salvation of slaves only to keep them in their current standing became a paradoxical way to use the religion as a form of social control. “Such confusion of purpose could be seen in other aspects of religious life on this frontier; for example, drinking preachers lived nearby those in the same denomination who viewed liquor as diabolic. This religious ‘split personality’ from the frontier era continued to characterize the section for decades.”<sup>54</sup>

By 1860, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South maintained a population of over two hundred thousand African-American slaves among its growing congregations.<sup>55</sup> However, although missionary efforts focused on the improvement of slave spiritual life, churches at this time still typically remained segregated.

While the planters on some of the largest plantations sometimes built separate churches for their slaves and had white or colored preachers to instruct them, a more common practice was for the whites and their slaves to worship in the same church. Sometimes the slaves sat in galleries built for that purpose. In other instances there was an imaginary line dividing the areas to be occupied by slaves and whites.<sup>56</sup>

This practice of segregation within the church community further reinforced the inferior social standing of African-Americans, reflecting the biblical interpretation by Southern Methodism to “limit the mission of the church to the saving of souls, steering clear of most social issues”<sup>57</sup> and following the status quo of society. By the end of Civil War, vast numbers of African-American Methodists began to change membership from local plantation churches to new congregations that consisted solely of former slaves. Such “Colored Missions” emerged throughout the

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<sup>54</sup> Bailey, 1288.

<sup>55</sup> Culver, 50.

<sup>56</sup> Wiley, 69.

<sup>57</sup> Mitchell, 1321.

Memphis Conference in West Tennessee, including the large “Wesley Colored Mission,” which resided in the Somerville District.<sup>58</sup> As a result, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South began losing the majority of its African-American membership. In 1866, the first Methodist General Conference after the Civil War met in New Orleans and permitted African-American congregants to form their own ecclesiastical bodies, no longer under the supervision of white Methodists. Establishing religious independence for African-Americans, the Conference additionally allowed black preachers to become officially ordained and licensed. By 1870, the “Colored Conferences,” consisting of African-American church leaders previously belonging to the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, organized the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church, which separated itself from the Memphis Conference.<sup>59</sup>

The rise of Methodism in the first half of the nineteenth century profoundly impacted the social and religious lives of the early West Tennessee settlers. Intent on converting as many new believers as possible, the Methodists used camp meetings during the massive Second Awakening religious revival to become the largest denomination in the South by the middle of the century. Arminian theology and an emphasis on missionary work characterized the values and goals of the Methodist Episcopal Church throughout its early existence in the United States. The system of conferences, circuits, and circuit riders established an administrative system that connected congregations across the region through the sermons of traveling preachers and decisions made in quarterly meetings. The organization of Andrew’s Chapel in 1847 occurred as this system became divided over the issue of slavery, officially establishing the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, as a separate entity from the Methodist Episcopal Church in the North. Taking shape just three years after this division, Andrew’s Chapel emerged during one of the most pivotal

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<sup>58</sup> Wilkerson, 104.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, 107-109.

moments in Methodist history, as Southern churches continued to proclaim their independence from the abolitionist north.

### *The Lost Church at Ames Plantation*

Despite the wealth of artifacts still under the surface, only a small cemetery indicates that Andrew's Chapel once occupied a small plot on a southeastern section of Ames Plantation. Since the structure burned to the ground at an undetermined date prior to 1900, the area remains covered by a dense forest. An excavation conducted during the 2011 Archaeology Field School held by Rhodes College uncovered a vast array of objects linking the area to its past occupancy – including brick fragments, burned pieces of glass, and nails. Fragments of toy marbles provide supporting evidence that the structure additionally served as a community schoolhouse. Traces of a once active road winds around the church plot and cemetery, and approximately twelve surviving grave sites reveal the final resting places of church founders William W. Williams and David E. Putney. This section chronicles the founding of Andrew's Chapel in 1847, examining the scarce but significant documented evidence behind its inception.

This summer's archaeological team uncovered a large quantity of burnt artifacts on the church site, reaffirming the oral tradition that the structure burned to the ground before the turn of the century.



Burnt Brick Fragment  
40FY255  
Unit 1  
Level 1  
17-2



Burnt Bottle Glass  
40FY255  
ST12  
7-4

A marble fragment additionally indicates that the structure served as a community schoolhouse.



Stone Marble  
40FY255  
ST2  
2-2

An iron-steel key found in the area possibly functioned as a means of access to the Andrew's Chapel structure, and further provides a glimpse into the design of keys in the mid-nineteenth century.



Iron-Steel Key  
40FY255  
Unit 1  
Level 1  
17-11

Finally, the rim of a purple glass bottle, found without rust, contains a beautiful design and possibly resided within the chapel to be used for ecclesiastical purposes.



Purple Free Blown Bottle Glass Rim  
40FY255  
Unit 1  
Level 3  
21-12

A land deed drafted on May 29, 1847 lists William W. Williams, Elisha W. Harris, Enoch Stewart, David E. Putney, Binberg Walton, and two additional individuals as trustees of a “house already erected on the premises for a place of worship for the use of the Methodist Episcopal Church South.”<sup>60</sup> Walton, who originally acquired the land on July 25, 1837 from N.R. Morgan and M. Morgan, functioned both as the land’s grantor and trustee of the church.<sup>61</sup> Williams served as one of the first preachers at Andrew’s Chapel, but died on June 22, 1847, less than one month after the organization of the church. His obituary references three traveling Methodist preachers who he housed shortly before his death, as well as the substantial fortune that he contributed to “the church and the poor.” This suggests that Methodist circuit riders were active in the area during the beginnings of Andrew’s Chapel, and possibly visited the new structure around the time of Williams’ death.<sup>62</sup> The grant continues to list administrative duties of the church, primarily the measures taken by the station minister or preacher in the instance of an existing trustee’s death. Through this extensive process, the grant describes that a committee of living trustees creates a nomination process, filling the vacancy so that the same number of trustees always oversee the church and its property. The procedure ultimately insured the church’s continued existence on that property, even when the initial trustees died.<sup>63</sup>

The land deed of the church illustrates the process of identifying land ownership in the mid-nineteenth century – by referencing land markers that possibly no longer exist but served as an indication of land boundaries. The Andrew’s Chapel deed describes this set of markers:

“Beginning at a stake in Harris line in the road opposite to the South edge of said Waltons (acreage), running thence along the South edge of said (acreage) twenty poles &  $\frac{3}{4}$  to a stake thence

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<sup>60</sup> Land Deed of Andrew’s Chapel. Note: Two of the trustee’s names are not completely known.

<sup>61</sup> Land transactions of Binberg Walton provided by Jamie Evans.

<sup>62</sup> Obituary of Reverend William W. Williams provided by Jamie Evans.

<sup>63</sup> Land Deed of Andrew’s Chapel.

South a line marked (trees) 10 ¼ poles to a post oak then a line of marked trees West to a stake in Harris line thence along Harris line & the road to a beginning containing one & ¼ acres together . . .”<sup>64</sup>

The deed continues to reference an already existing structure on the property that came to be used as Andrew’s Chapel through the land grant. This suggests that the structure served as a church prior to the land grant that designated the building for the use of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. The traces of a road leading through the chapel’s property intersect Buford-Ellington Road, a busy street at that time in the area between Somerville and La Grange, Tennessee. The structure’s close proximity to a busy intersection suggests that the establishment of the church came at a time when the local community grew at a rapid pace and therefore needed a Methodist congregation to accommodate the increasing population.

In his examination of Andrew’s Chapel, Bryan Dye describes the slave ownership of church trustee Elisha W. Harris, indicating that his prospering estate and growth in slave numbers reflects the socio-economic status of the church congregation.<sup>65</sup> Since a listing of church members other than the trustees is unavailable, it is impossible to know how many white property owners, slaves, or people of varying social status maintained membership at Andrew’s Chapel. However, considering the ongoing practices of congregations belonging to the Methodist Episcopal Church at this time, this local plantation church possibly held a sizable population of African-American slaves, at least until the proliferation of “Colored Missions” and the establishment of the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church following the Civil War.

After the schism at the Methodist General Conference in 1844, Southern Methodists conducted missionary projects to improve the spiritual conditions of African-American slaves. Once freed from the abolitionist opinions of the northern Methodist Church, church leaders

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<sup>64</sup> Land Deed of Andrew’s Chapel.

<sup>65</sup> Dye, 14.

focused on incorporating more slaves into church membership. However, slavery remained a reality even in the church space, as Methodists continued to segregate in church services and activities. As a community church within plantation property, Andrew's Chapel possibly contained a population of slaves from the area. However, the practice of segregation and the lowered status of African-American slaves were still very prevalent in church settings at the time of the structure's organization.

### *Conclusion*

Unfortunately, few conclusions can be made regarding Andrew's Chapel since excavations on the site remain incomplete. The progress made by the field school team this summer reaffirms much of the previous knowledge about the structure – it was organized in 1847 by a group of white landowners, functioned as a community Methodist church and schoolhouse, located near one of the region's major roads, and burned down sometime before the turn of the century. However, much of the material culture left at the Andrew's Chapel site is left for future excavations to explore. For the time being, the historical context of West Tennessee Methodism sheds light on how similar churches in the region responded to the ongoing changes within the religion throughout the nineteenth century leading up to the Civil War. Through this examination of Methodism in a larger historical framework, future excavators can interpret Andrew's Chapel as a product of its time, influenced by both larger forces and local culture.

The Second Awakening posed a massive religious revival that culminated in the spread of a Protestantism that emphasized the personal religious experience and mandate to spread the knowledge of salvation. This movement swept the American frontier, providing showy camp meetings and ultimately allowing major Protestant denominations such as the Methodist and



Baptist churches to take a strong hold on the religious life of the nation. The religious fervor resulted in an influence, particularly within the South, so strong and extensive that Marty refers to this new spread of power as a “righteous empire.” “From 1830 until long after the Civil War, almost no southerner of note found it useful or advisable to go his own way and make a point of attacking the evangelical synthesis which had bonded with southern culture.”<sup>66</sup>

The Methodist Episcopal Church, organized in 1808, became a strong voice within the Second Awakening movement, participating in camp meetings and creating networks of circuits that worked to link congregations together. Circuit riders, otherwise known as preachers who travelled from congregation to congregation along a circuit route, brought enthusiastic ministry leaders into contact with members of community churches. A system of local, regional, and national conferences united Methodist leaders and worked to establish administrative control over the entirety of American Methodist congregations. By the 1840s, however, the debate over slavery led to the division of the church, creating a Methodist Episcopal Church, South. The organization of Andrew’s Chapel occurred only three years following this schism, while the new Southern church emphasized mission work to educate and convert the African-American slave population into Methodism. However, slaves maintained their social standing within the communities, remaining segregated in the church despite their increased religious involvement. “Over the decades, Southern Methodism invested time, money, and manpower into the construction of a social order in which slavery and the gospel functioned together, smoothly and symbiotically.”<sup>67</sup>

This development from the spread of Second Awakening principles to the increased focus on African-Americans within the Methodist Episcopal Church, South provides a backdrop to the

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<sup>66</sup> Marty, 60.

<sup>67</sup> Hildebrand, 6.

religious world that Andrew's Chapel entered in the middle of the century. As a plantation congregation belonging to a local Methodist circuit and receiving occasional travelling preachers,<sup>68</sup> the church undoubtedly became influenced by the larger Methodist Episcopal Church, South denomination. Continued excavations on the site will likely provide a more detailed picture of the structure of the building, as well as the church's everyday activities. Far from finished, the work on Andrew's Chapel will prove to be an enlightening piece of Methodist history for the continued archaeological efforts at Ames Plantation.

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<sup>68</sup> Obituary of Reverend William W. Williams provided by Jamie Evans.

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