



A LAYMAN WITH CONVICTIONS

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It was on December 17, 1811, that Micajah McPherson was born in Chatham County, North Carolina. Far south of the Mason-Dixon line, the site seemed an unlikely one for the life and labors of a nearly Wesleyan Methodist, a zealous opponent of human slavery. Yet this was the stage on which a Wesleyan hero acted out his part in one of the most dramatic scenes of our denominational history.

Almost nothing is known about Micajah's early life. When he was about twenty he married, and to him and his wife were born a son and two daughters.

In 1843 the Wesleyan Methodist Connection was organized. After Rev. Edward Smith, first president of the Allegheny Conference, published an antislavery speech entitled "Love Worketh No Ill to His Neighbor," some copies fell into the hands of Methodists who lived not far from Micajah. A pastor, finding some of his parishioners reading the pamphlet, bitterly, denounced it and unintentionally fanned their spark of interest into a flame.

Finally forty or fifty persons withdrew from the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. They wrote to the editor of *The True Wesleyan* asking for a *Discipline* and to the Allegheny Conference asking for a preacher.

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Rev. Adam Crooks, a young minister from Ohio, volunteered to follow up the request. He arrived in North Carolina in October of 1847 and began an evangelistic and church organizing ministry. Micajah and his family were among his converts. A log church was built that first winter nearby in Alamance County. Called Freedom's Hill (although opponents nicknamed it "Free Nigger Hill"), it was ready for dedication by March, 1848. Micajah was one of the original trustees of the building.

By the end of Crooks's first year, he had established eight congregations in North Carolina and Virginia with a total of 140 members. He was joined in 1848 by Rev. Jarvis C. Bacon and in 1849 by Rev. Jesse McBride.

The growing work soon faced the threat of violent persecution. During the first year Crooks heard himself called "nigger thief" and saw his effigy tarred and feathered. Later each of the three young preachers was arrested and jailed, charged with disrupting the peace of the land. A mob attacked Freedom's Hill, burying their bullets in its walls. Another mob dragged Crooks from the pulpit. By the end of 1851 all three preachers had had to return to the north to avoid injury, long-term imprisonment, or even death.

For six years after their departure, Micajah and his fellow Wesleyans were left alone among their hostile neighbors, but their antislavery convictions held true. Then Rev. Daniel Worth, a native North Carolinian then living in Indiana and former president of the General Conference, came to encourage these isolated Wesleyans. Some had moved to Indiana and other free states, but Micajah and his associates had been so zealous that there were still twenty preaching points scattered across five counties.

Worth was left alone for awhile, but then he too was jailed and eventually had to return to the north on the eve of the Civil War. More Wesleyan families moved away, and all of the churches were closed except Freedom's Hill and one other. Micajah and his wife and some fifty or more members remained. As the night of war closed in on this tiny fellowship and antislavery ideas became equated with

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with treason in the eyes of their neighbors, one can only imagine the tension with which the lives of these precious people were filled.

One morning as Micajah was doing his chores near his barn, a number of men rode up and surrounded him. They notified him that he was to be hung because of his antislavery principles. His wife and grandson watched helplessly from the house

Micajah McPherson was a Wesleyan layman without unique abilities but with deep convictions which he would not compromise to gain man's approval, to free his life of tension, or even to save his life. Even though he was known as a martyr-hero, he did not bask in the glow of past achievements but sought to grow in grace and understanding.

as he was dragged across the creek toward the woods. They could only pray, and one tormentor shattered even their prayers with an intimidating rifle shot into the house near where they stood.

A few rods from the road, near a small creek, stood a leaning dogwood tree, with a fork some seven feet or more from the ground and slightly above a large rock. The mob lifted Micajah up, one crying, "A knotty dogwood is good enough to hang a Wesleyan on." They fixed a noose improvised from a bridle-rein and shoved his body off the rock. He soon lost consciousness.

After awhile Micajah heard steps, then horses wading the creek. Someone rode up and cut him down, remarking that "the old rascal" was not quite dead but they needed the noose to hang another. Micajah dropped to the ground too nearly dead to move or speak. Just before dark he regained sufficient strength to crawl back home, where his wife tenderly nursed him back to health.

Micajah continued his active role among the Wesleyans. After the Civil War, Wesleyan ministers returned to North Carolina. Freedom's Hill was the lone .

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survivor of the early period, but Micajah and his fellow sufferers had the comfort of seeing the work grow

In a revival held many years afterward, Micajah recognized a man who had slipped into the service as one who had been among his would-be lynchers. He went to him and urged him to repent, but being recognized by a man whom he had helped to hang twenty years or more earlier so overwhelmed the visitor that he ran from the building.

Micajah McPherson lived for over thirty years after the Civil War, dying November 8, 1896. He had outlived his first wife and both daughters, had remarried, and had lived to see his great-grandchildren.

His spiritual life remained rich and contagious. He loved to testify in the church services. Micajah came to oppose the use of alcoholic beverages as strenuously as he had slavery. He fully supported the holiness revival among Wesleyans, commenting to a Christian friend during his last summer, “The doctrine of entire sanctification is the doctrine of the Bible.”

Just before his death he got the victory over the tobacco habit, “the last filthiness of the flesh,” saying, “I had rather die than to live and use it.” His Christian life was a battle – and a victory – to the very end.