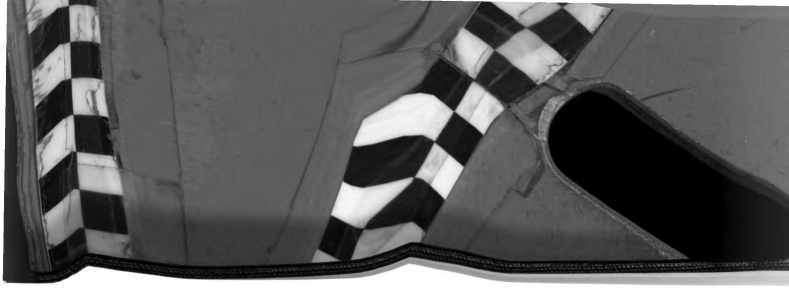

MOTHERS IN ISRAEL: WOMEN AND REVIVALISM IN FRONTIER OHIO, 1800-1840

By

Frank E. Johnson

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ABSTRACT

MOTHERS IN ISRAEL: WOMEN AND REVIVALISM
IN FRONTIER OHIO, 1800-1840

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By focusing on Ohio, and analyzing the roles of women, this essay seeks to better understand enthusiastic religion along the free trans-Appalachian frontier during 1800-1840. This essay posits that women's participation in religion was predicated on a rural, if not frontier-like, environment. Female Ohioans deftly used this physical setting to overcome obstacles to their spiritual well being and maximize their spiritual authority.

Women were active in all aspects of worship--both private and public. Private worship included: providing hospitality, leading family worship, being a minister's wife, greeting new settlers, organizing and financing new chruches, and caring for the sick. Women were also integral componenets of public worship, taking part in singing, testimonies, exhortation, praying, even preaching. Many pioneer women were venerated for being pious, authoritative, spiritual guideposts by which individuals could measure themselves--for being "mothers in Israel."

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many people contributed to this project and have left me with a debt I am unable to repay. I wish to thank the Michigan State University History Department for providing me a summer research fellowship. Thanks to Doug Waggott who shared his computer expertise and aided the completion of this thesis in many other ways. Dr. Justin L. Kestenbaum not only read this thesis, opened his office and computer system for my use, but also gave me access to his remarkable grasp of nineteenth-century America. This thesis would have never matured without the able advice and guidance of Dr. David T. Bailey, one who always offers more than seems possible to intellectually digest. Finally, special thanks to my wife Terri whose encouragement changed my life.

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Introduction

During the nineteenth century, the United States experienced two extended periods of religious enthusiasm, 1795-1835 and 1870-1915. These "awakenings" mirrored a broader "reexamination and redefinition of the nation's social and intellectual values." Theologically, American Protestantism completed an unfinished transition from Calvinism to Arminianism. There also was an "ecclesiastical shift" from somewhat staid vicarious worship to individual initiative and socially-oriented evangelicalism.[1] Ohio figured prominently in these sweeping changes, yet little is known of just how Ohio influenced this course.

Historians have overlooked the religious development of the free trans-Appalachian West--especially Ohio. In addition, the experiences of frontier women have only recently been given attention. Even so, women's roles in frontier religion remain largely uninvestigated. Many mistakenly believed that, prior to Reconstruction, women practiced religion solely within a domestic sphere. Rosemary Radford Ruether and Rosemary Skinner Keller note few challenged the assumption that women's "spiritual power was supposedly best exercised as a quiet influence on her husband and children within their home."[2] Barbara Welter and Ann Douglas also oppose this traditional interpretation. Instead, Welter and Douglas posit a "feminization" of antebellum religion; clergy and lay women used their position within the church to counter cultural change due to (among other things) the Industrial Revolution. Despite the efforts of historians such as Ruether, Keller, Welter, and

1. William G. McLoughlin, Jr., *Modern Revivalism* (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1959), pp. 3-11.

2. Rosemary Radford Ruether and Rosemary Skinner Keller, eds. *Women and Religion in America*, 3 volumes, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1981), I:viii.

Douglas, slaying this dragon of anachronism and bias is no easy task.[3] Quite simply, women were vital agents in the development of enthusiastic frontier religion. Moreover, women's religious roles were not only clearly defined, but women were an essential element of frontier culture--esteemed by the men and children with whom they lived.

Ohio enjoys a rich prehistory. For 15,000 years prior to European contact, six major culture complexes (Paleo-Indian, Archaic or Glacial Kame, Adena, Hopewell, Fort Ancient, and Whittlesey Focus) resided in the Ohio country. Unexplainably, natives abandoned their Ohio settlements in the later-half of the seventeenth century. The region remained uninhabited for nearly a century (approximately 1650-1750). Before their demise in the nineteenth century, Ohio was home to multiple tribes including Wyandots, Miami, Ottawa, Shawnee, Mingoes (mostly Senecas), among others.[4]

French exploration and trading sorties in the mid-seventeenth century brought the first Europeans to what is now Ohio. Aside from isolated Jesuit activity, Moravian missionaries initiated the first concentrated effort at Christianizing the native peoples; their work with the Lenni Lenape (Delaware) began in the early 1760s. At first enjoying a successful ministry, misfortune soon followed when nearly all of the Moravian converts were massacred in 1782. This profoundly effected the direction of frontier ministries. Whites, not natives, became the prime object evangelistic zeal. Regardless of mission activity, Indians faced the stark options of relocation or extermination. It is crucial to bear in mind that white emigrants did not stumble upon an empty wilderness, but conquered an extensive

3. Welter and Douglas disagree over the implications and proper interpretaion of this "feminization." Barbara Welter, *Dimity Convictions: The American Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1976); Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977). For good overviews of each argument, as well as the dispute between Welter and Douglas, see Lois W. Banner, "Women's History: Cuture and Feminization," *Reviews in American History* 6 (June 1978): 155-162; Darrel M. Robertson, "The Feminization of American Religion: An Examination of Recent Interpretations of Women and Religion in Victorian America," *Christian Scholar's Review* 8 (September 1978): 238-246.

4. For a recent and superb general history of Ohio see George W. Knepper, *Ohio and Its People* (Kent: The Kent State University Press, 1989). Material for this paragraph is from Ibid., pp. 9-23.

and highly structured complex of civilizations.[5]

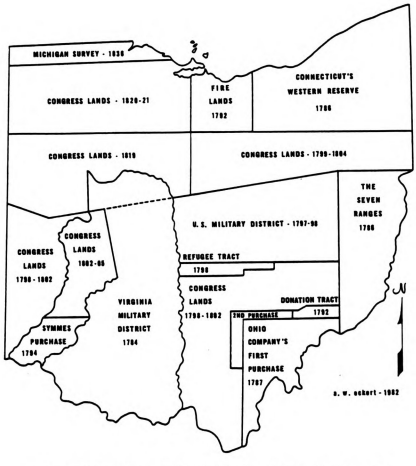
Until 1794 the prime concern for would-be settlers and investors in the Ohio country was pacifying the natives and securing title to their lands. With the exception of sparse

Map 1. "Approximate area of the Ohio Country." Source: Knepper, *Ohio and Its People*, p. 49.

5. Interestingly, the mission at Sandusky (home of the Wyandots) was initiated in 1816 by a free black, John Stewart. Later joined (1819) by the Methodist itinerant of considerable renown, James B. Finley, Stewart's contributions fell under Finley's shadow and, two centuries later, have yet to be studied. See William Warren Sweet, *Religion on the Frontier, 1783-1840,* IV, *The Methodists, A Collection of Source Materials* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946), p. 499. For additional overviews of Ohio's early history, see: Eugene Holloway Rosenboom and Francis Phelps Weisenburger, *A History of Ohio*, (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1934),1-66; and David Lindsey, *An Outline History of Ohio*, (Ann Arbor: Edwards Brothers, Inc., 1953), pp. 1-23.

populations in the Seven Ranges, the Ohio Company Purchase, the Virginia Military district, and the Symmes Purchase, land purchases and attempts at settlement prior to 1794 proved either unprofitable or impermanent. General (Mad) Anthony Wayne's victory at Fallen Timbers and the ensuing Treaty of Greenville, opened the floodgates of permanent settlement. Reaching the mandatory 5,000 free white males in 1798, Ohio broke away from the Northwest Territory to become the Ohio Territory. In February 1803, Ohio became the seventeenth state in the Union.

Ohio experienced a population explosion following the War of 1812. The war "removed for all time the *Indian menace* since the small number of Indians remaining were



NOTE: THE DOTTED LINE WHICH APPEARS IN THE UPPER VIRGINIA MILITARY DISTRICT AND THE CONTINUING SOLID LINES TO THE EASTERN AND WESTERN BORDERS OF THE STATE INDICATE THE ORIGINAL INDIAN/WHITE BOUNDARY LINE ESTABLISHED BY GENERAL ANTHONY WAYNE IN THE GREENVILLE TREATY OF 1795.

Map 2. "Partitioning of Ohio." Source: Allen W. Eckert, *Gateway to Empire*, The Winning of America Series, (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1983), p. 106.

confined to tiny reservations in the northwestern part of the state. Furthermore, Ohio citizens had cooperated in a national effort, and had gained an enhanced sense of nationhood."[6] Few could resist the magnetic pull of "Ohio fever." Already home to 231,000 in 1810, Ohio grew to 938,000 in 1830 and nearly two million by mid-century. Emigrants settled in clusters giving the state a variegated culture: New Englanders in the Western Reserve and Marietta region, Virginians in Scioto Valley, New Jerseyans between the Miami rivers, and Scotch-Irish and Pennsylvania German in the east-central region.[7]

Yet man is but one factor in the geography of Ohio; Ohio's distinct physiography proves that the environment, too, is an historical agent. Ohio's three principal physiographic sections house extensive river courses (some 44,000 miles), variable climate, and a diversity of natural ores and minerals. The Allegheny Plateau spans nearly half of the state, extending from the northeastern corner to mid-point on the southern border. This section is subdivided into glaciated and unglaciated areas, with the later totaling much of the state's southeastern quadrant. The Allegheny Plateau is most noted, especially in the unglaciated sections, for the virgin hardwood forest that once covered the land. The Lake Plains follow the shore line of Lake Erie across the breadth of the state. While only five to tens miles wide along the Pennsylvania border, this section broadens to between 50-80 miles wide near the Indiana border. This section also was home to the infamous Black Swamp which temporarily impeded westward migration during the early nineteenth century. The Till Plains comprise a third physiographic section, covering approximately one third of Ohio. The Till Plains are bordered by the Lake Plains to the north and the Allegheny Plateau to the east. Scored by glacial movement, rolling hills and unusually fertile soil are the key

6. Knepper, *Ohio and Its People*, p. 111.

7. John M. Barker, *History of Ohio Methodism* (Cincinnati: Curtis & Jennings, 1898), p. 24. This unique settlement pattern had a significant impact on missionary activity in Ohio. See William Warren Sweet, *Religion on the American Frontier*, Vol. II, *The Presbyterians, 1783-1840 A Collection of Source Materials* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1936), pp. 37, 60.

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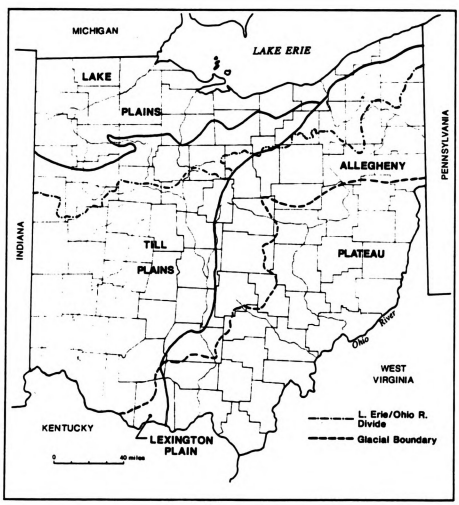
Recognizing that Ohio was "settled" several millennia before any European canoed "la belle riviere" (the beautiful river) or traversed its environs, the remainder of this essay will concentrate on the period of settlement and development between 1800 and 1840. During these four decades, Ohio matured from frontier region to pioneer state. In the frontier period, 1788-1815, survival was the order of the day. As the pioneer stage progressed,



Map 3. "Physiographic Features." Source: Knepper, *Ohio and its People*, p. 5.

8. Ohio has one further physiographic province, the Lexington Plain, but this minute region differs little from the unglaciated portion of the Allegheny Plateau. Unlike the other three sections, the Lexington Plain seems to have had little bearing on the course of Ohio history. Knepper, *Ohio and Its People*, pp. 1-9; Rosenboom and Weisenburger, *A History of Ohio*, pp. 1-9.

1815-1850, Ohio increasingly commanded national attention--leading the nation in horse and sheep production. Though mechanized equipment began to appear on Ohio farms only in the 1840s, by 1850 Ohio was one of the Union's major grain and livestock markets.

Yet, in terms of the early nineteenth century, Ohio was much more than a developing region. Antebellum Ohio was an oasis in the Old Northwest--the prime conduit to the West. Few ventured into Michigan or Illinois until the advent of steam navigation in the mid-1830s. Much of Indiana remained unsettled through the 1850s, either because of popular misconceptions or claim disputes. When compared to the settlement of its neighbor states, Ohio apppears a veritable land of milk and honey. Provided one could get to Ohio, once there, little seemingly could hinder success. In addition, between Lake Erie, the Ohio River, the Black Swamp, and the foothills of the Appalachians, Ohio was something of a safe haven from the rest of the country. Rachel Lockwood's experience illustrates Ohio's appeal to would-be pioneers. Not only did migrating to Ohio in 1834 enable Lockwood's mother to purchase land of her own (which she was unable to do back East), but Lockwood herself found a unique contentment directly related to her sense of place.

> I wish you could come and see for yourself our circumstances and things as they really are, for unless you do it is impossible to believe the advantages which this country does possess. . . . How very strange it is that when a place becomes home it unfolds new beauty to us and we often indulge the ardent hope that our friends will one day dispense with their prejudices against this country and and come to remain for themselves.[9]

Pre-1850 Ohio represents something of a cultural clearing house, entertaining migrants from all sectors of the country. In short, Ohio was a home to a diverse population (often having direct ties with settlements in the East), experienced rapid settlement, and was a launching pad for migration further west. These facts make it all the more surprising that most scholars overlook Ohio both as a vital link in the history of the American West, and as home to remarkable religious development.[10]

9. Rachel R. Lockwood, "A Pioneer Letter," *Ohio Archaeological and Historical Society Publications* 36 (1927): 153-155.

10. Knepper makes the distinction between frontier and pioneer Ohio: see *Ohio and Its People*, p. 120.

Helen Yeager is one of the few who has studied the religious development of antebellum Ohio. She claims that all denominations "in early Ohio

> bore the stamp of the frontier, some to struggle and die, others to thrive and prosper, but each to fill some spiritual need in the lives of the frontier settlers.[11]

Yeager maintains that "generally speaking, frontier religion was emotional and revivalistic, even the more staid bodies as the Presbyterians and Congregationalists were revivalistic in their emphasis."[12] One can apply Knepper's frontier-pioneer distinction to the evolution of religion in Ohio. "Frontier" revivalism was frenetic and hyper-emotional. "Pioneer" revivalism retained the spiritual intensity of the frontier stage but (usually) with more sophistication. Initially, frontier religion was somewhat out-of-control; later revivals were closely managed. Alfred Brunson, a Methodist itinerant in the Western Reserve, dates this transition between 1823-1824. Brunson claims that, rather than "promoting the interests of religion in the people," the emphasis of revivalism became "disciplin[ing] and train[ing] the Church."[13]

Ohio was home to myriad religious bodies. Though such diverse groups as Mormons, Millerites, Shakers, Quakers, Disciples of Christ, Amish, Mennonites, Moravians, Catholics, and Zoarites worshiped in Ohio, this essay focuses primarily on Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian, and Congregational churches.[14] Unlike Baptists (and to a degree

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11. Helen F. Yeager, "The Rise, Spread, and Influence of Religion in Ohio from 1783 to 1815" (M. A. Thesis, University of Cincinnati, 1942), p. 26.

12. Ibid., p. 54.

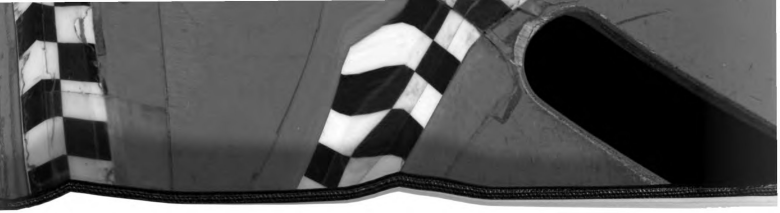
13. Alfred A. Brunson, *A Western Pioneer: or, Incidents of the Life and Times of Rev. Alfred Brunson*, 2 volumes (Cincinnati: Methodist Book Concern, 1872-1879), pp. 225, 282. Recognizing that revivalism was constantly evolving through 1840 (and beyond), the terms frontier and pioneer will be used interchangeably throughout the remainder of this essay. The focus here is not how revivalism changed, but what effect this change had on women's participation in frontier religion.

14. For a general overview see *Ohio's Religious Groups of Historical Interest* (Columbus: Columbus Blank Book Company, 1965); Knepper, *Ohio and Its People*, 168-178; and William C. Pautz, "The Social and Economic History of the Western Reserve, 1796-1860," (Ph.D. Diss., Columbia University, 1939).

Congregationalists), who were hindered by a lack of denominational superstructure, and Presbyterians who suffered from just the opposite, Methodists figure prominently in this essay due to (1) their meteoric growth rate, and (2) the unique ability of lay members to foil the institutionalization of their denomination. In other words, speedy growth prevented Methodism from breaking free from its grass-roots foundation--a fact which vexed many a politically minded parson.[15]

By focusing on Ohio, and analyzing the roles of women, this essay seeks to understand enthusiastic religion along the free trans-Appalachian frontier during 1800-1840. This essay also attempts a novel perspective; rather than analyzing women's social roles, or investigating the linkage between religious and social or economic change, this essay focuses on women's participation in religion and how that participation was predicated on a rural, if not frontier-like, environment. Female Ohioans surely were not unique in their ability to involve themselves in religious organizations. Women had been vital components of worship and evangelism since the seventeenth century. Moreover, female participation in American religion has something of a pan-regional element. The development of religion is directly related to the geography of a given area (especially significant in Ohio--the forest); female Ohioans deftly used this physical setting to overcome obstacles to their spiritual well being and maximize their spiritual authority. Though official Church policy denied women equal opportunity, the same structure quietly made allowance for their participation in frontier revivalism. Because of this institutional discrimination, many women transferred their energies to moral reform. The distinction between moral reform and female ministry was fine indeed. Though many female Ohioans became leading advocates of national reform, their initiation into reform was commonly through the Church. This essay restricts itself to women's involvement in, and contributions to, frontier revivalism. The connections between revivalsim and reform are reserved for a later study. Many pioneer women were venerated

15. Though but one of a host of denominations in Ohio at this time, Methodism experienced the most dramatic growth registering 321 members in 1800, 51,460 in 1833, and 107,062 by 1843. See Barker, *History of Methodism*, p. 123.



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Chapter 1

Private Worship

One irony of antebellum America is that women, though constituting the majority of church membership, had no voice in the official business of the church.[1] Women organized and maintained many frontier churches, yet the mainline denominations, Methodists, Presbyterians, and Baptists, clung to I Corinthians 14:34--"women should remain silent." Without the aid of female pioneers, much of the frontier would have remained spiritually barren. Though disfranchised by a male hierarchy, these women were not completely powerless. Disguised as service, pioneer women operated vital evangelistic ministries which directly effected the development of religion in frontier communities. These service "ministries," or methods of alternative evangelism, were: hospitality, leading family worship, being a minister's wife, greeting new settlers, organizing and financing churches, and caring for the sick.

Most frontier women put faith into action through the ministry of hospitality. Quite simply, hospitality entailed sharing with others--but often at substantial sacrifice. Women who practiced hospitality customarily provided food and shelter to neighbors or travelers. Yet such a ministry could include much more such as giving counsel, engaging others in religious-oriented conversation, etc. Hospitality, like each service ministry outlined in this chapter, was a home-based ministry--a means of "private" worship. This is not to imply

1. Quakers were the one exception to this rule--but this status is open to question. Marjorie Procter-Smith notes that Shaker women who migrated west enjoyed greater religious freedom than when in the East, but worship remained a controlled activity which clearly set women apart from men. While historically considered to be one of the most liberated religious groups of the nineteenth century, even Shakers relegated women to second-class status. See *Women in Shaker Community and Worship*, Studies in Women and Religion, v. 16 (Lewiston and Queenston: Edwin Mellon Press, 1985), pp. 56-67, 94-96, 98, 120-121, 139-141.

that women were confined to their homes; in fact just the opposite was true. By practicing hospitality, women could freely travel (to the homes of others) within their communities and throughout surrounding regions. It would seem that the ministry of hospitality (and private worship in general) was as much a Christian duty as an opportunity to "get out of the cabin."

William Forrest Sprague notes that frontier women were expected to entertain and attend to the needs of any who knocked at their doors. Common visitors included: travelers in route to a new homestead, land speculators, and surveying parties.[2] One frequent guest was the itinerant preacher. Many a pioneer home also doubled as a "preacher's house." Settling in the Western Reserve, Sally Hanson gained notoriety for being "active in church work, and in making [her] home a pleasant stopping place for the traveling preacher."[3] Hospitality was not limited to itinerant ministers. In addition to caring for those simply "passing through," women also invited guests home following Sunday services. Whether serving dinner, tea, or merely engaging in conversation, women such as Emeline Carlton practiced hospitality in order to spread the gospel.[4]

Occasionally, caring for uninvited guests severely taxed a family's provisions. Many

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2. It is interesting to note that some passers-by were disenchanted pioneers returning east. Nathaniel Dike, a lawyer from Haverhill, Massachusetts, moved to Steubenville, Ohio in 1816. In route he encountered "several families from New Jersey and New York returning from the Western Country. They were fatigued, impoverished, and sick almost to death, of the Ohio. They were anxious to get home, to tell their friends of *the truth*, and to dispel the delusions which led them to fancy the Western World, an earthly paradise--Altho' I could not but compassionate [sic] their sufferings, I was amused at the *good earnest* with which they expressed themselves. They said they would rather live on one meal a day in their native state than on 3 in Ohio." Dwight L. Smith, ed., "Nine Letters of Nathaniel Dike On the Western Country, 1816-1818," *The Ohio Historical Quarterly* 67 (July 1958): 196. See also William Forrest Sprague, *Women and the West: A Short Social History* (Boston: The Christopher Publishing House, 1940); reprint, American Women: Images and Realities (New York: Arno Press, 1972), p. 44.

3. Gertrude Van Renesselear ed., *Memorial to the Pioneer Women of the Western Reserve*, 2 volumes (Cleveland: The Women's Department of the Cleveland Centennial Commission, 1896-1924); reprint, (Jefferson, Ohio: Ashtabula County Genealogical Society, Inc., 1981), 1:95.

4. Wickham, *Memorial to the Pioneer Women*, 1:651.

women struggled simultaneously to practice hospitality and balance the family diet. According to Henry Howe, some circuit riders were less affectionately known as "chicken eaters." "Brother Brannen" of eastern Ohio was such a character--one "especially favored with gastronomic powers." At first humorous, the following anecdote is a telling example of how hardship might also accompany hospitality. Brannen once called on a popular hostess and, while waiting to be fed, Brannen proceeded to care for his horse. Hearing the women's son crying, Brannen found him hiding "behind a corn-crib with a chicken under his arm." Brannen asked the child to explain his tears. "'I am crying' he replied, 'because mother sent me out for this chicken, and what between the hawks and the circuit riders it is the last chicken left on the place.'"[5]

While survival required economic production from every family member, frontier women were especially burdened. Mildred Covey Fry catalogs the household production duties of female pioneers.

> Among their responsibilities were: milking the cows; cooking and baking; preparing flax; spinning, weaving, and making clothes for large families; planting and caring for small vegetable gardens; making soap and candles; washing and caring for clothes; cleaning houses; and the rearing of children. The frontier women by necessity assumed all the roles of wife, mother, and housekeeper; counselor, and educator, religious instructor, and doctor; and craftsman, weaver, and farmer.[6]

It is interesting to note that pioneer women enjoyed a small compensation for their labor: they produced many of the family's finished products.7

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5. Henry Howe, *Historical Collections of Ohio*, 2 volumes (Cincinnati: C.J. Krehbiel & Co., 1900), 1:892. If Benjamin Lakin's journal is any indication, itinerants could easily dismiss such sacrifice: [dated: February 4, 1804] "This morning I was disagreeably situated; the woman where I stayed had been displeased the evening before, and she still shewed [sic] something of the old bone; and the children was so noisy that I could neither read nor meditate; I felt the effects of it in preaching." William Warren Sweet, *Religion on the Frontier, 1783-1840,* IV, *The Methodists, A Collection of Source Materials* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946), p. 229.

6. Mildred Covey Fry, "Women on the Ohio Frontier: The Marietta Area," *Ohio History* 90 (Winter 1981): 60. For a romanticized, but informative primary account of pioneer life see: Martin Welker, *Farm Life in Central Ohio Sixty Years Ago* (Wooster: Clapper's Print, 1892).

7. Sandra Shaw Osbourn goes beyond pointing out the negative side of female

Entertaining guests was something of a juggling act. For example, early in the nineteenth century, a group of neighbor women descended upon one female pioneer of Erie County. While pleased to have these visitors, for her to offer the usual fare of "tea and cakes" required detailed preparations. Such impromptu visits naturally wrecked havoc on the daily routine--but a Christian hostess could not deny her duty. Having only one fire-proof kettle, this pioneer first fried pork for grease, prepared some dough, made biscuits, then fried the biscuits. Cleaning the kettle after it had cooled, she then used it to draw water for the tea, so the group could enjoy "a very sociable dish of tea."[8] What is more striking than the fact that women endured such trying conditions, is that they continued to participate in this ministry in spite of these conditions.

Women who practiced the ministry of hospitality most likely honed their skills through family worship. Frontier settlement required that the home be the locus of spiritual matters. Established religion was hindered by the relative isolation of most Ohioans--a factor which significantly contributed to the success of camp meetings. Naturally, rural life did not preclude corporate worship; instead, such worship required sufficient capital to sustain a building campaign. Therefore, in the absence of a permanent facility, the home served as both domicile and church.[9] This worked to the advantage of women, for within the home, females were expected to promote piety.

Missionaries canvassed settlements, commonly the only "official" representative of established churches back East, but insufficient personnel and meager financing limited

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production and demonstrates their expertise at transforming raw materials into finished products. See Women in "Ohio Valley Frontier Culture" (M. A. Thesis, The University of Florida, 1963), pp. 26-38.

8. Harry Forrest Lupold, "Women on the Ohio Frontier," *The Western Reserve Magazine* 9 (May-June, 1982): 53.

9. This corresponds with two transitions in revivalism: the shift from improvised outdoor camp meetings to highly structured and managed affairs, and from rural camp meetings to community-based protracted meetings. Women's participation in camp meetings is addressed in Ch. 3. For the transition in frontier revivalism, see Charles A. Johnson, *The Frontier Camp Meeting: Religion's Harvest Time* (Dallas, Texas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1955).

their ability to keep pace with western settlement.[10] After five years of labor for the Connecticut Missionary Society, Joseph Badger had his salary retroactively reduced--by one year--from seven to six dollars. Unable to support his wife and six children, Badger left the Western Reserve the following year.[11] Individual households almost single handedly bore the responsibility of infusing religion into pioneer life. Within the home, women, seemingly as often as men, provided spiritual guidance and led family devotions. In short, frontier women "saw to it that religion was not neglected."[12]

William Forrest Sprague aptly describes the experiences of many pioneer women:

> almost incessant work, loneliness due to a husband's absence or indifference, constant danger of attack by Indians, wild beasts, or ruffians, and homesickness.[13]

Pioneers also faced constant battle with disease.[14] Unlike O. E. Rolvaag's Beret Hansa,

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10. Missionary activity varied by denomination. Baptist ministers commonly migrated with their congregations. Methodists created circuits. Presbyterians concentrated on established settlements or pioneers already claiming some Presbyterian heritage. Shakers and Disciples of Christ gained many of their converts by stealing parishioners from the mainline denominations. See William Warren Sweet, *Religion on the American Frontier*, Vol. II, *The Presbyterians, 1783-1840 A Collection of Source Material* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1936), chapters 2, 3, and pp. 82-83; _____. *Religion on the American Frontier*, Vol. I, *The Baptists, 1783-1830 A Collection of Source Material* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1931), chapters 2 and 3; and ._____. *The Methodists* chapter 3, and p. 40.

11. W. E. Barton, "Early Ecclesiastical History of the Western Reserve," in *Papers of the Ohio Church History Society*, 10 volumes 10 volumes (n. p., 1899), 1:25-27. Barton notes that in 1805 the Connecticut Missionary Society collected $21,196.94, but expended a paltry $2,517.49 for missionary salaries.

12. Fry, "Women on the Ohio Frontier," p. 70.

13. Sprague, *Women and the West*, p. 51. The Indian "menace" was resolved in the War of 1812; most of the beasts which roamed Ohio--poisonous snakes, bears, and the over abundance of small game--were depleted by the mid-1830s. See also George W. Knepper, *Ohio and Its People* (Kent: The Kent State University Press, 1989), pp. 111, 121-123.

14. During the frontier period, doctors were called upon to treat "outbreaks of small pox and fevers. Venomous snake and insect bites were commonplace, as were burns from the open fires. Extremities were often severed or mutilated through careless use of knives and axes . . . ." Marilyn Van Voorhis Wendler, "Doctors and Diseases on the Ohio Frontier," *Ohio History* 89 (Spring 1980): 223. According to Nathaniel Dike, these conditions had improved little by 1817. See Smith, "Letters of Nathaniel Dike," p. 217. Pioneer correspondence emphasizes the prevalence of sickness in frontier Ohio. See especially "The Edward Dromgoole Letters," Sweet, *The Methodists*, pp. 123-201.

many pioneer women eagerly ventured to the "edge of civilization" and found happiness there. Rolvaag's dichotomy of fragile femininity and the rigors of frontier survival suffers from overkill, but all pioneers--like Beret Hansa--were potential victims of depression and mental breakdown from frontier isolation.[15]

Until adequate roads and canals improved the ability of farmers to access distant markets in the late 1830s, women were often home alone while husbands secured game, visited the miller, or transported various home-grown commodities to market. In fact, pioneer women were regularly left to defend frontier settlements.[16] "It was often times imperative for a women to be able to fire a gun, either in defense of her life and those of her children, or to obtain food when the husband and father was absent from home."[17] Surprisingly, Cleveland pioneer, Hannah Huntington, demonstrates that women in frontier "communities" faced many of the same trials as their counterparts in rural regions. Settled in 1796, Cleveland remained surrounded by "hostile Indians, dense forests, malaria-infested swamplands, wild bears, [and] loneliness" in the early 1800s (the city's first newspaper was not founded until 1819--one year after Huntington died). Hannah's husband, Samuel, preoccupied with creating a new state, left to her the responsibility of nearly all farm and family matters. Not only was he typically absent, while Governor of Ohio, Samuel did not even write to his wife for nearly two years.[18]

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15. O. E. Rolvaag, *Giants in the Earth* (New York: Harper & Row, 1927).

16. Sprague, *Women and the West*, 46-47; two accounts which compliment this theme of isolation are John Frost, *Pioneer Mothers of the West; of, Daring and Heroic Deeds of American Women* (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1869); Mary S. Logan, The Part Taken by Women in American History, (Wilmington, DE: The Perry-Nalle Publishing Co., 1912); reprint, American Women: Images and Realities (New York: Arno Press, 1972).

17. P. P. Cherry, *The Western Reserve and Early Ohio* (Akron: R. L. Fouse, 1921), p. 92.

18. Richard D. Klyver, *They Also Serve: Twelve Biographies of Notable Cleveland Women from 1800 to 1985* (Solon, OH: The Evans Printing Company, 1986), pp. 10-13, 20-21. Harlan Hatcher notes the centrality of loneliness to frontier settlement. See Harlan Hatcher, *The Western Reserve; The Story of New Connecticut in Ohio* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1949). pp. 73-74. Kenneth Lottich asserts the pioneer women served their frontier "sisters" in a support network to counter the phsychologically

While abandonment was but one more hardship to endure, being even a temporary head of household gave women access to responsibility and authority usually beyond their reach. Prudence Gough is an example of this. In addition to ministering through hospitality, she also led family devotions. Whether or not she led the service, all who lodged at her home were required to attend these "family" gatherings. "It mattered not who were there; . . . if there was no male person present who could lead the devotions, Mrs. Gough read a chapter in the Bible, gave out a hymn, . . . after which she would engage in prayer."[19]

Family and personal devotions were serious concerns to the religiously inclined pioneer. Family devotions, in addition to meal-time prayers and private devotions, were held both morning and night. "If the head of the family was absent, his wife took his place."[20] Family devotions were laced with revivalistic potential. Even though exhortation was not part of the family devotion routine, pioneer women could shape hymns, scriptures, and prayer into a direct and personal a message of salvation. Women undoubtedly welcomed the opportunity to serve as spiritual leaders, as well as the genuine opportunity to engage in evangelism.

Serving as a minister's wife presented a third means of Christian service to frontier women. Leonard I. Sweet's *The Minister's Wife* is virtually the sole scholarly publication on this subject. Sifting an impressive quantity of primary and secondary documents, Sweet uses

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debilitating effects of isolation. Kenneth V. Lottich, *New England Transplanted* (Dallas: Royal Publishing Company, 1964), p. 114.

19. Abel Stevens, *The Women of Methodism: Its Foundresses, Susanna Wesley, The Countess of Huntingdon, and Barbara Heck* (New York: Carlton & Lanahan, 1869); reprint, Women in American Protestant Religion, 1800-1930, Carolyn De Swarte Gifford ed., (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1987), p. 241. Though Gough never lived on the Ohio frontier, she is an example of how women forced their way into the religious hierarchy. Those who migrated west surely were aware of such activity. Sandra Shaw Osbourn asserts that female Ohioans modeled this practice. See Osbourn, "Women in Ohio Valley Frontier Culture," p. 89.

20. Samuel W. Williams, *Pictures of Early Methodism in Ohio* (Cincinnati: Jennings and Graham, 1909), p. 60.

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four "models" to assess nineteenth-century ministers' wives.[21]

> The Companion, a ministering angel who held up her husband's hands in his sacred calling; the Sacrificer, who clasped her hands in pious resignation, asked little from her husband, financially or emotionally, and "hindered him not in his work" by staying out of his way and raising the family on her own; the Assistant, who became her husband's right-arm, sharing many pastoral responsibilities and functioning as an extension of his ministry; and the Partner, who ministered with both her own hands, developed a ministry alongside her husband and often served as the pastor's pastor.[22]

Throughout antebellum Ohio, minister's wives combined all four of Sweet's categories. No one model typifies the experiences of these evangelical pioneers for many were at once companions, sacrificers, assistants, and partners.[23]

Taking part in public worship was one of the elemental ways ministers' wives could labor with and for their husbands. Minister's wives not only sang, testified, exhorted, and prayed, but also took responsibility for catechizing the public and making "pastoral" visits.[24]

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21. Sweet seems disinterested in time and region as causative factors of change. He also neglects the professionalization of ministry and its incumbent influence on ministers and their wives. Despite these limitations, Sweet's work is an important addition to the historiography of American religion. The documents consulted for this chapter confirm most of Sweet's conclusions, but differed on two significant counts. Most importantly, Sweet's typological analysis breaks down when applied to minister's wives in Ohio. Sweet ignores his own caution and implicitly stresses the sequential significance of each model. His work, periodized chronologically, narrates the step-by-step liberation of nineteenth-century women. In Ohio, there appears to have been no progression from one model to another. Second, Sweet somewhat cavalierly disregards the belief system to which both minister's wives and local parishioners adhered. Leonard I. Sweet, *The Minister's Wife: Her Role in Nineteenth-Century American Evangelism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983).

22. Sweet, *The Minister's Wife*, p. 3.

23. Compare with Julie Roy Jeffrey, "Ministry through Marriage: Methodist Clergy Wives on the Trans-Mississippi Frontier," in *Women in New Worlds: Historical Perspectives on the Wesleyan Tradition*, ed. Rosemary Skinner Keller, Hilah F. Thomas and Lousie L. Queen (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981), pp 143-160.

24. There were four types of visitation during the nineteenth century. Family visitation required personal interviews with each member of a household to determine their spiritual well being. Evangelistic visitation was a "community dragnet" to boost attendance at revival or church services. Pastoral visitation was a ministry to the infirm and aged. Social visitation was specifically designed for the pastor to foster personal relationships with his congregation. Leonard Sweet maintains that "the clergy were most heavily involved in the first two types of calls, and their wives in types two, three, and four." Sweet, *The Minister's Wife*, p. 99.

While marrying a minister might have increased women's spiritual authority, this gain often was offset by heightened social criticism. Unlike the sense of community which characterize acts of hospitality, securing congregational approval was no easy task for the minister's wife. Surprisingly, female parishioners served as jury and judge of this process: rather than rallying behind the minister's wife, these lay women often hazed her unreasonably. Writing in her journal shortly after her marriage to a Methodist itinerant, Helen R. Cutler braces herself for this inevitable treatment.

> You have entered upon a new scene of life. Instead of looking for approval every-where [sic], you must expect to have your conduct scanned; instead of having all your wishes gratified, you must now study to please others, and may not relax your efforts even though they are often unsuccessful and unappreciated. You have heretofore lived carelessly, as whim or inclination prompted; you must now be ever ready for your duty, though sacrifice attend it; you are not your own any longer.[25]

More than once female parishioners grilled Cutler without solicitation; her performance as the local minister's wife was under constant scrutiny. In one instance, Cutler was reprimanded for failing to give enough attention to one of over one hundred guests attending a function in her home.[26] Why were women so prone to mistreat one another? It is probable that only a minority of women abused their minister's wives in this fashion (and other leading ladies of the church also were likely to receive such treatment: e.g., missionary society executives, Sunday school teachers, etc.). Prominent Christian women were victims of circumstance; by right of their position, they were licensed with spiritual authority denied most other women. The obstinate female parishioner might have been part of a larger drama in which disenfranchised females vented their anger and voiced their desperation. Bitterness might have been a form of social protest against an intransigent husband or a personal situation which precluded involvement in the other avenues of ministry outlined in this chapter. While the decision to marry a minister was a covenant to

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25. Helen R. Cutler, *Jottings from Life; or, Passages from the Diary of an Itinerant's Wife* (Cincinnati: Poe and Hitchcock, 1864), p. 35, emphasis mine.

26. Cutler, *Jottings from Life*, pp. 61, 102-108.

accommodate the pros and cons of public service (and as Cutler's experience demonstrates, a sacrificial willingness to be ritualistically punished for the welfare of sister believers), the issue was ministry not marital status. Minister's wives, like lay women, envisioned themselves as fulfilling a divine commission.[27]

Through the donation party, local parishioners provided foodstuffs and household articles to their pastoral family. Sweet maintains that these "parties" served little purpose beyond humiliating minister's wives and indicating their financial instability. According to Sweet, the only positive attribute of donation parties was the opportunity for "socializing."[28] Such a perspective ignores what could be the prime motivation for such a party: putting the New Testament into practice--loving one's neighbor. If a religious impulse was not the chief impetus for donation parties, it surely was a key factor. For example, Mary Orne Tucker relished donation parties. The following is taken from her journal dated February 25, 1846.

> A "donation party " took possession of our humble tenement this evening, numbering some three hundred persons, bringing a profusion of eatables, besides some presents of a more substantial character. It was a most happy meeting of true and congenial souls, and the kind remembrances of these beloved brethren and sisters were gratefully appreciated by Mr. Tucker and myself. Such pleasant occasions are like the oasis in the desert, refreshing to the wearied traveller in his master's vineyard. . . . It is not because of the temporal benefits conferred upon the preacher and his family by these friendly gatherings that I prize them so highly. I value them for that blessed exhibition of love and friendship which is far more precious than earthy gifts, and more enduring that the perishable things of time and sense.[29]

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27. Julie Roy Jeffrey overlooks this point; she posits that women married ministers to augment social status and geographic mobility. See Jeffrey, "Ministry through Marriage," pp. 143-160. On the other hand, Lori D. Ginzburg's study of Oberlin is unique in that she takes into account marriage as one end to evangelism for women. Ginzburg, "Women in an Evangelical Community: Oberlin, 1835-1850," *Ohio History* 89 (Winter 1980): 78-88.

28. Sweet, *The Minister's Wife*, p. 75.

29. Mary Orne Tucker, *Itinerant Preaching in the Early Days of Methodism, By a Pioneer Preacher's Wife* ed. Thomas W, Tucker (Boston: B. B. Russell, 1872); reprint in The Nineteenth-Century American Methodist Itinerant Preacher's Wife, Edited and with an Introduction by Carolyn De Swarte Gifford (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1988), pp. 137-138. For an interesting account of womens' donations to a Methodist parsonage in the late-eighteenth century, rural New York, see J. B. Wakeley, *Lost Chapters Recovered from the Early History of American Methodism* (New York: n. p., 1858), pp. 220-226.

Herrick M. Eaton, who compiled a manual for ministers' wives in 1851, noted that ministers and their families were insufficiently provided for and that a minority of church members were marked by a "penurious spirit." But Eaton also commented that "a majority of the Church [keeps] a benevolent eye upon the interests of our Zion; and many are ready to 'give as the Lord has prospered them.'"[30] A memorial to "Mrs. Perkins" is helpful in that it demonstrates this spiritual aspect of donation parties, and the fact that such an activity could be an individual act of sacrificial service.

> She was a woman of intelligence, a devout Christian, and her religion was something that was real and practical. While looking carefully after the interests of her own family, she always made her pastor's family her especial care, providing for their temporal wants if she found anything lacking.[31]

Finally, a minister's wife could have a direct influence on her husband's ministry. "The role of the minister's wife related directly to the definition of the role of the minister."[32] Sarah Perkins is a case in point. Sarah "urged" her husband to "preach temperance sermons." Word of this a spread and one of Perkin's members paid a call to dissuade him. Thus confronted, Perkins resolved to preach as his wife suggested whether his congregation liked it or not--and if they did not, they were to find a new pastor.[33] Not only did ministers' wives guide their husband's ministry (if from behind the scenes) they also served as guardians of public morality. While her husband was preoccupied with either preparing or preaching sermons, Sandra Dow kept one eye on their parishioners and the other "on the rowdies."[34]

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30. Herrick M. Eaton, *The Itinerant's Wife: Her Qualifications, Duties, Trials, and Rewards* (New York: Lane and Scott, 1851); reprint in *The Nineteenth-Century American Methodist Itinerant Preacher's Wife*, Edited and with an Introduction by Carolyn De Swarte Gifford (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1988), p. 81.

31. Wickham, *Memorial to the Pioneer Women*, 1:32.

32. Lois A. Boyd and Douglas Brackenridge, *Presbyterian Women in America: Two Centuries of a Quest for Status,* Contributions to the Study of Religion, v. 9 (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1983), p. x.

33. Martha Emily Rose, *The Western Reserve of Ohio and some of its Pioneers, Places, and Women's Clubs* (Cleveland: Euclid Printing Company, 1914), pp. 255-256.

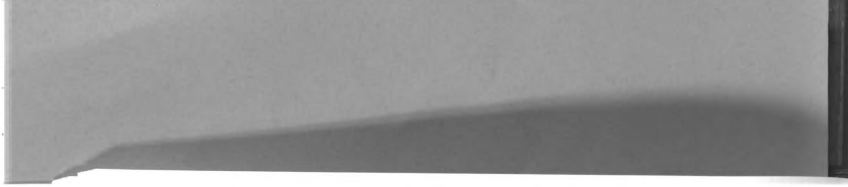
Providing hospitality, leading family worship, and being a minister's wife were the principal forms of "private worship." Yet at least three other home-based ministries deserve mention: greeting new settlers, organizing and financing churches, and caring for the sick. Greeting new settlers proved an important outreach ministry. Many pioneer families arrived at their wilderness homes only to find no "home" for shelter. Commonly, those wishing to migrate designated a family member to scout a suitable site for homesteading, and erect as best a shelter as time allowed before returning. Soon thereafter, the family would pull stakes and venture west. Elizabeth Blackman's initiation to frontier housing surely speaks for the experience of many women. In 1808, having traveled from Chester, Massachusetts to Aurora, Ohio, and seeing the lean-to her husband billed as a home, she berated her husband: "Elijah, if I had seen this wild and desolate country as you did, I never should have brought my family here!" Though the Blackman homestead was in an remote area, they were greeted by other settlers. This pioneer welcome-wagon replenished foodstuffs and provided a sympathetic shoulder for Elizabeth to cry upon.[35] Undoubtedly, women were the principle agents of this missionary enterprise. For those migrants who did not have the luxury of preselecting a claim site, frontier churches also served as shelters for newly arrived settlers until suitable lodgings could be arranged.[36]

Garrettsville is somewhat distinguished in that two women, Mrs. John Garrett and Mrs. Marlinda Mason Hazen, helped finance and construct meeting houses there. Mrs. Lucinda Young personally lead the drive to organize a Baptist church in Youngstown. In the 1850s, Fanny Willes of Bedford built a church for "union meetings;" this church was known as "Mrs. Willes' Church" until she donated it to the M. E. Church.[37] "Aunt Easter,"

34. It should be noted, though, that Dow was not without her faults. "Her one weakness was smoking, and she puffed her clay pipe so vigorously that she seemed to smoke for exercise and go to work afterwards for rest." Wickham, *Memorial to the Pioneer Women*, 1:466.

35. Wickham, *Memorial to the Pioneer Women*, 1:442. See also note 18.

36. A. O. Fuller, "Early Annals of the Austingburg Church," in *Papers of the Ohio Church History Society* 2:67n2.



sister of Deacon Marimon Cook, helped organize the Burton Congregational church in 1808. Her "gentle firmness left an abiding influence for good morals and spirituality" on the residents of Burton. For the first five years, this church "had no regular pastor, [but] public worship was maintained." The church sponsored Thursday and Saturday evening prayer meetings in addition to Sunday services. "For many years," these prayer meetings usually convened at Marimon or Hiram Cook's house. It is highly probable that "Aunt Easter" played a leading, if unrecognized, role--through her brothers--in establishing Congregationalism in Burton.[38] In short, women were instrumental contributors to frontier religion by "choosing places of worship and helping construct them, providing land for church use, and establishing Sunday schools."[39]

Caring for the sick presented Christian women yet another opportunity to share their faith. The key characteristic of frontier illness was its unpredictability. A pioneer suffering from ague (a malaria-related fever) could be working one moment and immobilized with chills and fever the next.[40] Due to a lack of--and in retrospect, often because of--professional care, illness and death were bedfellows.[41] Lois Scharf claims that "in sparsely populated communities, women provided almost all medical care for their families, and aided their neighbors as well. Homemade concoctions were prepared and prescribed for illnesses that ranged from common ailments to typhoid, diphtheria and smallpox."[42] In the

37. Wickham, *Memorial to the Pioneer Women*, 1:171-172, 174, 385, 676-677.

38. Elwell O. Mead, "History of the Congregational Church of Burton," in *Papers of the Ohio Church History Society*, 2:46, 48, 65.

39. Mary D. Irvine and Alice L. Eastwood, *Pioneer Women of the Presbyterian Church, United States* (Richmond, VA: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1923), pp. 15-17.

40. Though seldom fatal, ague was especially problematic on two counts: (1) its complications--repeated fevers, chills, and sweating--could easily exhaust the most stalwart, and (2) ague irregularly (but tied to seasonal change) alternated from active to dormant, a characteristic which obviously impeded recovery. Wendler, "Doctors and Diseases," pp. 237-238. See Cutler, *Jottings from Life*, pp. 164-165; Wickham, *Memorial to the Pioneer Women*, 2:775, 2:784, 792-793.

41. See Wendler, "Doctors and Diseases," especially pp. 233-234.

absence of physicians, women could take advantage of this additional opportunity to fulfill their Christian duty.[43] In spite of high mortality rates among frontier populations, I can find no instance when a minister was summoned along with a doctor. Provided that often women were the primary care-givers in frontier settlements, is it not possible that when a female "physician" responded to a medial need, one gained the bonus of spiritual assistance as well?

Whether taking part in hospitality, leading family worship, being a minister's wife, greeting new settlers, organizing and financing churches, or caring for the sick, between 1800 and 1840 female pioneers were the backbone of Ohio religion. Women were forced to disguise these ministries as private worship and Christian services in order to legitimately function within the church superstructure. Nevertheless, these women linked their labor to a divine commission; they, too, were going unto the ends of the earth--or so it seemed. Success at these private, home-based ministries translated into greater participation within public worship. Leonard Sweet notes:

> It was pious females who were summoned when someone new moved into the community, when someone was sick, impoverished, in trouble, in need of food, or crying out for help to make it through the night. And it was these same females who, when their health failed, passed on to their daughters the duties of neighborhood visitation.[44]

Sweet dates these practices with the ministry of Charles Finney. Based on developments of religion in Ohio, it would appear that the tradition had been establish long before.

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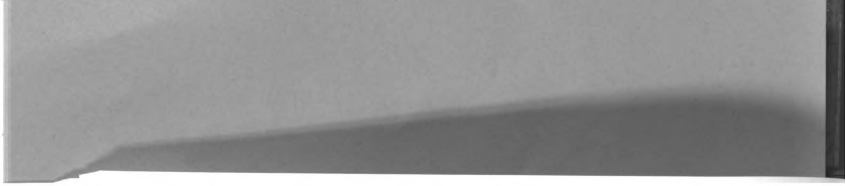
42. Lois Scharf, "Helpmates and Housewives: Women's Changing Roles in the Western Reserve," *The Western Reserve Magazine* 5 (May-June, 1978): 35-36.

43. Infusing medical and spiritual healing was commonplace. Many male physicians were actually bi-vocational ministers and doctors. "Medical and theological concepts were closely intertwined, as were the roles of physicians and preachers of the gospel." Like their male counterparts, women active in some form of medical practice would likely have incorporated such a tendency. See Wendler, "Doctors and Diseases," p. 228.

44. Sweet, *The Minister's Wife*, p. 101.



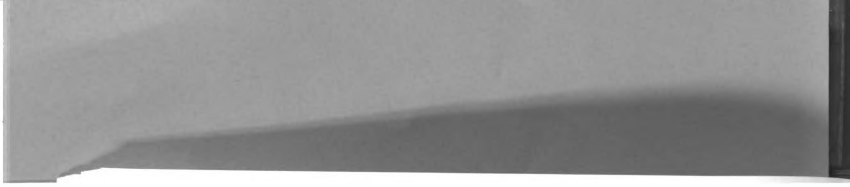
Chapter 2

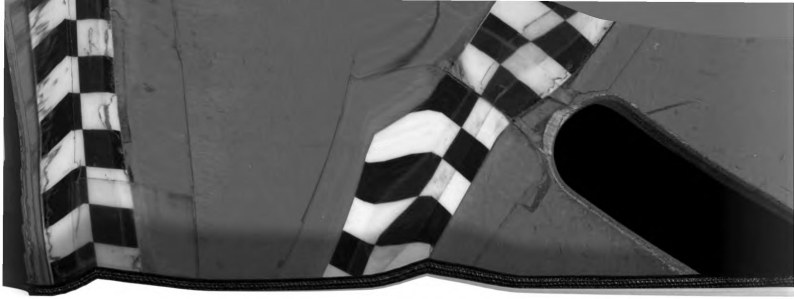
Freedom in the Forest

Before proceeding to forms of public worship, attention needs to be given to the significance of the forest to frontier revivalism. In other words, was place a factor in the development of these meetings? If so, what was the relationship between the forest and women's involvement in these outdoor services? As will be seen, not only were forest revivals unique for their locale, but the combination of place and purpose could directly affect the gender of those engaged in worship. Early frontier revivals are distinguished for being open to all regardless of age or gender. As these meetings institutionalized, participation was more closely guarded. Yet, locating revivals in the forest allowed women to maintain a highly visible profile--making vital contributions to the spiritual welfare of pioneer Ohioans.

Camp meetings were the principal institution of frontier revivalism. These outdoor crusades were ripe with social significance. Contrary to Carol Smith Rosenberg's interpretation, camp meetings also were home to ritual-like behavior.[1] Victor Turner classifies (Ndembu) rituals as either seasonal, tied to climactic change, or contingent, "held

1. Carrol Smith-Rosenberg argues that sweeping social change, combined with the revivalism of Charles Finney, enabled socially dispossessed to confront the power structure of American Christianity. Through a cycle of anti-ritual behavior, anti-structure, and counterstructure, women joined men in creating a new bourgeoisie. The merit of Smith-Rosenberg's analysis is hindered by her inability to separate social environment from spiritual. For example, though drawing from Victor Turner's anthropological studies on ritual, Smith-Rosenberg fails to see any change in the believer's worldview when transitioning through rites of passage. Finally, Smith-Rosenberg confuses the process of accessing a heretofore closed power structure and attempts to destroy that same structure. See "Women and Religious Revivals: Anti-Ritualism, Liminality, and the Emergence of the American Bourgeoisie," in *Evangelical Tradition*, Leonard I. Sweet ed. (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1984), 199-232.





in response to an individual or collective crisis." Turner further divides contingent rituals into those of life crisis, marking changes in one's life-cycle, and rituals of affliction, ceremonies designed to exorcise demons or beings that have adversely affected an individual or group. Other rituals are performed for divination, initiation, thanksgiving, and to protect territorial suzerainty.[2] Turner defines ritual as "a stereotyped sequence of activities involving gestures, words, and objects, performed in a sequestered place, and designed to influence preternatural entities or forces on behalf of the actor's goals and interests."[3] Turner further proposes that signs typify or represent the known, symbols the unknown. He concludes that ritual symbolization makes

> visible, audible, and tangible beliefs, ideas, values, sentiments, and psychological dispositions that cannot directly be perceived. Associated with this process of revealing the unknown, invisible or the hidden is the process of making public what is private, or making social what is personal.[4]

In short, religious ritual activity encompasses actions, emotions, and thoughts geared toward promoting and or restoring social cohesion.

Conversion was the core ritual of frontier camp meetings. Put in Turnerian language, conversion was a contingent ritual laced with both life-cycle and affliction rites.[5] Camp meetings were contingent in that evangelists entreated individuals to correct what was first and foremost a personal crisis--even though the unregenerate state of a community could also be cause for alarm. In addition, conversion contained life-cycle attributes: virtually every sermon referred to spiritual re-birth and the inevitability of death for non-

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2. Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1967); _____, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1969).

3. Victor Turner, "Symbols in African Ritual," in Arthur C. Lehmann and James E. Meyers, *Magic, Witchcraft, and Religion* (Palo Alto: Mayfoeld Publishing Company, 1985), p. 55.

4. Turner, *Forest of Symbols*, p. 50.

5. To a degree, camp meetings also were seasonal in that they were held in conjunction with the agricultural calender, but this seemingly reflects convenience rather than ritual as I find no relationship between calendrical change and religious activity.

believers;[6] as for rites of affliction, supernatural phenomena was easily interpreted as machinations of Satan requiring exorcism through salvation.[7]

If camp meetings were infused with ritual activity, how does one interpret the behavior of those under the influence of these meetings? Critical here is distinguishing religious rites from the broader corpus of social-cultural interactions. As has been indicated, camp meetings were ripe with social significance, but what constituted religious as opposed to social activity? To that end, one must first realize the rudiments of frontier religion.

A barebones analysis of frontier religion includes but two elements: the problem and the solution. In short, revival sermons focused on men and women's depraved nature and salvation as the remedy to this debacle. The problem, then, was that men and women were spiritually destitute, damned to eternal punishment. What were the requirements for salvation? By and large, repentance and faith were the sole criteria for spiritual rebirth. This solution, though, raised yet another problem: how did one lead a "holy" life? Believers were to consecrate themselves through diligent Bible study, prayer, and regular attendance at local religious services.[8] The 1805 Methodist Western Conference put the isssue succinctly:

> It is the opinion of this Conference, that we live in an age in which there is great need to cry aloud, and spare not, and show lukewarm professors the danger of resting in a form only, and urge experimental and practical holiness, and teach sinners their utmost peril, and lead them to the Saviour of Men.[9]

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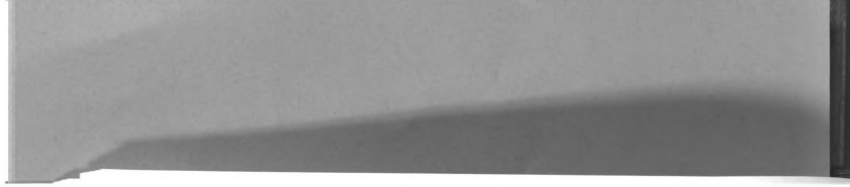
6. To draw a parallel, it is interesting to note that funeral services were viewed by ministers and believers alike as potential spiritual harvests. Especially for female Christians, impending death destroyed all barriers to social convention and gave license to speak openly of the need for salvation or continued faithfulness. Therefore, it is possible to find--even in death--the life-cycle ritual as a prime opportunity to affect change. Compare with accounts of death bed exhorations found in William Warren Sweet, *Religion on the Frontier, 1783-1840,* IV, *The Methodists, A Collection of Source Materials* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946), pp. 182, 200.

7. See especially note 18.

8. For a good overview of Peter Cartwright's "theology" (typical of frontier itinerants), see Dorothy L. Fahrney, "Peter Cartwright and the Frontier: Formulas for Happiness" (M. A. Thesis, California State University, 1985), pp. 24-25.

9. William Warren Sweet, *The Rise of Methodism in the West* (Smith & Lamar and



Pioneers manufactured the remainder of frontier religion--whether ceremony or creed--for specific social ends.[10] Not that such actions were sinister, this indicates that frontier revivalism emphasized building the kingdom rather than maintaining one's spiritual integrity. In other words, camp meetings emphasized outreach more than worship.[11] As a result, camp meetings retained much of their "frontierness" even though most of the trans-Appalachian region quickly passed this stage. In short, religious development did not keep pace with political and economic change. This sluggish institutional growth was by design--an attempt by lay men and women to counter the bureaucratization of their churches and revival services.

It is impossible to appreciate the religious and social significance of camp meetings without taking into account their locale--the forest. The forest was at once terrible and wonderful. Two fears figured prominently in the pioneer's relationship with the forest. Early on, settlers were ever-vigilant lest they be taken captive by Indians.[12] Secondly, and somewhat ironically, settlers feared getting lost in the forest. When an eleven year old girl lost her way bringing cows home from pasture, residents of Williamsburg responded immediately. Over 1,000 frontiersmen combed the surrounding woods for eight consecutive days. Though never seen again, the manhunt for Lydia Osbourn underscores how settlers were both masters of the forest and mastered by it.[13] In light of this fear, the fact that

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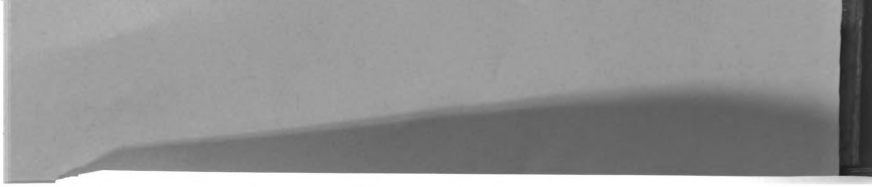
The Methodist Book Concern, 1920), p. 102.

10. Here I refer to such aspects of revivalism as: the politics of seating individuals on the speaker's platform, determination of the order of service, establishing the limits of suitable religious expression, resolving church trials, and the direction of denominational legislation. Benjamin Lakin includes a fine overview of essential Methodist theology; he struggled to teach it as a counter to Baptist "misrepresentation" of Methodist doctrine. See Sweet, *The Methodists*, pp. 253-258.

11. This explains in part the short-lived conversions of many revival participants. See pp. 37-38.

12. Most nineteenth-century (and even some twentieth century) historical works contrast pioneer ingenuity with Indian depravity. For a classic example of this theme, especially as it relates to frontier women, see Elizabeth F. Ellet, *Pioneer Women of the West* (Philadelphia: Henry T. Coates & Co., n.d.).

13. Recounted by J. B. Finley, the search for Lydia Osbourn appears exceptional.



women would often walk--alone--several miles through the forest to attend services is all the more impressive.[14]

Though the cause of much apprehension, the forest was also sublime. Most eye-witnesses appear fascinated with the forest's distinctly non-human attributes. The forest was home to God; it also represented all things uncontrollable, both animate and inanimate (e.g., animals, weather, Indians, and the life-cycle of time). In addition, the forest held an intrinsic aura and mysterious power. In short, the forest was magical. Frontier itinerants recognized the potential of holding evangelistic crusades in the forest. According to pioneer preachers, open-air forest revivals were definitely unlike city revivals.

> Alone in the deep solitude of the wilderness man can commune with himself and Nature and her God, and realize emotions and thoughts that the crowded city can never produce. . . . [In the forest] pride, envy, selfishness, and ambition have no abode.[15]

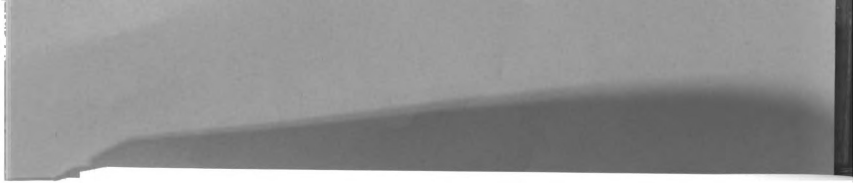
Joseph Hilts comments that

> to commune with nature, is, to a devout mind, a precious privilege. . . . To hold converse with nature, tends to expand the intellect and quicken the sensibilities.

Such an alarm was raised over her absence that Cornelius Washburn, a famous Kentucky "backwoodsman and hunter" came to help--bringing with him his famed hunting dog and approximately 500 searchers. The record of the search party is both pathetic and enlightening. The search team found many signs of Lydia (she had constructed two make-shift homes to protect herself at night), but never even heard her voice. Eventually, based on the evidence available, and Washburn's expert opinion, it was determined that Indians had taken Lydia captive. The novelty in this account is that twice, the men tracking this child collectively broke into tears. Finding one of the "homes" Lydia built, but still no Lydia, Finley claims that "tears stole freely down our cheeks." He continues, "at the sight of the little bower a scene occurred which would be impossible to describe. Here were brave stalwart men, subjected to the perils of the wilderness contending for every inch with savages and wild beasts, whose hearts were never known to quail with fear, who at the sight of that little bower were melted to tears." Finding the second shelter, when the father cries out in anguish: "'Oh Lydia, Lydia, my dear child, are you yet alive?' a thousand hearts broke forth in uncontrollable grief." Henry Howe, *Historical Collections of Ohio*, 2 volumes (Cincinnati: C. J. Krehbiel & Co., Printers and Binders, 1900), 1:417-418.

14. Gertrude Van Renesselear Wickham ed., *Memorial to the Pioneer Women of the Western Reserve*, 2 volumes (Cleveland: The Women's Department of the Cleveland Centennial Commission, 1896-1924); reprint, (Jefferson, Ohio: Ashtabula County Genealogical Society, Inc., 1981), 1:508.

15. *Autobiography of Rev. James B. Finley; or, Pioneer Life in the West*, W. P. Strickland, ed. (Cincinnati: Methodist Book Concern, 1853), pp. 158-159. Based personal experience, Finley concludes that only human imagination "[fills] the woods with demons of darkness." Ibid., p. 175.



> . . . And to commune with God purifies and exalts our whole nature, and inspires us to holier and loftier life aims and a fuller consecration to the service of God.[16]

Forest revivals, then, were marked by a surrealism that non-forest settings could not provide--a "theater" where apocalyptic jeremiads had profound effect.

As sensationalistic as it might seem, evangelists felt they had empirical evidence to support their claims of an omnipotent God bent on regeneration or retribution. Frontier revivalism boasts countless examples of divine intervention--not only in daily life, but in worship services themselves. It was neither unusual nor uncommon for fervent prayer to redirect tornadoes, or cause rain to give way to sunshine. Under the Spirit's guidance, the righteous could perform amazing physical feats. For the especially hard-of-heart, there were remarkable happenings that defied human logic.[17] Supernatural wonders such as unexplainable weather extremes, floods, unusually severe storms, fevers, epidemics, eclipses, meteor showers, and earthquakes amplified the call for repentance.[18] As the reaction to Thomas Eddy's praying a tornado away from a revival meeting indicates, witnessing such

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16. Joseph H. Hilts, *Experiences of a Backwoods Preacher, or, Fact and Incidents Culled from Thirty Years of Ministerial Life*, 2d. ed. (Toronto: William Briggs, 1892), p. 97. The forest also was an often used as a key getaway for secret prayer.

17. One of the most astounding of these accounts reads like the Bible come to life. At a quarterly conference, Calvin Ruter was preaching on the baptism of Christ. "In the tide of his feeling, as if he saw a vision, he was saying, And I see the Spirit of God descending like a dove. Just at that instant a beautiful snow-white dove flew in through the open window beside the pulpit, and, circling two or three times around, . . . flew out again through the window by which it had entered." Charles N. Sims, *The Life of Rev. Thomas Eddy*, with an Introduction by Rev. Bishop Simpson (New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1884), p. 184.

18. Such phenomena triggered exceptional--though temporary--growth, especially among the Methodists. See Sweet, *Rise of Methodism*, p. 29. The following is a general listing of supernatural phenomena in greater Ohio, 1789-1860. Most settlers interpreted these phenomena as sure signs of the end times.

Flooding and Unusually Severe Storms
1792, 1815, 1825, 1830, 1834, 1837, 1847
Fevers and Epidemics
1812, 1814, 1832-33. 1838-39, 1849
Weather Extremes
1789, 1798, 1813-14, 1816, 1838, 1845, 1854
Eclipses, Meteors, Earthquakes
1806, 1811, 1811-12, 1816, 1817, 1819, 1833, 1860

phenomena profoundly affected believer and non-believer alike.

> The winds suddenly died away, till not a breath stirred the leaves. To that people it was as if they had heard the divine voice commanding the winds to cease in answer to their prayers. Then the power of God came down on them. Believers rejoiced and the unconverted cried for mercy, so that for several hours there could be no unity of service in singing, prayer, exhortation, or preaching. . . . The services did not close to near midnight, and when, finally, the people departed for their homes, it was with the feeling that they had seen a wondrous answer to prayer.[19]

While there was some measure of luck involved in seeing what could be thought of as a physical manifestation of divine power, every believer had opportunity to meet or encounter God. This sentiment was expressed in a number of ways, but most people refer to "standing on holy ground." Based on the tone of awe use to communicate this experience, it is also probable that such encounters were highly satisfying--despite the absence of a tangible display of God or his power. While the integrity of camp meeting religion might seem a bit unbelievable in the twentieth century, many pioneers attest to having "had a deep and powerful [religious] experience" in the forest.[20]

The intersection of place and ritual netted a most unusual result. Again, Turner's work is helpful. In *Ritual Process*, Turner develops the three stages of rites of passage originally put forth by Arnold Van Gennep: separation, margin ("limen"), and aggregation.

> The first phase (separation) comprises symbolic behavior signifying the detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure, from a set of cultural conditions (a "state"), or from both. During the intervening "liminal" period, the characteristics of the ritual subject (the "passenger") are ambiguous; he passes through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state. In the third phase (reaggregation or reincorporation), the passage is consummated. The ritual subject, individual or corporate, is in a relatively stable state once more and, by virtue of this, has rights and obligations vis-a-vis others of a clearly defined and "structural" type; he is expected to behave in accordance with certain customary norms and ethical standards binding on incumbents of social position in a system of such positions.[21]

These stages can easily be appropriated to the camp meeting conversion ritual. "Separation"

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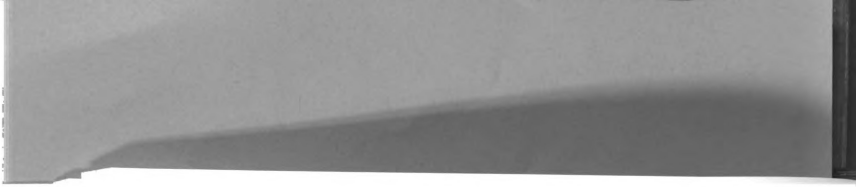
19. Sims, *Thomas Eddy*, p. 201.

20. Finley, *Autobiography*, p. 183.

21. Turner, *Ritual Process*, pp. 94-95.



could occur at any time, but most revival services were preprogrammed for such a stage following exhortation, testimony, and especially preaching. During the second stage the penitent most likely would come forward for prayer at an altar (though commonly the point of conversion, this process might entail multiple altar sessions). One was "reaggreagated" as a member of the Christian community following conversion. Now a fellow believer, the ritual subject would immediately seek recruits to undergo the same ritual process.

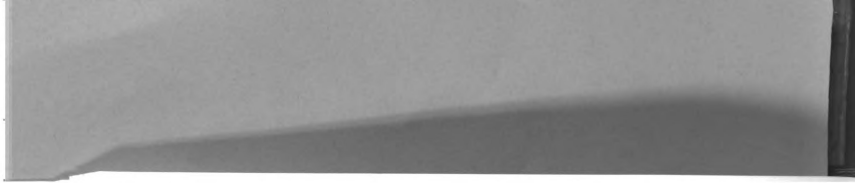
The liminal stage is key to the conversion ritual; it is at this point that seekers step outside of social convention and exchange one identity for another. According to Turner, in the liminal stage "passengers" experience "society as an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated 'comitatas' [communitas], community, or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders."[22] The liminal stage is not only unique for erasing traditional social roles and responsibilities, but because it is the focal point of conversion--the most sacred and spiritually intense of the three stages.[23] Finally, the identity exchange of the liminal stage results in a temporary genderlessness of the participants.

When experiencing communitas, ritual subjects were no longer marked by gender, but became "children" of God, or members of God's family. This genderlessness complicates analysis of camp meeting behavior as one must distinguish between ritual subjects (penitents seeking conversion), unbelieving observers, believers recommitting their initial conversion, and those believers aiding ritual initiates (serving in a capacity something like ritual elders). Turner labels the liminality associated with conversion as that of status elevation. During such a state, participants

> emphasize humility, patience, and the unimportance of distinctions of status, property, age, sex, and other natural and cultural differentiae. Furthermore, they stress mystical union, numinosity, and undifferentiated communitas. This is because many of them regard this life as itself constituting a liminal phase and the funerary rites as preparing for the reaggregation of initiands to a higher

22. Ibid., p. 96.

23. Ibid., p. 128.



level or plane of existence, such as heaven or nirvana.[24]

Though the subjects could not directly transfer their enhanced status to the secular social structure (as is commonly the case in Ndembu status elevation rites), within the religious community the new status was regarded as permanent and effective immediately.[25] In a literal sense one regained his or her gender in reaggreagation, but much of revival activity was designed to keep the communitas unbroken. For female believers, this was paramount--not just to co-opt a new found liberty, but to be recognized for making genuine, authoritative, and significant contributions to frontier revivalism.[26]

Holding revivals in the forest had a direct impact on the nature of revivals themselves. This combination of ritual and place is unique in the history of American religion. The forest was an integral component of frontier culture; forest revivals maximized the magic of frontier spirituality. In this other world, men, women, and children could witness--and participate in--both the strange and miraculous. Not surprisingly, this uniqueness vanished with the institutionalization of camp meetings. After 1840, revivals were more likely to be held in community churches than the open forest (known as protracted meetings). In addition, camp meetings became highly orchestrated affairs involving among other things permanent structures, hymnals, and restrained emotion.[27]

Having addressed the significance of place in frontier revivalism, what of the actions and behavior at these assemblies. It is not my intention to make light of, or in any way discount the fact that many did have true religious experiences at frontier camp meetings. On the other hand, frontier religion filled a social as much as spiritual void. Thus, there is a histrionic component to camp meeting activity which warrants investigation.

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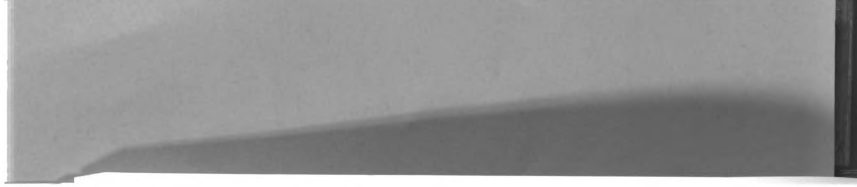
24. Turner, *Ritual Process*, p. 189.

25. See, Ibid., Chapter 5.

26. Though this essay focuses on the participation of women in frontier revivalism, the significance of genderlessness holds vital import for lay men as well.

27. Charles A. Johnson, *The Frontier Camp Meeting; Religion's Harvest Time* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1955), pp. 86, 97-98, 108.



One of the most discussed aspects of frontier camp meetings is the emotionalism which distinguished it as a fledgling institution. The essence of such behavior, according to Charles Johnson, was "rampant enthusiasm and animal excitement."[28] Better known as "muscular" or "acrobatic" Christianity, Ohioans attending early camp meetings were prone to "falling," "jerking," rolling," dancing," running," singing," and "barking" exercises.[29] William Warren Sweet cautions that

> Not only did the circuit rider stand for law and order, but he also stood for moderation in religious practices. It has been the general conception that the early frontier preachers desired to work the people up to a state of religious frenzy at every meeting, . . . but this is an entire misconception. None of the preachers objected to hearty shouts during their preaching, but there were few fanatics among them, and what few of that sort did creep into the ministry were soon weeded out by the watchful presiding elders.[30]

As the camp meeting matured, the number of these exercises dwindled to singing and shouting, but emotions still ran high. Men and women, believer and non-believer, were similarly affected by these uncontrollable outbursts. According to contemporaries, each exercise was divinely inspired, evidence of the Holy Spirt. Johnson maintains that extreme emotionalism had passed by 1815, yet post-1815 revivalism was not without its share of enthusiasm.

William Christie's behavior at an 1832 quarterly conference camp meeting at Bethel illustrates that emotion remained a centerpiece of frontier revivalism.

> On a sudden, while soaring upward on the "wings of faith," and speaking of our future inheritance in strains "as sweet as angels use," he threw his arms in a circular form above his head . . . and then, suiting the action to his words, stepped up on the seat by my side, . . . and pointed upward to heaven, apparently unconscious of the extraordinary influence he was exerting upon his audience ["electric and almost overpowering"]. The "power of Christ rested upon him," and an unearthly radiance was visible in his countenance. . . . The

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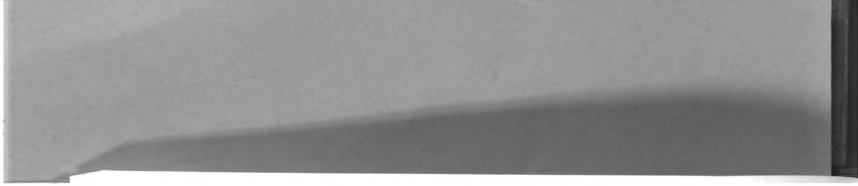
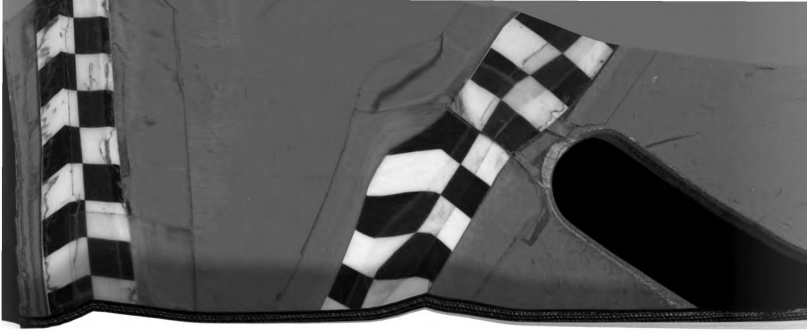
28. Charles A. Johnson, "Early Ohio Camp Meetings, 1801-1816" *Ohio State Archaelogical and Historical Quarterly* 61 (January 1952), p. 33.

29. Johnson, *Frontier Camp Meeting*, pp. 56-61. Though less frequent, "visions and trances," and the laughing exercise were also experienced. See Howe, *Historical Collections of Ohio*, 1:279; and Earnest Lee Carter, "The Early Camp-Meeting Movement in the Ohio Valley" (M. A. Thesis, Ohio Wesleyan University, 1922), pp. 54-70.

30. Sweet, *Rise of Methodism*, pp. 61-62.





> congregation was completely overwhelmed with the majesty and glory of God. Sinners cried for mercy, backsliders were restore, and the people of God were clad with the garments of praise, and shouts for joy and gladness of heart. . . . It was more than one hour after the close of the sermon before the congregation retired from that sacred mount of Gospel privilege.[31]

As late as 1837, Elnathan Gavitt was enjoying "wonderful manifestations of Divine power" in his Mansfield Circuit meetings. At one revival in particular, lasting six weeks, some 700 were converted and 596 joined the Methodist Church.[32] In his autobiography, Gaddis reflects on the course of frontier revivalism and concludes:

> Quarterly meetings and camp meetings in those [pioneer] days were occasions of unusual interest to the Methodist Israel, as [we] met from many and distant points to hold communion with God, and make the forest vocal with the voice of prayer and praise. . . . Methodism has peculiar distinctive characteristics, to which she must adhere, or loose not only her hold upon the public mind, but her aggressive power; and while she keeps up with the age in all conservito-progressive [sic] movements, we trust she will ever preserve her strongly-marked identity with her original character.[33]

What was the purpose of these exercises? According to Ralph Gabriel, "ecstasy was the end sought, the supreme good, a good that could be enjoyed in the here and now."[34] One must bear in mind that frontier revivalism appealed to the heart, not the head;

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31. Maxwell Pierson Gaddis, *Foot-Prints of an Itinerant* (Cincinnati: The Methodist Book Concern, 1855), pp. 90-91. The power of God did not rest on Christie alone. At an 1820, St. Clairsville camp meeting, some 1,000 demanded William Swayze preach. After a slow and shaky start, Swayze caught fire. "We soon saw his eyes glowing red, and the big veins on the side of his neck began to swell. He threw back his head, looked up to heaven, and exclaimed, with a loud voice, 'God help the emaciated Swayze once more!' The people were shocked as if they had touched the electric wire. In a few moments they began to fall from their seats like men slain in battle--among the number was the Yankee dancing-master, who fell as quick as if he had been shot through the heart. His friends caught him, held him up, and he was completely convulsed. M'Elroy saw him fall, and knowing what a notorious sinner he had been, began to cry out, 'Help! help! men of Israel, for there is a bull in the net.' Swayze could be heard no more. By this time, at least one hundred were stretched on the cold [February] ground, crying for mercy." Jacob Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer; or, the Nativity, Experience, Travels, and Ministerial Labors of Rev. Jacob Young* (Cincinnati: L. Swormstedt & A. Poe, 1857), pp. 357-358.

32. Elnathan Corrington Gavitt, *Crumbs from My Saddle Bags or, Reminiscences of Pioneer Life and Biographical Sketches* (Toledo: Blade Printing and Paper Co., 1884), p. 257.

33. Gaddis, *Foot-Prints of an Itinerant*, pp. 533-534.

34. Ralph H. Gabriel, "Evangelical Religion and Popular Romanticism in Early Nineteenth-Century America," *Church History* 19 (1950), p. 39.

evangelists targeted the individual rather than the whole of society. Yet this personal religion went to the very core of frontier society.

> The West needed a doctrine of personalized religion that would appeal to the emotions, relieve the element of danger inherent in pioneer living, and emphasize the direct relationship between a loving God and man. Itinerants stresses that the Creator was ever-present, ever-watchful over his flock, and all-powerful in the face of adversity. To a fighting population in constant peril from ruthless nature, Indian attack, lawlessness, starvation, and illness without medical aid, these were comforting thoughts.[35]

Therefore, there are at least two explanations for these peculiar antics. First, could not social decorum dictate that worshipers take part in at least one exercise? At many of these revivals, the atmosphere was such that peer pressure most likely demanded participation--for social if not religious respectability. Secondly, believers hoped to recreate or maintain the "communitas" of the conversion ritual. In addition to its religious benefits, revival participants could use liminality as a momentary escape from the rigor and monotony of daily survival. It is probable, that at least some pioneers engaged in these exercises as an emotional release from the daily grind.[36] In short, camp meetings could be fun. No doubt all found pleasure in the carnival atmosphere of frontier revivalism.

Women seemingly benefitted, and most likely supported, heightened emotionalism. Their spiritual authority was at stake. Both Methodism and the camp meeting as an evangelistic institution were becoming structurally more sophisticated. Where at the outset of the use of camp meetings, spontaneous emotional outbursts were welcome interruptions, revivalists grew less tolerant as their power-base increased. As this transformation mirrored the changes taking place in nineteenth-century society, restrictions on lay believer's freedom

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35. Johnson, "Early Ohio Camp Meetings," p. 44.

36. Fahrney makes this point--to the exclusion of any other possibility. See Fahrney, "Peter Cartwright and the Frontier," pp. 31-34. Sandra Shaw Osbourn notes that "a minimum of interesting companionship, doing strenuous physical work, with little mental stimulus" helped lure women's into the excesses of frontier revivalism. "Any outlet for their starved emotional nature was welcomed." Just the same, such emotional release did not always indicate happiness; some "women were giving vent to their deep-seated feelings of grief over the loss of loved ones, loneliness, fear, and insecurity." Sandra Shaw Osbourn, "Women in the Ohio Valley Frontier Culture," (M. A. Thesis, The University of Florida, 1963), pp. 96, 101.

of expression came at greater cost to women than men. Women were forced to venture into moral and social reform to maintain their active participation in revivalism.

Conversion was a second theatric component of frontier camp meetings. To the skeptic, the long and drawn-out conversion process is immediately suspect. The central problem for those seeking salvation was not whether God was able to follow through on his promises, but assurance that he had indeed changed them. Altar workers and preachers seemingly prolonged the decision of whether or not to act on faith (it is also puzzling that the process, not the end result, is given foremost attention). Lengthening the conversion process might have been a deceptive tactic (practiced by both lay women and men) to reach even more of the lost: in keeping the altar lined, peer pressure might work to awaken even more sinners.

One curious aspect of camp meetings was that many spiritual commitments lasted only as long as the meetings themselves--making conversion something of an annual ritual. While the traditional interpretation is that such behavior reflects the social nature of camp meetings, discounting initial conversion or commitment renewal as genuine religious experience, I believe this is indicative of the institution itself. Again, camp meetings emphasized conversion, not spiritual maintenance. Turner's commentary on communitas makes for interesting comparison:

> Spontaneous communitas has something "magical" about it. Subjectively there is in it the feeling of endless power. But this power untransformed cannot readily be applied to the organizational details of social existence. It is no substitute for lucid thought and sustained will. On the other hand, structural action swiftly becomes arid and mechanical if those involved in it are not periodically immersed in the regenerative abyss of communitas.[37]

Therefore, it is possible that individuals chose to regularly engage in the conversion process in order to reap the "magic" experience it produced.

One of the most unusual aspects of camp meeting conversions is that many clearly were not genuine. Yet even more dubious than the regularity of some seekers is the practice

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37. Turner, *Ritual Process*, p. 139.

of forced conversion. Apparently, the preferred method was to surround a non-believer and bombard him or her with prayer, exhortation, and song all at once. This tactic could unnerve the most emotionally stable, let alone someone caught committing an illicit or illegal activity.[38] If words proved ineffective believers could--and did--resort to a more physical witness. Rev. James Jones is a prime example of such behavior. At six feet, 200 pounds, Jones could be extremely persuasive when needed.[39]

Though few seem to have noticed, women exerted a profound influence on frontier revivalism. The combination of magical forest and the impermanence of gender roles during the conversion ritual accounts, at least in part, for much of frontier revivalism's dynamism. It also enabled lay men and women to make significant contributions to the social and spiritual environments of their day. For women in particular, forest revivals unlocked the door to indiscriminate participation and enhanced spiritual authority otherwise unavailable to female pioneers.

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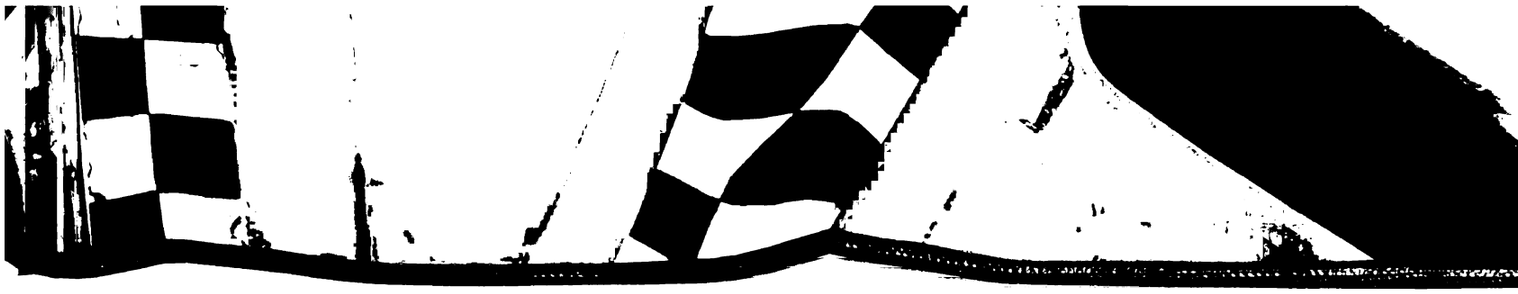
38. Elijah Pilcher once infiltrated a group of ruffians scheming to disrupt a camp meeting. He suggested that they hold they own mock meeting provided that they agree to listen to his entire sermon. The group readily consents. Pilcher's true motives were plain soon enough. Those back at the camp ground heard the "service" and immediately surrounded the group. Pilcher concludes that five or six were converted shortly thereafter. James E. Pilcher, ed. *Life and Labors of Rev. Elijah H. Pilcher* (New York: Hunt & Eaton, 1892), pp. 91-92. See also Johnson, *Frontier Camp Meeting*, pp. 54, 65-66; Fahrney, Peter Cartwright and the Frontier," p. 26; and Carter, "The Early Camp-Meeting Movement in the Ohio Valley," pp. 8, 18, 42, 87-89.

39. At an 1820 camp meeting in Doddridge, Jones was asked to intercede for a woman who, while praying at the altar, was literally dragged back to her seat by her husband. Jones attempted to reason with the man only to be insulted in return. He then ordered the man "to get on his knees and pray" which further incensed the already irate husband. Jones then wrestled the man to the ground and refused to let him up until "saved." The pair were immediately surrounded by the faithful who also prayed. "Soon the man himself began to weep and cry out, 'God be merciful to me a sinner,' and soon the shout of victory came. There stood that rejoicing wife and conquered husband, rejoicing and praising God together. This was the old style of doing work at camp-meetings, and no man was ever better able to do it than Rev. James Jones." John C. Smith, *Reminiscences of Early Methodism in Indiana* (Indianapolis: J. M. Olcott, 1879), pp. 189-190.



Chapter 3

Public Worship

Women were integral components of frontier religious services, taking part in testimonies, exhortations, praying, singing, even preaching.[1] Throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, women remained relatively free to express themselves at revival meetings. Rather than being prohibited, their participation was strongly encouraged--especially when meetings were held in the forest. Commonly, historians depict women's involvement in these meetings--if noticed at all--in terms of "transcending role restrictions," or stepping outside the ideal of domesticity.[2] This approach seems both inadequate and over-done.

Others dismiss frontier revivalism as a cultural hallucinogen practiced by intellectually inferior peoples to counter social instability. Yet such an interpretation requires deliberate disregard of the historical record. The issue is actually much more complicated. On the one hand, frontier worship (though peculiar) reflects genuine religious experience. On the other hand, some--especially women--did use revival services to implement a social agenda.

Surprisingly, little scholarly attention has been given to frontier camp meetings. Charles A. Johnson's *The Frontier Camp Meeting* (1955) stands as the single monograph attempting a comprehensive study. Dickson Bruce Jr.'s *And They All Sang Hallelujah*

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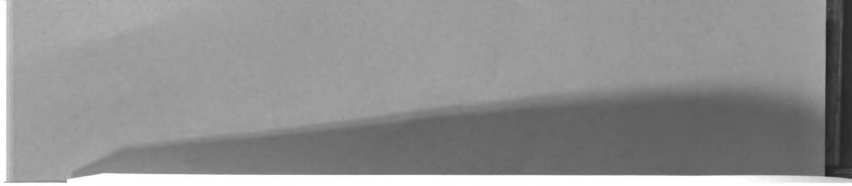
1. Ch. 4 will specifically address women preaching.

2. Two of the clearest examples of this tendency is Joe L. Kincheloe, Jr., "Transcending Role Restrictions: Women at Camp Meetings and Political Rallies," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 40 (Summer 1981): 158-169; and Lois Scharf, "Widening Their Sphere: Women in the Western Reserve, 1800-1870" *The Western Reserve Magazine* 5 (March-April, 1978): 33-40.



(1974) is insightful, but only analyzes the Southern camp meeting (which he proves was unique to the region). Other available material must be culled from journals and dissertations--most of which predates 1960.[3] Before analyzing camp meeting activity, a brief overview of this institution is needed.

Camp meetings are an American phenomenon, an outgrowth of southern revival activity in the closing decade of the eighteenth century. Though variants of this were used for nearly a decade, the camp meeting was not fully christened until the July, 1800 meetings at Gasper River, Kentucky. By far the most singular camp meeting of antebellum America occurred the following year at Cane Ridge, Kentucky.[4] Crowds numbering in the tens of thousands gathered for this week-long crusade. Distance was no obstacle in attending camp meetings. These services, at first, were flavored with interdenominational cooperation--though the Methodists reaped the greatest yield. Camp activity was at once carefully organized (with as many as four services daily) and marked by pandemonium. The atmosphere at these meetings was ripe with emotional expectancy; many fell victim to fantastic religious exercises. Concomitant with this heightened spirituality, camp meetings were also social events or a "holy fairs." By the 1840s, "protracted meetings"--less "muscular" extended revivals held in local churches--had replaced camp meetings as the

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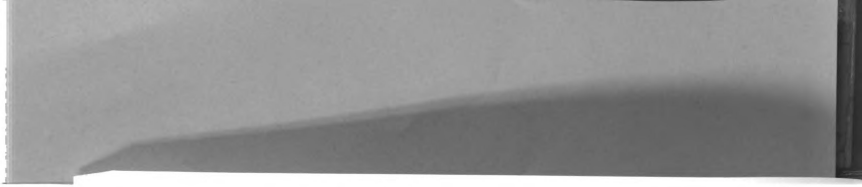
3. Charles A. Johnson, *The Frontier Camp Meeting Religion's Harvest Time* (Dallas, Texas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1955); and Dickson D. Bruce, Jr. *And They All Sang Hallelujah: Plain-Folk Camp-Meeting Religion, 1800-1845* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1974). Of either direct or related interest to antebellum camp meetings, in addition to extensive bibliographies found in Johnson and Bruce, see: Paul H. Boase, "Moral Policemen on the Ohio Frontier," *The Ohio Historical Quarterly* 68 (January, 1959): 38-53; "The Fortunes of A Circuit Rider," *Ohio History* 72 (April, 1963): 91-115; Charles A. Johnson, "Early Ohio Camp Meetings, 1801-1816," *Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Quarterly* 61 (January 1952): 32-50; Charles A. Parker, "The Camp Meeting on the Frontier and the Methodist Religious Resort in the East Before 1900," *Methodist History* (April 1980): 179-192; Catherine L. Albanese, "Savage, Sinner, and Saved: Davy Crockett, Camp Meetings, and the Wild Frontier" *American Quarterly* 33 (Winter 1981): 482-501; Kinchloe, "Transcending Role Restrictions;" Russell E. Richey, "From Quarterly meeting to Camp Meeting: A Reconsideration of Early American Methodism," *Methodist History* 23 (July 1985): 199-213.

4. William Warren Sweet, *Religion on the American Frontier*, Vol. II, *The Presbyterians, 1783-1840 A Collection of Source Material* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1936), pp. 86-87.



principle means of outreach and spiritual renewal.[5]

In addition to the domestic duties of preparing and presenting meals, managing household supplies, and, generally, supervising family life, women took central roles in camp meeting religious activity. That women participated in camp meetings is hardly surprising, yet the meaning and historical significance of their performance remains to be studied.[6] But first, how did women help bring about revivals of religion? Most women took part in one or all of the following: singing, giving exhortations or personal testimonies, and prayer.

Singing was a vital component of the preaching service. A skilled vocalist could prepare a congregation for an impending message, provide an avenue by which sinner and saved alike could directly communicate with God, and deliver instruction in the regeneration process. Singing was at once spontaneous and planned, an individual or group activity. Song leaders enjoyed considerable creativity in crafting and selecting choruses to accompany standardized hymns.[7] Much camp meeting singing followed a pattern of initiation and response. Often a song leader would "line" a hymn, signing a phrase which the congregation repeated. In other instances, services were interrupted by, or occasionally the result of, spontaneous singing. It is significant that, in either scenario, those within earshot appear compelled to participate.[8] In as much as singing was a utilitarian device, it was also a

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5. Bruce, *And They All Sang Hallelujah*, pp. 51-60; Johnson, *The Frontier Camp Meeting*, 25-68; Paul H. Boase, "The Methodist Circuit Rider of the Ohio Frontier," (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, 1952), pp. 193-228; Earnest Lee Carter, "The Early Camp-Meeting Movement in the Ohio Valley," (M. A. Thesis, Ohio Wesleyan University, 1922), pp. 25-53.

6. Bruce is the one exception to this; he claims that an essential element of the conversion ritual entailed an inversion of social order. Women temporarily enjoyed a prominent position during this role reversal. *And They All Sang Hallelujah*, pp. 85-89.

7. Bruce, *And They All Sang Hallelujah*, Ch 4. An excellent work which seconds Bruce's conclusions--and takes them much farther--is Sandra Sizer's *Gospel Hymns and Social Religion*, American Civilization, ed. Allen F. Davis (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978).

8. For example, at one camp meeting a group of girls gathered to sing hymns and were soon surrounded by a large crowd of "men, women, and children" who immediately

means of transporting oneself out of the present experience and into another--something of a one-way ticket to Jordon's other shore.[9]

By far, Lydia Hawes was the most renown female vocalist in the greater Ohio Valley. A native of Brown county, Ohio, Hawes maintained an active ministry until her 1874 death at the age of seventy-four. John Smith claims that Hawes' skills were so proficient and the effect of her performances so profound that hers was a "ministry of fire." Hawes' songs exuded "a remarkable power and fascination rarely equaled and never excelled." A Methodist itinerant himself, Smith bestows no small accolade when considering Hawes a fellow minister--yet, she never preached a single sermon.[10] Through song, Methodism broadcast a "glad news" message; "people were either singing, shouting, or praying, nearly all the time" at camp meetings and quarterly conferences yielding the greatest number of converts.[11] Singing was directly connected to the ritualism of forest revivals--initiating and reinforcing conversion.

Ralph Gabriel maintains that "the religious song, however, more than the spoken word, moved the mourner to grief for his sin and exaltation at his escape therefrom."

> In these spirituals of evangelical Protestantism, untutored men and women could forget the drabness and squalor, the pains and sorrows of poor and isolated communities in a dazzling, romantic vision of pearly gates and golden streets.[12]

If Gabriel over-states the (potential) negative aspects of pioneering, he does make a valid

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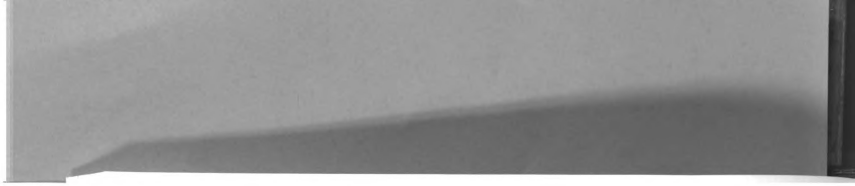
joined them. Joseph H. Hilts, *Experiences of a Backwoods Preacher, or, Fact and Incidents Culled from Thirty Years of Ministerial Life*, 2d. ed. (Toronto: William Briggs, 1892), p, 111.

9. Gertrude Van Rensselaer Wickham ed. *Memorial to the Pioneer Women of the Western Reserve*, 2 volumes (Cleveland: The Woman's Department of the Cleveland Centennial Commission, 1896-1924; reprint, Jefferson, Ohio: Ashtabula County Genealogical Society, Inc., 1981), 1:608.

10. John C. Smith, *Reminiscences of Early Methodism in Indiana* (Indianapolis: J. M. Olcott, 1879), pp. 91-102.

11. John Versteeg ed. Methodism: Ohio Area, 1812-1962 (Cincinnati: Ohio Area Sesquicentennial Committee, 1962), p. 98; Jacob Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer; or, The Nativity, Experience, Travels, and Ministerial Labors of Rev. Jacob Young* (Cincinnati: L. Swormstedt & A. Poe, 1857), p. 267.

12. Ralph H. Gabriel, "Evangelical Religion and Popular Romanticism in Early Nineteenth-Century America," *Church History* 19 (1950): 39.



point. Music could escort an initiate through each stage of conversion. Moreover, sacred music was unique in that anyone could participate at any phase of worship--whether believer, non-believer, or initiate undergoing separation, liminality, or reaggregation.

There is no way to determine how many conversions were brought about, or how many lives were changed due to women's exhortation and testimony. Each of these practices were integral to the camp meeting fabric. Exhortation usually following preaching. As a rule, exhorters (whether clergy or laity) recapitulated the message which preceded it, or read from a printed sermon. What ever the point of reference, exhortation highlighted the need for, and process of, conversion. Testimony, on the other hand, was a personal statement of praise or admonition. Whereas exhortation remained tethered to professional clergy, testimony had no prerequiste--nor any gender, race, or age restrictions--other than the prompting of the Spirit. Hence it is probable that women would be more inclined (and encouraged by clergy) to testify than exhort. While exhortation included elements of personal reflection, such reflection was the sole purpose of testimony. Exhortation was primarily negative in tone while testimony was positive. Finally, both of these techniques were prolonged affairs; many seekers were instructed to return the following night or service to find assurance of their salvation. For some, this process lasted weeks rather than days.[13]

Interestingly, neither exhortation nor testimony were confined to camp meeting grounds. Death offered women a prime opportunity to forgo convention and exhort family and friends on the need for salvation and testify to the merits of holy living. Many, especially those who came under the influence of "acrobatic Christianity," were either unable to communicate their experience until later, or simply took the liberty of relating this

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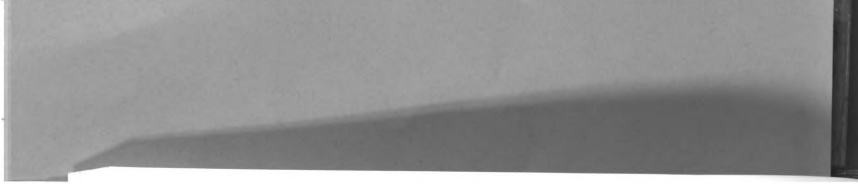
13. John Lock is one whose conversion spanned several days. Having come forward for prayer at a revival, Lock failed to receive salvation "but was tenderly exhorted to come back the next night, and continue seeking until he should find. The next night he was promptly at his place and at the altar of prayer where he continued with increased faith and ardor to struggle for the blessing. The third night he was back again and promptly at the altar, where, with even increased earnestness, he continued to seek for light." Smith, *Reminiscences of Early Methodism*, p. 214.



(testifying) to those back home. In one case, a woman who had "fallen" for some three hours, "got up praising the Lord, and started home. . . . She went shouting all the way. When she got to her home she shouted and praised the Lord until the family were awakened."[14] Even William McKendree, the longtime Methodist Bishop, attributed his conversion to the testimony of a woman returning from a Methodist service.[15]

Women's involvement in prayer is one of the most intriguing facets of frontier revivalism. Prayer was at once a banal requisite for holy living, and a unique gift from God. While every Christian was to pray, some did so in such a way as to have an unaccustomed power over others. Mrs. John Dunbar is just one of a host of women so empowered.

> When she extended her hands benignly and said, "Let us pray," she became as one inspired. Her pastor said: "Mother Dunbar's prayers take us into the seventh heaven."[16]

Not only did women's prayers captivate others, but often they contained a salvific quality as well. For example, Amanda McGrath's "appeals before the throne of grace not only reached the ear of Jehovah, but melted many an obdurate heart."[17] Prayer could be offered in two forms: audible and inaudible. Obviously, though, audible prayer presented the greatest opportunity to draw attention to oneself--whether motivated by a desire to witness one's faith or to augment social status.[18] While it is impossible to statistically

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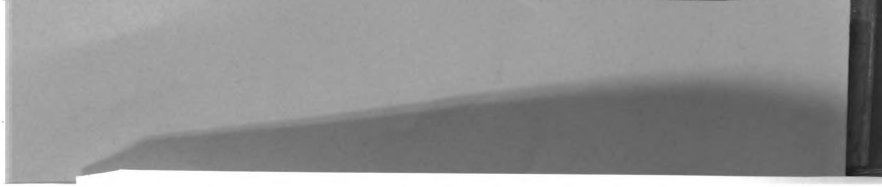
14. Hilts, *Experiences of a Backwoods Preacher*, pp. 110-111.

15. John Fletcher Hurst, *The History of Methodism*, 7 volumes (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1902), 5:601. See also, Johnson, "Early Ohio Camp Meetings," p. 49.

16. Wickham, *Memorial to the Pioneer Women*, 1:464; Phoebe Palmer spotlights the labors of additional "extra-ordinary women" actively engaged in public ministries. See especially her treatment of Mary Taft whose "gift for prayer . . . was much sought after." Phoebe Palmer, *Promise of the Father; or, A Neglected Specialty of the Last Days* (Boston: Henry V. Degen, 1859); reprint, Women in Church Work Donald W. Dayton ed. (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1985), pp. 71-95.

17. A. H. Redford, *Western Cavaliers: Embracing the History of The Methodist Episcopal Church in Kentucky from 1832 to 1844* (Nashville: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1876), p. 97.

18. Related to motivation is the issue of women's ability to compete with the pulpit



document the percentage of women versus men who led the singing at frontier revivals, it is likely that such a position was virtually the only way females could get onto the preaching platform. Therefore, it could be argued that women employed prayer as a preaching technique--an ingenious compensation for being excluded from the pulpit.[19]

It is important to bear in mind that spiritual song could double as prayer. For example, a chorus directly preceding prayer would not only intensify the emotional aspect of communicating with God, but also allow for wider participation. Choruses and hymns of invitation, then, were something akin to prayer-like incantations. Most importantly, public prayer increased, if only temporarily, spiritual visibility and authority. Through leading prayer, women became spokespersons for the assembly--and in a sense, for an entire community.

In addition to leading group prayer and praying for themselves, women also were key participants "around the altars of prayer, where the erring and penitent [came] to get counsel and help."[20] The altar was an evangelistic device central to the success of frontier revivalism. Before developing this point, a brief aside is necessary to place the significance of women's alter-work in perspective. First, what was the purpose--goal--of frontier revival services? Secondly, in addition to preaching, what factors helped facilitate this end?

From the frontier evangelist's perspective, pioneers needed one thing above all others to ensure survival: a contrite heart. Whether addressing temporal or spiritual matters, conversion was revivalism's first goal. Methodists, the prime advocates of revivalism, defined conversion simply: forsaking past mistakes and surrendering oneself to God. Clerics carefully guarded and regimented this process yet, at the same time, allowed for individual expression. In other words, while all "seekers" were to humble themselves before

(especially an issue concerning husband-wife evangelistic teams). Surely more than the Rev. Goodale had to live with the stigma that his wife was more gifted in prayer and exhortation than himself. Wickham, *Memorial to the Pioneer Women*, 1:753.

19. The prohibition against female preaching was widespread but not absolute. See Ch. 4.

20. Smith, *Reminiscences of Early Methodism*, p. 75.

God and plead forgiveness, this could be done in a fit of emotion at a camp meeting, resulting in an instant transformation, or silently at a place of business with no immediate outward change. For many, conversion was a regular renewal of a prior profession of faith. Secondly, revivalists preached sanctification, or the need to completely consecrate one's life to God. Conversion guaranteed immortality in a world to come; sanctification enabled believers to partially live in that other world while still on earth.

Revivalists employed a variety of techniques in presenting their good news. Yet, preaching was but one facet of revivalism--as much happened off stage as on. To better manage the outcome, revivalists seemingly worked in tandem with laity, though no official church documents have been found to support this claim.[21] This coordinated effort was aided by at least two additional factors: seating arrangement and location. Gender segregation was a hallmark of virtually every frontier revival service. Often, men and women not only were separated, but faced each other during worship services--a fact which surely heightened the preacher's advantage.[22] Yet, while men and women "sat apart," believers were intermixed with nonbelievers. This, too, not only increased the evangelist's coercive allure, but facilitated conversion. Believers could act as the revivalist's personal agent: sensing someone under "conviction," a lay member could attend to them with spiritual counsel and prayer. In other words, conversion as a phenomenological process is

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21. Christina Holmes Tilson notes that frontier preachers first appealed to the intellect, then the emotions. Compare her first-person account with Donald Byrne's synthetic work. *A Woman's Story of Pioneer Illinois*, The Lakeside Classics, ed. Milo Milton Quaife, no. 17 (Chicago: The Lakeside Press, 1919), pp. 78-80; and Donald E. Byrne, *No Foot of Land: Folklore of American Methodist Itinerants*, With a Foreword by Stuart C, Henry, ATLA Monograph Series, No. 6., (Metuchen, N. J.: The Scarecrow Press, Inc. and the American Theological Library Association, 1975), Ch. 10, especially pp. 242-252.

22. For a specific instance when this policy was the subject of heated debate see Paul H. Boase, "Let the Men and Women Sit Apart," *Bulletin of the Historical and Philosophical Society of Ohio* 15 (1957): 33-48; and Frederick A. Norwood, "When They All Sat Together in Dayton," *Methodist History* 25 (October, 1986): 34-40. One can only ponder the rigid adherence to gender-based seating. Logically, just the opposite should be the case. Did disrupting social norms help disoriented the congregation, making them more susceptible to the gospel message? Possibly, revivalists feared losing control--to be sure, they could not manage the services when emotions were uninhibited. Afterall, evangelists were competing for more than souls. At stake was the revivalists financial security, social position both within and outside of the church, and future employment.

closely allied with psychological and sociological energy manipulated by clergy and laity alike. Another factor crucial to the frontier camp meeting was their physical location. As has been demonstrated, open-air revival meetings held in the forest had a distinctly different flavor than those held in local churches or urban centers.

Typically, one path led to the revivalist's ends--prayer around the altar. Getting a non-believer there was a complex process in which women were directly involved. Having heard an evangelistic message, the "awakened," those who recognized their spiritual deficiency, were called forward for special attention. Prayer, singing, exhortation, and additional preaching were often employed to more emphatically convince the awakened of the need for change. Those awakened were then encouraged to kneel before the altar and pray.[23] The seeker was immediately surrounded by Believers who prayed and offered counsel. Conversation tended to focus on making the necessary changes to lead a holy life, and to how to find assurance of salvation. This time of prayer could last minutes or hours. Usually, one would pray until assured of salvation or until physically and emotionally exhausted. Once certain that heaven was theirs, the new convert would commonly testify to what had occurred, note the change in their life (especially if this lasted more than several days), and began to exhort others to do the same. Most importantly, the convert was at last a welcome member in the community of believers. While gender seemingly had no bearing on participating in this process, women were especially noted for their altar-working skills. What makes the efforts of these female prayer warriors so unique remains to be seen, but their "prayers and exhortations can never be forgotten by those who heard them."[24]

Despite the fact that "women and girls took the leading lay part" in camp meetings, aptitude did not translate into autonomy.[25] Lay women were welcome to exhort, testify,

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23. Commonly, the altar ("mourner's bench") was a wooden railing but variants included "mourner's tents" and "praying circles." Johnson, *The Frontier Camp Meeting*, p. 132.

24. Wickham, *Memorial to the Pioneer Women*, 1:391; Johnson, *The Frontier Camp Meeting*, p. 139.

sing, and to intercede in prayer on behalf of others, but these often were the outer limits of their involvement in the conversion process--unless physically at an altar.[26] Anywhere else, the ability to mediate a new birth for the penitent was a "members only" privilege reserved for the professional clergy.[27] John Smith records the most direct example of this elastic spiritual authority. According to Smith, during one especially powerful revival service, he was approached by a Christian woman to go and speak to a lady overcome with emotion and--by the non-believer's own admission--definitely in need of salvation. What is curious here is that "the whole encampment seemed to be an altar of prayer." For some reason, the female believer was prohibited from praying with the non-believer where she was. The lay woman either needed to relocate her prospect to the altar, or get assistance from a professional--she chose the latter. Even more interesting is that the female believer accompanied Smith, supporting him as he encouraged the non-believer to go to the altar--a feat which would again license the female believer to take a more active role. The implication is twofold: (1) clergy and lay women (probably laity in general) worked in tandem to convert the lost, and (2) the altar has important social as well as spiritual significance.[28]

Naturally, there were exceptions to clerical dominance of the conversion process--as a matter of fact, the record is quite contradictory on this score. Jacob Young notes that over a period of five or six days some three hundred were converted at St. Clairsville, yet

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25. William Forrest Sprague, *Women and the West: A Short Social History* (Boston: The Christopher Publishing House, 1940); reprint, American Women: Images and Realities (New York: Arno Press, 1972), p. 59.

26. Most likely this was less rigidly enforced in all-female meetings.

27. This is not to imply that a lone individual could not experience a change of heart, but this usually was linked in one way or another to a formal revivalistic service or church-sponsored outreach.

28. Smith, *Reminiscences of Early Methodism*, pp. 83-84. This was not restricted to worship services only. Maxwell Gaddis' professional services were once called upon to help a group of students find salvation. They had been awakened by their female teacher who had given a devotional and prayed with them, but she could "do nothing more." Gaddis, *Foot-Prints of an Itinerant* (Cincinnati: The Methodist Book Concern, 1885), pp. 177-180.

"we had but little ministerial help."[29] Evangelists attempted to manipulate "their" services.[30] Revivalists were considered professionally incompetent, if not personal failures, when they did not govern every aspect of worship. Surprisingly, in each instance where the entire camp was an altar, there is no specific mention of lay people actually winning souls, they merely labored alongside clerics. To be sure, many evangelists enjoyed "power over the hearts of [their] hearers," and doggedly pursued "victory," but they were most effective when aided by the laity.[31]

Even as camp meetings underwent increasing institutional sophistication and management, they remained the seat of religious activity in Ohio. If one looks beyond the pulpit, women emerge as central agents of frontier evangelism. Through singing, testifying, exhorting, or praying, Christian women could enjoy increased spiritual authority--many times rivaling the most successful men. Revivalism also provided one of the finest ways to sidestep class and gender barriers. But for most, these benefits were secondary; serving God was the prime motivator.

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29. Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer*, p. 267.

30. This requires literal interpretation. Revivalists often refer to their work as just that--their work, not God's. More than most, this theme can be found in the reminiscences of Elnathan Gavitt. Gavitt regularly, and unashamedly, attempted spiritual crowd control. Clearly, Gavitt wanted to be in charge of his meetings, not the Holy Spirit. Gavitt, *Crumbs from My Saddle Bags or, Reminiscences of Pioneer Life and Biographical Sketches* (Toledo: Blade Printing and Papers Co., 1884).

31. Thomas Eddy is an example of one who commanded "power" over others, see Charles N. Sims, *The Life of Rev. Thomas M. Eddy* with an Introduction by Rev. Bishop Simpson (New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1884), pp. 72-73, 163; on "victory" see Smith, Reminiscences of Early Methodism, p. 66 (especially his treatment of Rev. John Strange, pp. 23-51). It is possible that the competitive nature of frontier revivalism contributed to evangelists concern over managing their services. Donald Byrne metaphorically likens frontier preaching to armed conflict, in which itinerants battled "not only with the Bible and sometimes doctrine, but also with a full quiver of the arrows of ridicule, rebuttal, caricature, and mockery." Byrne, *No Foot of Land*, p. 266.

Chapter 4

Preachers without Pulpits

For women, the early nineteenth century was an age of domesticity and proper spheres. These spheres set the boundaries for permissible social behavior. Wives increasingly found themselves locked in their homes by social convention, an ornament which husbands could display with pride--at their pleasure. Women's social function was to counteract the negative character traits of men, i.e. to be gentle, temperate, rational, refined, etc.. For the unmarried woman, mere existence became even more tenuous than ever before. Without male provision, single women had little choice but turn to any means of survival available. A single woman could always anticipate her wedding day when she would be retired from public view only to encounter a new exploitation. Yet, within this proscribed arena there is an interesting anomaly. Some women enjoyed social mobility, freedom of expression, and achieved considerable renown as ministers of the gospel.

The purpose of this chapter is to illustrate (1) that were women active itinerants, but (2) no single definition of "ministry" guided these preachers. In short, not all female preachers were alike. The women profiled here, Margaret Prior, Salome Lincoln, and Hannah Reeves, represent three distinctly different ministries. Prior and Lincoln--though symbolizing important variations in ministry--never entered Ohio and therefore will only be considered briefly. Hannah Reeves, a longtime Ohio "minister," is the focus. Preaching ministries offered pioneer women an opportunity to break social barriers and gain access to an otherwise closed public profession--if they could weather inevitable (and often brutal) opposition. Female preachers certainly diversified the religious arena. While immensely popular, female preachers were never allowed to pastor their own congregations. Though

able to build the kingdom as well as any male, these women were always just visiting.

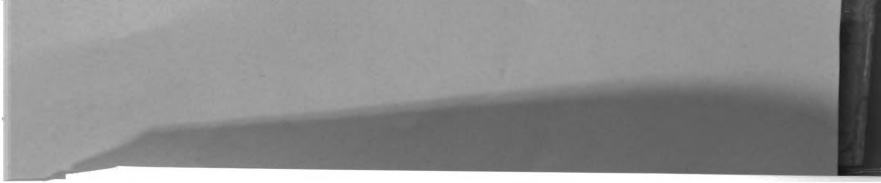
Margaret Prior

Margaret Prior (b. sometime in 1773, d. April 7, 1842), a native of Fredericksburgh, Va, spent the majority of her adult life in either Baltimore of New York City. Prior seldom suffered from even a common cold, but those closest to her died at a frightening rate. All told, of Prior's immediate family, eleven out of thirteen preceded her in death (all but one dying before she reached the age of 35). Sarah Ingraham distills the shock of this non-stop tragedy into one simple and haunting statement: "these repeated strokes were deeply felt."[1]

Having made earlier professions of faith, Prior experienced something of a spiritual watershed in 1815: she rededicated her life to Christ and answered a call to service. Prior joined the Methodist Church in 1819 and remained a member until her death. Ingraham maintains that Prior practiced benevolence, I contend Prior initiated a full-scale, inner-city ministry. One of her first actions was to convince a friend to operate soup kitchens from their homes. Underwritten by her husband (a store owner), these two established--and staffed--this project which, over two years, provided more than 700 gallons of hot soup to any qualified indigent of New York's ninth ward. Prior was soon noted for her "walks of usefulness," day trips wherein she would walk around portions of the city sharing her message of spiritual regeneration and preaching a social gospel.

While this profile of Prior could go on at length, two significant features of her religious life merit special focus: character traits and preaching activity. There were three central ingredients to Prior's temperament: fearlessness, faithfulness, and empathy. Suited in the armor of God, Prior never hesitated to share her faith. As an evangelsist, Prior eagerly ventured into social and spiritual wastelands, including brothels and occult shops. Once, she even disguised herself as a "washer-woman" in order to safely minister to the "wretched inmates" in bondage at a brothel.[2] Due to this fearlessness, on at least four

1. Sarah R. Ingraham, *Walks of Usefulness or, Reminiscences of Mrs. Margaret Prior* (New York: American Female Moral Reform Society, 1843; reprint, New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1987), p. 12.



occasions, Prior's life was physically threatened by those who doubted the goodness of her news.[3] Prior's faith never wavered.

Prior's preaching activity set her on the cutting edge of social and spiritual reform in New York City. From its inception in 1833, she served as a leading administrator of the American Female Moral Reform Society. Prior was appointed as the Society's first city missionary in 1837. Prior, though, had been ministering long before this. In 1822, Prior personally founded a school for poor children which she "visited weekly for conversation and prayer". Prior also served on the board of managers of the New York Orphan Asylum. What is especially significant here is Prior's motivation. She earnestly desired to share with others the blessings of saving grace.

Prior's "missionary" status seemingly legitimated her ministry, it provided an excuse to call on strangers (in one month alone Prior visited 350 homes). On joining the Methodist Church in 1819, Prior quickly involved herself in weekly class meetings. Sponsoring them in her home for many years, these meetings became a venue where Prior proved her skill in speaking to the hearts of others. Commonly, "she led the meeting, alter-nately praying, singing, exhorting, or inviting others to do the same."[4] Prior cultivated these gifts, so much so that she gained considerable notoriety for her abilities. She plied these skills on the streets of New York. In addition to her door to door ministry, Prior was on call around the clock using every available opportunity to preach Christ.

Salome Lincoln

Salome Lincoln was called by God to preach His gospel. Born September 13, 1807 in Raynham, Massachusetts, Lincoln had but thirty-four years to impact her world. At her death on July 21, 1841, few in south-eastern Massachusetts could have been unaware of her ministry. Lincoln benefitted from a common school education, but received no special

2. Ibid., pp. 53, 64-65.

3. Ibid., pp. 55-56, 63, 101, 105.

4. Ibid., p. 46.

training to equip her for public ministry. Spiritually awakened at the age of thirteen, Lincoln was converted at fifteen (1822) while kneeling before an anxious bench. Lincoln renewed her commitment in an 1825 revival. By this point she had wrestled with the call to some form of Christian public service for three years. Lincoln's spiritual life was something of a paradox: it became increasingly clear to her that she was to preach the gospel, yet she could not accept such a mission for fear of social ostracism. She agonized over this charge and begged God for another vocation. Finally, Lincoln determined that public evangelism was not an option but indeed a duty.[5]

Lincoln realized she would encounter opposition and criticism. This fact distressed Lincoln; she was quite reluctant to fulfill her call. Lincoln seemed genuinely frightened by two very personal issues: the inevitability of spinsterhood and the likely social repercussions of a high-profile ministry. Outside of God, there would be no one for her to hide behind, or even turn to, when the going got rough. Davis notes that "after she broke loose from the world, she was unceasing in her efforts."[6] Yet, Lincoln did not commit herself to full-time ministry until 1830--seven years after her initial conversion. Lincoln related the cost of this pursuit in a letter to one of her closest companions, Elizabeth (Liscom) French:

> I have given up all for Christ! . . . I have given up earthly prospects; I have taken the parting hand of friends; --and am now going to seek a bride for my master.[7]

Having sold-out to self, Lincoln remained steadfast, "never [repenting] the sacrifice [she] made for the cause of God."[8]

Lincoln possessed several innate traits and talents which proved invaluable to her

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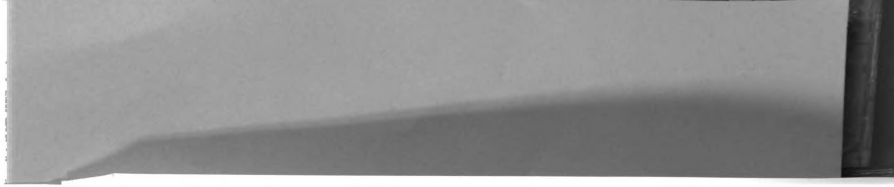
5. Almond H. Davis, *The Female Preacher, or Memoir of Salome Lincoln* (Providence: J.S. Mowry, 1843; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1972), p. 25.

6. Ibid., p. 39.

7. Judging from the contents, this letter can probably be dated sometime around 1829-30. Even though not in full-time evangelism, Lincoln had been preaching since October 17, 1827. Ibid., p. 39.

8. Ibid., p. 125.



ministry. While criticized as being too recluse with friends and neighbors, Lincoln became "bold and commanding" when preaching. Eyes that were "dark and piercing," being slightly taller than average, and having a voice "deep toned and heavy" combined to make Lincoln distinctive and her message more effective. "When she spoke in public, . . . her words would sometime fall upon the ears of the audience with a power almost irresistible!" One individual commented: "such exhortations and prayers, are not often heard, as proceeded from her lips."[9] Lincoln was extremely successful as an intinerant. She often drew overflow crowds. Many times, were it not for an open window or door, seekers could not have heard Lincoln's "good news."[10] Her ministry peaked in an 1834 tour of Maine where several services attracted over 1,000 each.

Lincoln married Junia Mowry on December 2, 1835. By spring of 1836, Lincoln had no choice but to accept domestic duties as a wife. Her husband was gone often. Lincoln frequently found herself left alone to single-handedly manage all household affairs while her husband traveled about (doing the same work she was called to).[11] She preached her last sermon on April 5, 1840; Lincoln died the next summer following a long battle with consumption.

Hannah Reeves

Of the female preachers in the nineteenth century, Hannah Reeves enjoyed an unusually long tenure--preaching in public for nearly fifty years. Reeves personifies determination. Converted in an evening "Bible Christian" service at the age of eighteen, Reeves awoke the next morning resolved to save others. This became her vocation for life. Born Hannah Pearce on January 30, 1800, in Sheepwash, England, she soon proved herself different from her peers (unlike Lincoln, Reeves was better known by her married name). Through drinking and mismanagement, her father squandered much of the family's financial

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9. Davis, *The Female Preacher*, pp. 21-23, 36, 44.

10. Ibid., pp. 69, 84, 118.

11. Ibid., p. 143.

security. As a result, Reeves' oldest sister was hired out as a domestic and she assumed many duties formerly the charge of their own domestic. With the estate reduced even further, Reeves was forced to leave home and learn the glove making trade. Possessing a skill in little demand, Reeves sought employment as a domestic herself. Even so, "she was not ashamed of the seeming drudgery."[12] In retrospect, this ignoble beginning proved extremely beneficial for Reeves' future ministry.

Soon after her conversion, Reeves was employed by Squire Simcoe, son of the late lieutenant governor of Upper Canada. During her tenure there, Reeves acquired the confidence and social graces necessary to function at the highest levels of society. She read voraciously, quickly erasing an educational deficit. Reeves became a trusted friend, even welcome within the Simcoe social circle. Reeves passed by no opportunity to share her faith. Her witness so impressed the Simcoe's that they began regular family worship--the Squire himself soon entered the ministry.

Reeves' career as a minister seemed to bound from one spectacular event to another. A charter member of the Bible Christian society, Reeves began to hold open-air meetings even though she could claim no circuit of her own. This shortcoming deeply troubled her; she returned home in need of advice. William Allen, one "whose answers to prayer seem, to those unacquainted with him, like religious fables," called on Reeves. Allen counseled Reeves and proposed prayer to solve her dilemma. He received from God the command that Reeves should take "the great circuit," the Shebbear Circuit.[13] Somewhat perplexed at this reply, Allen politely reminded the Lord that the Shebbear Circuit already had a

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12. George Brown, *The Lady Preacher: or, the Life and Labors of Mrs. Hannah Reeves, late the wife of the Rev. Wm. Reeves, D.D., of the Methodist Church* (Philadelphia: Daughaday & Becker, Publishers, 1870; reprint: Women in American Protestant Religion, 1800-1930, Carolyn De Swarte Gifford ed., New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1987), 20. While one of the few who refers to female preachers, William Noll typifies the casual treatment given this subject area. See his, "Women as Clergy and Laity in the 19th Century Methodist Protestant Church." *Methodist History* 15 (Janurary 1977): 109-110.

13. This circuit was highly favored, also it was significant in church politics as it contained the denominational head quarters.

minister. Allen continued:

> "And what art thou going to do with Simon Smale?" who was the junior preacher. The answer was immediate and distinct: "Take him home." "What!" rejoined this man of God, "take brother Smale home, Lord? Well, thy will be done."[14]

Shortly after her meeting with Allen, Reeves, though only nineteen, was appointed to the Shebbear Circuit--due to the untimely death of Simon Smale. Such divine endorsement could not go unnoticed. The affect on Reeves must have been profound.

To say Reeves answered God's call is an understatement. Her professional services were in great demand. In addition to preparing sermons, leading class meetings, and holding personal devotions, Reeves commonly walked up to fifteen miles a day and conducted seven to eight services each week. The extreme included walking over thirty miles in a single day and preaching six times in one day. As a rule, Reeves preached every day of the week, except Saturday, and three times each Sunday. Surprisingly, there were no days off (allowing for Saturday). If for some reason there was time to spare, Reeves was to plant new churches.[15] These responsibilities took a heavy toll on Reeves physically; appointed to her first circuit in 1819, she spent 1822-1823 recuperating at home. Reeves immigrated to the United States in 1831 a seasoned itinerant, having served the Bible Christians for ten years.

William Reeves met Hannah sometime in 1828; she changed his life and reinvigorated his ministry. William at first doubted the propriety of female preaching, but after hearing one of Hannah's sermons, "he resolved to go home and pray, and to study to become a better man and a more efficient preacher, or abandon the idea of the ministerial calling altogether." Quite simply, Hannah's sermon made Reeves "ashamed of his own puny performances." After the service, Reeves queried Hannah on her ability to speak at length without notes, as he could not do the same (bear in mind that they had never met).

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14. Brown, *The Lady Preacher*, pp. 35-36.

15. Ibid., pp. 36, 50, 52, 337.

> She looked upon him for a moment, it was either a look of pity or disdain, he could hardly tell which, and exclaimed: 'Throw away your crutches and fight like a man!' this reply was almost overwhelming, . . . [he] wanted to hide his head for very shame. After he had recovered from the shock of such a subduing response, he did then and there resolve on higher attainments of grace, and to study more faithfully the word of God, that he too might become a workman, not needing to be ashamed"[16]

Despite this first encounter, William and Hannah began to court each other. He traveled to the United States in 1829 after hearing of great revivals going on there. William itinerated for the Methodist Protestant Church. The two conducted their affair by correspondence for nearly two years. Hannah accepted his marriage proposal and sailed to join him in 1831.

Hannah Reeves possessed a paradoxical character. She was "slender in form, and frail in constitution," yet "literally knew no fear." Reeves excelled at debate; she was also noted for remarkable eloquence. Reeves' gender seemingly had no bearing on such praise. Brown catalogs Reeves' key character traits as: "1. Strong common sense; 2. A wonderful power of quick per-ception; 3. Good sound judgment; 4. Great resolution; 5. An iron will; 6. Calm self-possession; 7. An intrepid fearlessness in danger; 8. Deep piety of heart; 9. Great patience in suffering; 10. An unyielding confidence in God; 11. Good social qualities; 12. Hospitality at home."[17] With the exception of hospitality (having numerous connotations ranging from culinary to conversational skills), each of these traits were equally applauded in men. In short, Reeves' temperament was such that with one breath she could speak with heart-felt tenderness, and with the next callously humiliate a total stranger. Reeves was both active and passive, domineering and submissive.[18] The point here is not that Reeves

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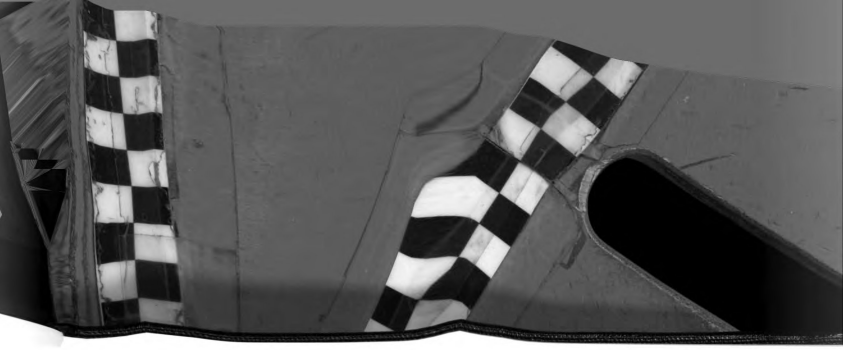
16. Ibid., pp. 60-61.

17. Ibid., pp. 20, 42, 328.

18. The following is another example of Reeves' paradoxical character. While on the journey from England to Zanesville, Ohio, Reeves tangled with an arrogant doctor, besting him both in argument and character. On a train from Boston to Albany, the doctor demanded Reeves' seat for his wife. Reeves flatly denied the request. The doctor proceeded to upbraid Reeves for her in-solence. Undaunted, she held her ground and, in short, told him he needed only to have asked politely. She explained that she was traveling several thousand miles alone, that she was tired and wanted to rest. Having the attention of the car, Reeves continued: "I was taught to believe that in the United States gentlemen were proverbial for their kindness to ladies, espec-ially to strange ladies. I hope I have met with



was an exception, surely other women exhibited similar character traits, but that professional status legitimated her behavior. Were Reeves not a minister, she most likely could not have stepped outside of her "sphere" so readily.

Hannah's gender spotlighted her ministry in an age crowded with successful evangelists. Indeed, female preaching was a novelty--especially in the United States. But there is something more at work here. Combining femininity and public preaching altered services considerably. William Reeves' captivation with Hannah is a case in point. Though knowing nothing about her, while listening to that first sermon mentioned above, "Reeves felt his heart deeply smitten, not only by the sermon, but by the charm of the lady preacher herself." His was not an unusual response. Hannah frequently received marriage proposals. There were enough suitors that she needed to concentrate on rejecting them without jeopardizing her work.[19] In some undefined way, Hannah Reeves' preaching affected men's emotions. Women also thronged to hear Hannah speak, but it is less clear what impact her preaching had on their feelings. Revivalists determined to save souls, but they first had to draw a crowd. Here Hannah's womanhood was a ministerial boon. Hannah's presence usually guaranteed a packed house (her largest meeting attracted approximately 1,000 people in Newark, Ohio, 1831). Yet, being a female preacher was at times a liability--at least for Reeves--in that men became attracted to her rather than her message.

For nearly thirty-seven years, the Reeves ministered as husband and wife in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and what is now West Virginia. The majority of their time, though, was

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an exception in the present case." At this, those in the car erupted in laughter as the doctor and his wife were forced to sit elsewhere. The doctor then began to belittle a Catholic woman--Reeves (sensing the kill?) came to her defense. The focus shifted to Reeves, who the doctor began to think was a Catholic herself. She foiled his attack with the admonition to treat others as he would himself. Brown notes: "This was another fatal stroke; all saw its point, and that the doctor's whole course with the lady passengers fell under the condemnation of this catholic principle, and they gave full vent to laughter. Soon after this the doctor and his wife found it convenient to leave the stage." Yet having had her sport, Reeves became demure again. With Reeves as the center piece, "the conversation turned on religious subjects, and was carried on with candor and kindness, all seeming desirous of knowing the truth." Ibid., pp. 85-89.

19. Ibid., pp. 57, 60, 125.

spent in Ohio. There the Reeves preached throughout the eastern-half of the state. They canvassed virtually all the area from Lancaster north to Lake Erie and east to the Ohio River. Both Hannah and William were equally comfortable preaching, praying, or singing (though William's "bass" voice was never warmly received). Actually, as a preacher, Hannah was in greater demand than her husband. Hannah was even offered a circuit of her own at the 1831 Annual Conference, but she chose instead to labor with William. In 1836, James Robinson was assigned to the Reeves as an assistant preacher. Rather than indicate secondary status or insignificance of any sort, I believe this only underscores Hannah's success--she was often engaged to hold services outside of their circuit, thus leaving William short-handed. Robinson's appearance was timely indeed as William was injured shortly thereafter leaving Hannah to take his place and Robinson to fill in where needed. Hannah continued to preach until nearly seventy years old; she died on November 13, 1868.

The Reeves ministry was far from problem free. They "lost an only child three times." An unnamed daughter died shortly after birth in 1832. Samuel, born in 1833, died in 1841. Asa lived from 1842 to 1847. For some undisclosed reason, William became the object of severe criticism resulting from a decision of a 1835 church trial. Both suffered ill-health frequently, due in large part to the nature of their work (traveling considerable distances on horseback with scanty provisions). They also were victims of fierce denominational rivalry. The Reeves seldom enjoyed any semblance of financial security; more than once they were apportioned $100 for an entire year of intinerant ministry. William himself, it would appear, had some difficulty with Hannah's success. The harder he worked at preaching, the more people clamored for Hannah. Though the assigned preacher, William often lost the pulpit if Hannah was present and would consent to speak. Of course, these problems were but a compliment to the inevitable heckling and abuse from those who only found humor in hellfire and brimstone.

To be sure, the three women profiled here represent but a fraction of those engaged in similar work in the early nineteenth century. There were countless references to female

ministries throughout the works consulted in preparing this chapter. For example, Hannah Reeves faced increased opposition while holding a series of meetings in Pittsburg and Alleghenytown (1833) because a "very talented lady preacher had recently preached in those cities."[20] After preaching at Newport, R.I., Salome Lincoln was said to compare "with any female preacher who had ever been there."[21] But preaching, as these profiles has demonstrated, was just one avenue of Christian service open to women. It is fascinating to discover auxiliary networks of female "ministers." Here Prior is a case in point. Whether through the Orphan Asylum, the school for poor children, her soup kitchen, the reform society, or a host of other means, Margaret Prior enlisted the help of all who were willing to share their faith with others. Prior's ministry knew no bounds. She once hired an unemployed man so he could provide for his family, from the start having the intention of witnessing to him--he was soon converted, and thanked her for it.[22]

Often the activity of a female preacher would spark females in the congregation to such actions as extemporaneous exhortation, door to door witnessing, even acts of protest. For example, Lincoln once had a meeting canceled because several leading citizens demanded that the school where she was to preach be locked. Hearing of this, "two ladies went and obtained the key." Unfortunately, neither Lincoln nor Davis detail how this was accomplished. It is possible that these ladies were skilled diplomatists, but, however they procured the key, they nonethe-less bucked the system of social deference and demanded the meeting be held.[23]

Despite there being an extensive network, female preachers seemingly predominated in the East. Repeatedly, Reeves is singled out as being the first woman preacher to address many of her congregations. Brown notes that Reeves was still a "novelty" as late as 1841.

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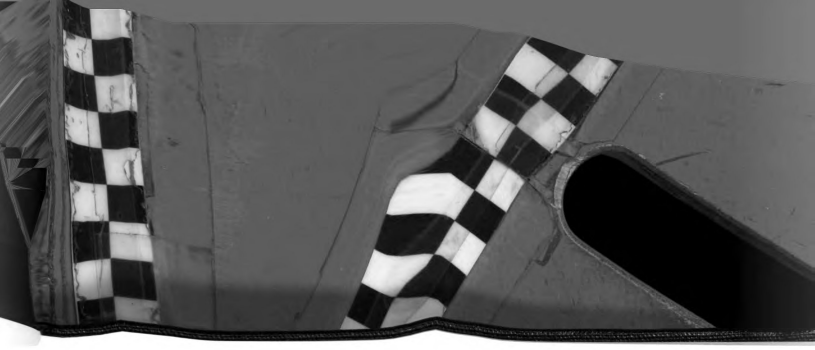
20. Brown, *The Lady Preacher*, p. 184.

21. Davis, *The Female Preacher*, p. 45.

22. Ingraham, *Walks of Usefulness*, p. 31.

23. Davis, *The Female Preacher*, p. 66.



While Reeves' ministry goes beyond the time frame of this essay, she helps illuminate the "frontierness" of Ohio through the 1840s. Was Hannah Reeves the first female preacher to cross into the Old Northwest? Lincoln, too, often was the first to actually preach in many rural Massachusetts communities. "The novelty of a woman in the pulpit drew together immense crowds." Many people attended Reeves' and Lincoln's meetings only out of curiosity. William Reeves recorded the following in his journal on July 24, 1831: "But curiosity has often resulted in good; and indeed to-day [sic] the tears, the sobs, the swelling breasts, with the distressed countenances, bespoke the trouble of their minds, on account of conscious guilt unremoved and sins unforgiven. All this gave reason to hope [Hannah's] labor was not in vain in the Lord."[24]

What composite can be drawn from these profiles? First, female preachers are noted for distinct physical and emotional characteristics: namely health (whether good or poor), stature, speech, and piety, fearlessness, perseverance. Second, female preachers created a network of women around them to perform a variety of ministry-related tasks. Third, especially in urban areas, female ministries were most successful among the socially disenfranchised. Fourth, while a curiosity everywhere, female preaching was a novelty in the trans-Appalachian West through the 1840s. Fifth, female preachers were able to step outside social constraints, choosing to exercise male or female temperaments. Finally, prayer was the foundation for each of these ministries.[25] "When God gives to a female all the

24. Brown, *The Lady Preacher*, pp. 101, 109.

25. Hannah Reeves' "rules" for holy living accentuates the centrality of prayer in the life of a female preacher.

1. Rise at six o'clock in the morning; spend an hour in prayer and reading the Scriptures.
2. Get ready for breakfast, and directly after breakfast have family prayers.
3. Retire to my room and spend some time with the Lord, and attend to other duties that are incumbent on me.
4. Spend the remainder of the morning visiting the sick and going about from house to house, inquiring in to the state of the people's souls.
5. Return to the house where I am going to dine, a little before dinner, and spend a few minutes in prayer before going tot he table.
6. Address myself to my journey, and if possible, get to the preaching house by five

physical, mental, moral, and spiritual qualifications to preach the gospel of Christ, together with a Divine impression that she ought to engage in that work, who will venture to stand in her way? . . . God never gave talents to be wrapped in napkins and burried." George Brown puts the case most succinctly: "Gospel truth never lost its power to save by being delivered to the people by a female."[26]

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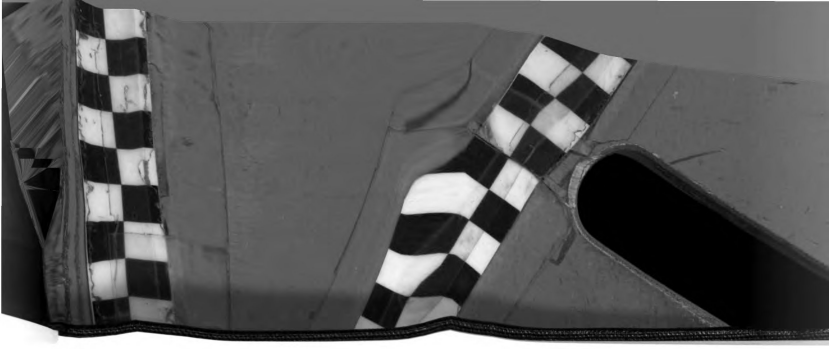
o'clock.

7. Spend an hour in my closet [refers to praying] before I begin meeting.

8. Commence the meeting at the time appointed, and be always short and earnest, except on occasion of particular outpourings of the Spirit of God.

9. Go to bed at ten o'clock, be in what company I may, never mind that; remember ten o'clock is the bed time. O, Lord, give me grace to fulfill this determination! Amen!! Brown, *The Lady Preacher*, pp. 38-39.

26. Ibid., pp. 318-319, 12.



Conclusions

Ohio has a rich religious history--one which this essay has only begun to tap. In the first four decades of the nineteenth century, Ohio underwent a transformation. During this age, Ohio matured from a fledgling territory to become the very pulse of the nation. This progress, though, had dire (or at least profound) implications for Ohio Protestantism. One of the most distinct attributes of frontier Ohio was its vast tracts of hardwood forests. By mid-century this virgin timber was alive only in memory. According to the nineteenth century mentality, these changes signaled progress. Ohio was full-grown by 1850; but in terms of religious development, Ohio had passed the point of no return in approximately 1840. To a degree, women were casualties of Ohio's "progress."

Frontier women participated in several service-related ministries, or what is refered to here as private worship. Women cleverly used home-based ministries--hospitality, leading family worship, being a minister's wife, helping new settlers adjust to pioneer conditions, organizing and financing frontier churches, and caring for the sick--to stake their claim within the power structure of American Christianity. Pioneer women understood that Christian faith was predicated on action (a fact which applied to men as well). As a result, frontier religion became a seedbed of social activism.

Hetty and Charles Beatty (minster of the First Presbyterian Church), were married at Steubenville in 1827; as a Christian laywoman, Hetty's highly visible role in Steubenville exemplifies acting on faith. Hetty was busy in the Female Auxiliary Bible Society and was chiefly responsible for opening the Steubenville Female Seminary in 1829 (only the second such school in the West--the other being Edgeworth Ladies Seminary near Pittsburgh founded in 1825). According to Page Putnam Miller, this seminary was helpful in

promoting revivals and led to an increase in church membership. Being a minister's wife also afforded Beatty countless opportunities to share her faith.

> Besides leading the women's prayer meeting and teaching a large class in the Sunday School, she constantly moved about the community assisting the poor with food and clothing and offering words of support to those discouraged in their Christian faith. Beatty used her Sunday School teaching as a special vehicle of evangelism and talked frequently in private with her students an others about their spiritual anxieties.[1]

Beatty is a prime example of how women could circumvent ecclessiastical convention; while "offically" attempting to harness women's spiritual authority, most antebellum churches quietly embraced the successful ministries their female parishioners.

Annie Wittenmyer claims that women ministered in ways men could not. Wittenmyer notes the imperativeness of faith-based actions.

> Doors that are insolently closed in the faces of Christian men will be respectfully left open for the pious female on her errand of good statements and exhortations; tracts and books will be quietly received from the hand of a woman that would be denied or debated, refused or thrown aside when offered by men. Surely this power and influence is not conferred upon woman to be exercised merely in the home, or to exhaust itself with the politeness and courtesies of social life.[2]

Women such as Helen Cutler, Lydia Hawes, Hannah Reeves, and Hetty Beatty were crucial extensions of nineteenth-century evangelicalism.

Women were involved in "moral reform" long before revivalism supposedly gave birth to social reform in the 1830s. Historians have nearly obscured this point. Many scholars believe women progressed from revival participant (beginning with the revivals of Charles G. Finney no less) to social activist, and link this analysis to the domesticity and maternalism indicative of women's "sphere." While women did consciously involve themselves in religious and reform organizations in order to break social constraints, women performed these acts--at least in part--due to religious devotion. In researching this

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1. Page Putnam Miller, "The Evolving Role of Women in the Prebyterian Church in the Early Nineteenth Century" (Ph.D. diss, University of Maryland, 1979), pp. 36-40.

2. Annie Wittenmyer, *Women's Work for Jesus* (New York: Nelson & Phillips, sixth ed., 1873); repirnt, Women in American Protestant Religion, 1800-1930, Carolyn De Swarte Gifford ed. (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1987), p. 108.

chapter, I found no first-person source which indicated a gender-based aptitude spurred these actions. For example, Gertrude Wickham includes a memorial to Orpha Webster who was

> positive in her convictions and unflattering in her devotion to her church and its services. The 'mother's meeting was a source of great comfort and strength to her. Mounted on the family horse with one or more of her little sons, she rarely failed to meet with other Christian mothers in prayer and counsel for their children.[3]

Did Webster attend these "mother's meetings" due to a religious compulsion or because of the responsibilities of her "sphere?" Is it not possible that female pioneers like Webster really used such meetings as a cover--but still with genuine concern for their maternal or feminine roles--to blend spiritual and social activism in an otherwise prohibitive environment? The central premise of this essay is that women, like men, felt called by God to minister to the needs of others. Just the same, much work needs to be done to explain the attention reform received at the expense of faith-based ministries following the 1840s.

In addition to private worship, female pioneers also engaged in public worship. Whether singing, exhorting, testifying, praying, or preaching, women made signal contributions to Christianity in frontier Ohio. Individuals could proclaim the message of camp meeting songs as a statement of personal tesitmony or use it as a step in the process of repentance. Exhortation was a how-to guide designed to bring about conversion. Testimony was primarily a statment of praise, evidence of what consitutes the holy life.

Public prayer seems laced with hierarchical qualities. Camp meeting prayer was distinguished by three gradations. Through prayer women could be: (1) the subject of their own prayers, (2) a conduit by which to voice the concerns of others, or (3) the chosen representative of a congregation before God. It would also appear that, to a degree, exhortation and testimonies were hierarchical. Whereas anyone could testify to the need for

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3. Gertrude Van Rensselaer Wickham ed. *Memorial to the Pioneer Women of the Western Reserve*, 2 volumes (Cleveland: The Woman's Department of the Cleveland Centennial Commission, 1896-1924; reprint, Jefferson, Ohio: Astabula County Genealogical Society, Inc., 1981), 1:312-313

holy living and attest to the blessings of God, exhortation targetted and instructed seekers in the process of conversion. Therefore, it is plausible that exhortation required skills that testimony did not e.g., the ability to persuade, to speak cogently, a sense of authority, etc.. All of women's public worship activity was designed to promote conversion. Especially through altar work, women were key agents in the conversion ritual.

Women fought a losing battle for spiritual legitimacy and authority with men. In retrospect, their participation in religion was seemingly predicated on a rural, if not frontier-like, environment. Holding open-air revivals in the forest created a middle ground, a meeting place where men and women simply became believer and non-believer. Maintaining this "communitas" was the desire of every Christian. P. C. Cherry claims that when

> transplanted to the solem silences of the forest border land, all the mysticism in [pioneers] nature came to the surface. If a man or woman is inclined to worship God, he or she will do it in a heavy forested land, it is a compulsion, and absolute necessity. God in the man cries aloud for utterance and will not be denied.[4]

The transition from forest camp meetings to protracted meetings (even when held in small, rural communities) displaced women from participating in public worship. This fact fueled the need to engage in private worship. With their fields of ministry shrinking daily, one can appreciate the attractiveness of, and short step to, social reform for these ecclesiastical expatriates. The ordintation of women eventually settled the issue of equality--but not until the twentieth century.

Any analysis of women's participation in frontier revivalism must probe deeper than the notion of exceeding domesticity or pin-pointing an emerging protofeminism. Through religion, women did not merely grasp at the reigns of social power, but also fulfilled specific roles in religious rites predicated on a belief system with an other-world orientation. Finally, the notion of sacrificial service and helpmate need not be pejoratives. Why not take

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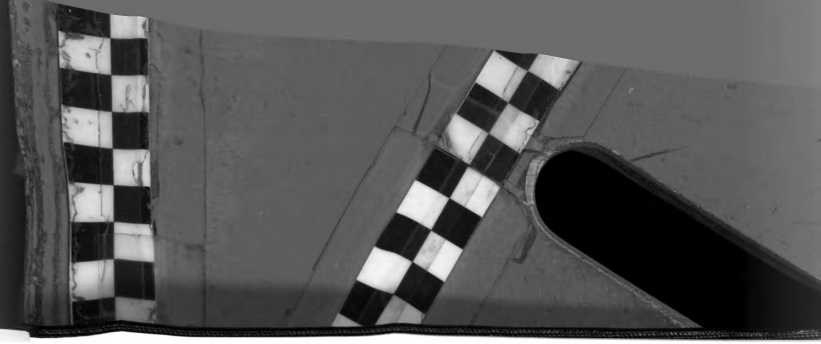
4. P. C. Cherry, *The Western Reserve and Early Ohio* (Akron: R. L. Fouse, 1921), p. 82.

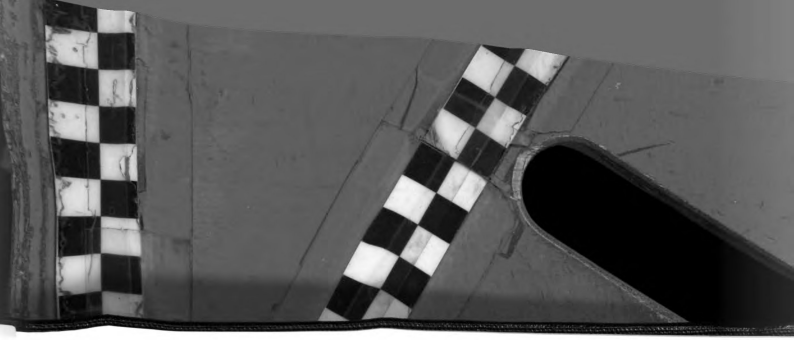


Christianity at its word and extol sacrifice?[5] When called by God, pioneer women seemingly cared little for social convention, and were willing to pay any price to fulfill his plan--especiall female preachers. James Fairchild notes that, despite limitations placed on women's participation in frontier worship,

> the women of that day were no idlers. The burden of life in the new country bore with full weight upon them. In the church, as well as at home, they were the life and inspiration of much that was done.[6]

5. Lois Scharf comes closest to this ideal. Though she writes of the sacrifice involved in pioneering, her perspective is that of a feminist--not a religious historian. See Lois Scharf, "Helpmates and Housewives: Women's Changing Roles in the Western Reserve," *The Western Reserve Magazine* 5 (May-June, 1978): 33-40. This perspective is more obvious when read in connection with her "Widening Their Sphere: Women in the Western Reserve, 1800-1870," *The Western Reserve Magaine* 5 (March-April, 1978): 33-40.

6. *Papers of the Ohio Church History Society* 10 volumes (n. p., 1899), 1:10.



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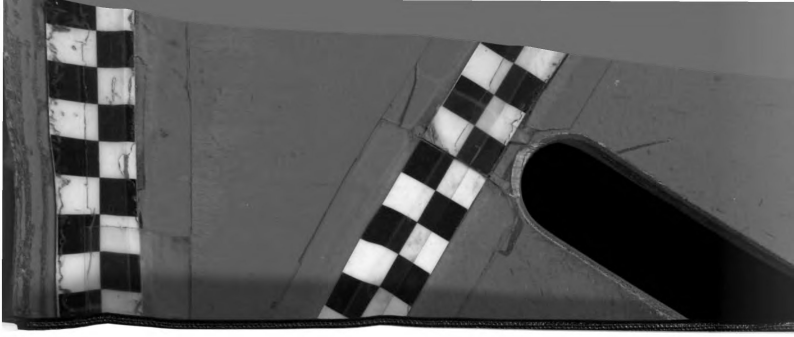

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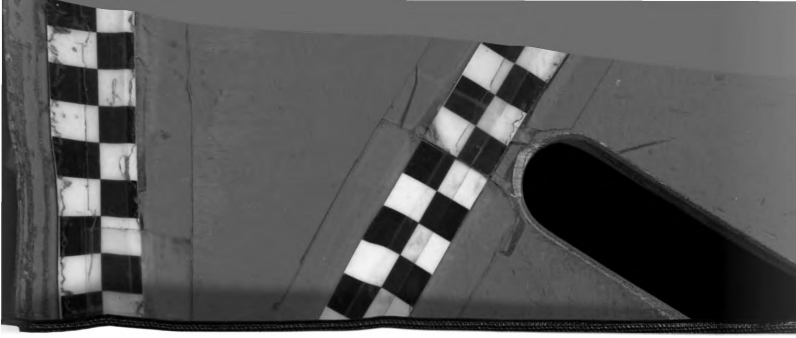

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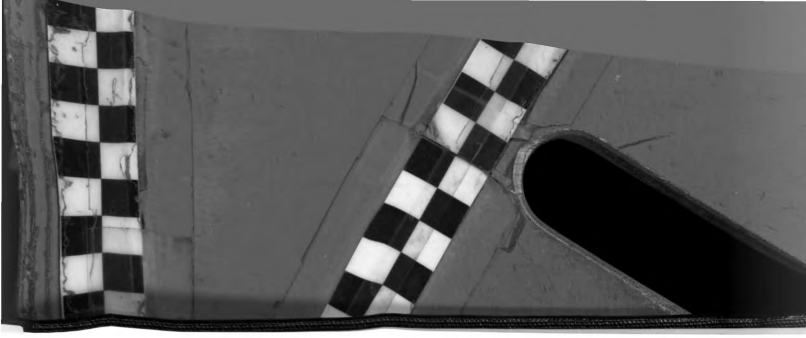

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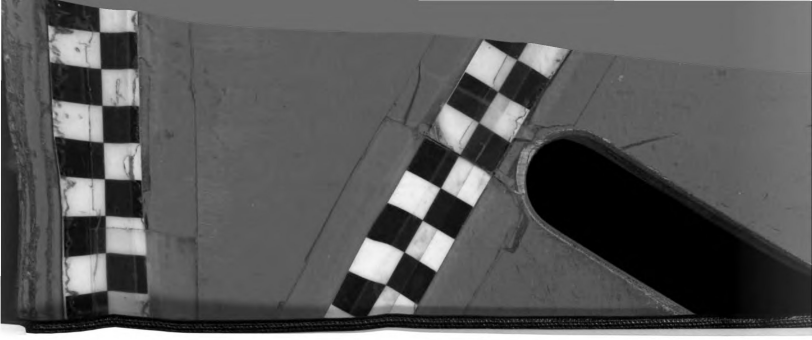

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