

William McKendree Lambdin

A Pioneer Methodist Minister and Educator of Texas

by

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Foreword

During a Fall University workshop for local church historians sponsored by the Commission on Archives and History of the Central Texas Conference of The United Methodist Church, I heard Jean Traster, the conference archivist, mention that the grave marker for the Rev. William McKendree Lambdin was missing at the First Street Cemetery of Waco. He was one of the earliest Methodist ministers in Central Texas. After locating the Lambdin family plot at the cemetery, I noticed a large, unattractive concrete slab on the ground. Upon closer inspection I noticed rough marble exposed on one end of the slab. With the help of Max Robertson, the director of Parks and Recreation for the City of Waco, and his staff the slab was later flipped, and the Rev. William McKendree Lambdin's grave marker was once again visible.

Later, I thought that perhaps the Conference Commission on Archives and History might sponsor an Official Texas Historical Marker at his gravesite. I had served as a member and later as the chair of the commission.

After many months of research in Waco and Dallas and with some of the family records belonging to a descendant, Elizabeth Estes Taylor, I applied for a state marker for this early Methodist minister. This narrative history was one of the requirements in the application.

The Official Texas Historical Marker for the Rev. William McKendree Lambdin was dedicated at First Street Cemetery on June 3, 2001.

William McKendree Lambdin

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William McKendree Lambdin was born January 16, 1811, in Virginia to the Reverend William Lambdin (circa 1784-May 22, 1854) and Susan Corner Lambdin (August 12, 1786-August 17, 1869) (1). He was probably named for Bishop William McKendree who was one of the early bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America. During his childhood, William McKendree Lambdin received a literary and religious education.

In 1829, William Lambdin built a paper mill in Wheeling, Virginia (now West Virginia) (2). According to the 1839 directory of Wheeling:

“The Virginia paper mill of Messrs. Wm. Lambdin & Sons, is in full, and apparently, very prosperous operation. It is conducted by the immediate and unremitting attention of the partners, in a style and upon a system eminently calculated to do honor to the proprietors...They manufacture all kinds of paper of unexceptionable qualities. Their manufacturing machinery throughout, which is propelled by two steam engines, appears to have received in its construction, the utmost bounds of human invention. It is well worthy of attention of strangers to examine the perfection of this machinery, and to observe the order and neatness in which everything in the establishment is executed and kept. The annual product is \$50,000 – 30 hands are employed – and 55,000 bushels of coal are annually consumed, which cost 3 ¾ cents per bushel.” (3)

The paper mill was located at 49 Water Street in South Wheeling. William Lambdin & Sons was also a dealer in dry goods and groceries, and this business was located at 117 Water Street,

- 1 McLennan County, Texas Cemetery Records, Volume I (Waco, Tex.: Central Texas Genealogical Society, 1965), p. 77.
- 2 J. H. Newton, G. G. Nichols, and A. G. Sprankle, History of the Pan-Handle; being Historical Collections of the Counties of Ohio, Brooke, Marshall and Hancock, West Virginia (Wheeling, W. Va.: J. A. Caldwell, 1879), p. 243
- 3 J. B. Bowen, The Wheeling Directory and Advertiser (Wheeling: John M. M'Creary, 1839), p. 11.

corner of 2nd Street, in South Wheeling (4). The paper mill continued operation until 1857 or 1858 when it was turned over to Daniel Cushing.

On May 20, 1834, William McKendree Lambdin and Phebe G. Lamb were married in Wheeling, Ohio County, Virginia (5). According to family tradition, Phebe Lamb was raised in the Society of Friends (Quaker) tradition. Later they had several children before her death by consumption on October 10, 1849, in South Wheeling (6).

According to family tradition, William McKendree Lambdin commanded a wagon train to California during the 1849 Gold Rush. It was reported that he found some gold, but was robbed on his return trip. On the 1850 federal census for Ohio County, Virginia, his children are found living with his parents, William and Susan C. Lambdin (7).

After his return to Wheeling, William McKendree Lambdin married Susan Amelia Thompson in 1855, and they later had several children. Susan A. Thompson was born on December 29, 1830, in Hagerstown, Maryland and died December 29, 1910, in Waco, Texas. In 1857, the William McKendree Lambdin family moved to Waco, McLennan County, Texas where his sister, Lucretia Lambdin Prather, and her husband, the Rev. George W. Prather, had a 3,000 acre farm (8). The trip, which took thirty days, was made overland in a two-horse carryall. They crossed the Brazos River on a ferry owned by Shapley P. Ross.

Later that year, William McKendree Lambdin became involved in the ordained ministry of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. He was admitted on trial to the Texas Conference as a deacon at its session held in Waco during December 1857 (9). Bishop H. H. Kavanaugh appointed him to serve as president of the Waco Female College which was a large educational

- 4 J. B. Bowen, The Wheeling Directory and Advertiser (Wheeling: John M. M'Creary, 1839), p. 71.
- 5 Elizabeth E. Mullett and Carol Hassig, Ohio County, West Virginia Marriages: Minister's Returns 1790-1835 (New Martinsville, W. Va.: Wetzel County Genealogical Society, 1991), p. 18.
- 6 Carol A. Scott, Marriage and Death Notices of Wheeling, Western Virginia and the Tri-State Area 1818-1857 (Apollo, Pa.: Closson Press, 1987), p. 60.
- 7 1850 United States Census, Ohio Co., Virginia: City of Wheeling, stamped p. 182.
- 8 John M. Usry, Early Waco Obituaries and Various Related Items 1874-1908 (Waco, Tex.: Central Texas Genealogical Society, 1980), pp. 381-382.
- 9 Macum Phelan, A History of Early Methodism in Texas 1817-1866 (Dallas, Tex.: Cokesbury Press, 1924), p. 380.

institution of the Methodist Church (10). He served as the second president in the history of the college.

At the November 1858 session of the Texas Conference, Bishop George F. Pierce appointed him to serve as the pastor of the Bosque Mission located in the Waco District (11). This mission later became the Bosqueville Methodist Church.

At the November 1859 session of the Texas Conference, Bishop Pierce appointed him to serve the Houston Station and Colored Mission. The Houston Station was later named the Shearn Memorial Methodist Church. The Shearn Memorial Church was later renamed the First Methodist Church of Houston.

In the History of Shearn Church 1837-1907, Mrs. I.M.E. Blandin wrote the following about the pastorate of William McKendree Lambdin:

“A year characterized by seasons of excitement and despondency for the church in Houston had just closed, and the war clouds were gathering fast when Conference met November 24th, 1859, in LaGrange, Bishop Pierce presiding.

Houston was considered by Bishop Pierce the most important station in the Texas Conference, therefore it was not surprising that Rev. W. McK. Lambden was appointed to this station.

Mr. Lambden was the son of a distinguished minister of the Pittsburg Conference, who was transferred to the Texas Conference in 1857. He was a man of unusual attainments, ranked far above the average as a preacher, and his pulpit manner was well-nigh faultless. He was a handsome man, possessed of a fine physique and commanding presence. The faithful few who ventured out to hear him were charmed, and soon the church was filled as in former days. The Sunday School wonderfully revived, and all week-day services were well attended.

When the new pastor and family arrived Mr. and Mrs. J. F. Dumble invited them to their home until suitable arrangements for their sojourn could be made. The parsonage was small and much out of repair, therefore it was decided not to make that the home of the pastor. After much discussion arrangement was made with Mr. Hardcastle to board the minister's

10 Homer S. Thrall, A Brief History of Methodism in Texas (Nashville, Tenn.: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1894), pp. 275-276.

11 Macum Phelan, A History of Early Methodism in Texas 1817-1866 (Dallas, Tex.: Cokesbury Press, 1924), p. 430.

family, and in the old Hardcastle hospitable home, out on San Felipe street, they found a comfortable and pleasant home while in Houston.

Mrs. Lambden was a cultured woman, truly a suitable companion for her husband, and was greatly beloved by the ladies of the Houston church.

Much to the regret of the congregation, Mr. Lambden remained only one year, but that year was a year of progress and upbuilding for the church.” (12)

William McKendree Lambdin also served the Colored Mission which later became the Trinity Methodist Church of Houston. Concerning the history of this mission, Mrs. I. M. E. Blandin wrote:

“At the time when the first church was built it was the custom to have preaching for the negroes in the afternoon, in the same building used by the white congregation; the same pastor preached to both. However, many churches had a gallery for the accommodation of the negroes, and both congregations were served at the same time. This was not satisfactory, as they needed somewhat different teaching to that given the whites. The old brick church had a gallery, but it soon became evident that it was needed for the white congregation, and the custom was to preach to the negroes in the afternoon, and this congregation was considered a very important part of the pastor’s work.

About 1851 it was deemed advisable to build a church for the accommodation of the negroes. A framed building was erected on the northwest corner of the lot, fronting Milam street.

This was the only church for negroes anywhere between the Trinity and the Brazos...” (13)

12 Mrs. I. M. E. Blandin, History of Shearn Church (Houston, Tex.: J. V. Dealy Co., 1908), pp. 57-58.

13 Ibid., p. 218.

At The November 1860 session of the Texas Conference, Bishop J. O. Andrew appointed him to serve as the presiding elder of the Fort Worth District of the church (14). He served in this position from 1860 through 1864. William McKendree Lambdin was also admitted into full connection to the Texas Conference as an elder at the November 1860 session.

At the 1864 session of the Texas Conference, he was appointed as an agent for Methodist publishing concerns.

At the 1865 session of the Texas Conference, he was appointed to serve the Waco Station (15). The Waco Station was later named the Fifth Street Methodist Church. The Fifth Street Church was later renamed the First Methodist Church of Waco.

In 1866, William McKendree Lambdin was elected to serve as a delegate to the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South which met in New Orleans (16). At the September 1866 session of the newly formed Northwest Texas Conference (now the Central Texas Conference) which was held in Waco, William McKendree Lambdin was appointed to serve as an agent for The Texas Christian Advocate which was the official denominational newspaper in Texas (17).

William McKendree Lambdin died on September 11, 1867, of yellow fever and was buried in the Prather – Lambdin plot at the First Street Cemetery in Waco (18, 19).

The following obituary was published in the minutes of the Northwest Texas Conference in November 1867:

“William McKendree Lambdin was an able minister of the New Testament, in the very prime of physical and intellectual strength – a brother beloved. He was assigned, at our last

14 Macum Phelan, A History of the Expansion of Methodism in Texas 1867-1902 (Dallas, Tex.: Mathis, Van Nort, and Co., 1937), pp. 8-9.

15 Fifth Street Methodist Church, Church Register/Register of Pastors. (Handwritten)

16 Macum Phelan, A History of Early Methodism in Texas 1817-1866 (Dallas, Tex.: Cokesbury Press, 1924), p. 485.

17 Ibid., p. 491.

18 McLennan County, Texas Cemetery Records, Volume I (Waco, Tex.: Central Texas Genealogical Society, 1965), p. 77.

19 Mrs. I. M. E. Blandin, History of Shearn Church (Houston, Tex.: J. V. Dealy Co., 1908), p. 58.

Conference, to the work of an agency for the Texas Christian Advocate. Though an important work, and very nearly allied to the interests of Southern Methodism in Texas, most of his brethren felt that he could not possibly be spared from the active duties of the pastorate to devote himself to it. It is due, perhaps, to say that, though Brother Lambdin was not a man to choose his own work, he, on several occasions, intimated to the appointing power that his state of health, and financial embarrassment growing out of the great pressure of the times, suggested to his mind the propriety of asking a nominal, rather than an effective, relation to the Conference. We believe that we are substantially correct in saying that it was mainly in view of these facts that the appointment was made. But though assigned to an agency which allowed considerable margin for attention to his secular affairs, he scarcely abated a tithe of his labors as a minister of the gospel. He seemed never for a moment to lose sight of the great commission, and eminently obeyed the command of the chief Shepherd, 'As ye go, preach.' He often remarked to his brethren, with whom he was intimate, that preaching the gospel, with him, was not a profession, but a *vocation*, an *embassage* of God to dying men. He felt it to be not merely a duty, but a great privilege. As God had counted him worthy to publish glad tidings to his fellow-men, his soul burned with quenchless ardor to make full proof of his ministry. He often dwelt with emphasis upon those impressive words of the apostle, 'The love of Christ constraineth us.' Brother Lambdin was no ordinary man, no ordinary preacher. Blessed with the advantages of a literary and religious education, he early contracted those habits of mental and moral discipline, which gave such beautiful consistency to his life, and developed that firmness and decision which was destined to become the crowning grace of his Christian and ministerial character. The occasion of his last sermon was one of unusual interest. His subject was faith in Christ as the condition of salvation. By many that sermon will never be forgotten. It was so peculiarly unctuous and powerful, that a brother remarked, after the conclusion of the service, it seemed to him 'that Brother Lambdin spoke like one from the border of eternity.' And so it was. He never preached again. Soon after his return home, he was attacked with violent illness, which terminated his useful life. Though not permitted to testify, even to those he most tenderly loved on earth, of the sustaining presence and preciousness of that Saviour whom he had so often preached, yet he left behind, in the purity of his life, and his self-sacrificing devotion to the itinerant ministry, a more satisfactory and enduring record. It would be a delightful office to recall the many pleasing and interesting facts connected with his private and ministerial life. But suffice it to say, that the vigor of his intellect, his noble Christian bearing, his gentleness of disposition, coupled with unwavering faith in the Redeemer, gave to his life a charm, and endeared him to all who knew him. His life and official administration in the Church were singularly pure and free from faults. An affectionate son, a devoted father, a

loving husband, and an able minister of the New Testament, he has bequeathed to his family and to the Church a richer legacy than earth can afford.” (20)

20 Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South for the Year 1867 (Nashville, Tenn.: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1870), pp. 187-188.

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