Practicing Piety: Sarah Jones and Methodism in 1790s Virginia

Chad Sandford

College of William & Mary - Arts & Sciences

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PRACTICING PIETY

Sarah Jones and Methodism in 1790s Virginia

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Lyon Gardiner Tyler Department of History

The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

by

Chad Sandford

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APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Chad Sandford

Approved by the Committee, November 2004

Christopher Grasso, Chair

Lu Ann Homza

Maureen Fitzgerald
Dedicated to the memory of Andrew, who has seen the chariots of Israel and its horsemen
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PREFACE

This project almost never happened. I was doing some preliminary research on what I thought was a good topic for a term paper, Episcopalians and their interaction with evangelicals in Virginia during the Second Great Awakening. In the process, Susan Riggs, in charge of special collections at The College of William and Mary, mentioned a little-used manuscript that related to the broader topic of religion in Virginia. At first uninterested in a Methodist woman’s diary (after all, what did that have to do with Episcopalians?), I brushed it aside and proceeded to look at other materials. Later, while talking to Chris Grasso, I mentioned the source, including the fact that it had been miscatalogued for a long time, and consequently had been paid little attention. Chris encouraged me to look at the diary and reconsider the potential it might have for a paper. His wisdom, along with Carol Sheriff’s flexibility in allowing me extra time to switch research topics midstream, were the impetus for my foray into the life of Sarah Jones.

I wish to thank several people for their support along the way. First, thanks to Susan Riggs for her superior knowledge of the special collections at the College, and for pointing out the diary to me. The assistance she and the rest of the staff gave in my many visits to peruse the source is much appreciated. Carol Sheriff provided a valuable read for what has become part of chapter one, giving positive feedback which encouraged me to think the project had potential. Both Maureen Fitzgerald and Lu Ann Homza were generous with their time and suggestions while serving on my committee. Without Chris Grasso’s willingness to act as my thesis director, this would never have come together. His careful reading of various drafts produced comments as sharp as they were helpful.

I would also like to express appreciation to those friends who willingly read portions, provided helpful comments, and showed an interest in this endeavor. You know who you are. As one who believes strongly that history should be made accessible to a wider audience than those who write it, it was gratifying to see interest among those who would not call themselves historians.
ABSTRACT

The role of women in late-eighteenth century evangelicalism is a subject with which many historians have grappled. This project continues the discourse, thanks to the recent discovery of the diary of Sarah Jones, a Virginian Methodist and plantation mistress during this time. Jones’ diary covers a seventeen-month span between 1792 and 1793, and is almost three hundred pages in length. It and other writings of hers offer rich insight into the nature of southern Methodism—and by extension evangelicalism—before 1800.

More specifically, scrutiny of Jones’ life shows how evangelicalism held radical potential for transforming society among those men and women who embraced it. Methodism tempered patriarchal authority, even as husbands continued to rule over their wives. The reason for men’s continual dominance over affairs of home and church might be linked to the extent to which Methodism transformed the lives of those who embraced it. For Jones, it was an all-consuming experience, and encouraged an otherworldly focus. The priority placed by women such as Jones on the immaterial is one reason why women did not advocate for an overturning, but merely an altering, of existing power structures.

While the fruits of Methodism did not include political or social equality, they did include an inner transformation. Rather than ordering her life around gender, race, or class, Jones chose her circle of friends based on religion. If they were right with God as she defined it, they won her approval. If not, they won her reproof. This departs from other scholarship on plantation mistresses, which has argued that religion did little to change their circumstances, or the way they ordered their lives.
PRACTICING PIETY
INTRODUCTION

In 1794, a white, married woman in her early forties cried out "The chariots of Israel, and the horsemen thereof!" and shortly after passed away, entering into what she hoped was her eternal reward. Her words were those attributed to the Old Testament prophet Elisha. Thus ended the earthly sojourn of Sarah Jones, a pious Methodist who both grew up and died in southern Virginia's Mecklenburg County.\(^1\) Her passing meant little to most inhabitants of the state, or of the fledgling early republic. However, some Methodist preachers knew her well, and must have grieved over her death. Jeremiah Minter, an itinerant in his late twenties at her passing, went so far as to write and publish a biography of her in 1799. He continued to expose her life to public scrutiny in 1804, when he published nearly a hundred and fifty pages of letters she had written.\(^2\)

These letters, combined with a recently discovered diary of Jones, invite an examination of this unique woman. As both a Methodist and a plantation mistress, Jones was a rare breed. And she wrote at a pivotal time, when Methodism was just beginning

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\(^1\) Jeremiah Minter, *Devout Letters or Letters Spiritual and Friendly, Written by Mrs. Sarah Jones, Corrected and Published by Jeremiah Minter, Minister of the Gospel, Author of the Life and Death of Mrs. Jones, Truth’s Cause Plead, &c. &c.* (Alexandria: Samuel Snowden, 1804), vii.

to gather momentum in Virginia, even as evangelicalism more broadly had already created rifts in culture and value systems in that state.³

What the nature of Methodism was at this time in Virginia is a question that a study of Jones will attempt to answer. Was it as socially revolutionary as the earlier groups of Baptists and Methodists examined by Rhys Isaac? This question is hardly a new one. In fact, an abundance of material on the nature of Methodism in the early republic has been published in recent years. Much of it focuses on how revolutionary Wesley’s religion was, as it was applied in America. In other words, how much power did it give women? Did it alter social structures in any meaningful way, specifically by changing the nature of planter authority vis-à-vis women?⁴ Jones helps us to understand Methodism as potentially radical in how it began to change social relations, even as it had conservative strands from the beginning that limited the scope of such transformation. Paradoxically, these traditionalist aspects of the religion may have been allowed to continue because other components provided a great degree of freedom, and with it satisfaction, that allowed women adherents to accept those elements of their religion that they might otherwise have tried to change.

Even if Methodism did not provide the material benefits one might look for as signs of a revolutionary character, it did transform Jones’ worldview, making her an atypical plantation mistress. This is the conclusion of chapter two, in which the focus is


on how Jones mentally placed herself within society, and how religion altered that perception. In examining how she ordered her circle, it becomes evident that religion was the key element to who won or lost Jones’ approval, and whether she accepted them as an equal. Other factors such as race, class, and gender were less important to Jones than what a person believed and how she or he behaved. This revelation is a departure from other scholarship on plantation women, particularly the important works of Catherine Clinton and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese.

It should be noted from the start what this study is not. This is not a comparative examination between either the Methodists and other evangelical groups, such as the Baptists and Presbyterians, or between evangelicalism and other forms of Christianity prevalent in the eighteenth century. I am not arguing for the uniqueness of Methodism with regards to its character, and how it interacted with and transformed society. In fact, in light of Rhys Isaac’s *Transformation of Virginia*, it seems that Methodism may have simply imitated the process of social transformation begun by Baptists, among others, in the First Great Awakening. Whatever the similarities or differences may have been between Methodism and other religious strains, a comparative approach would only make sense, or be fair, if using similar kinds of source material. Since much of my research focuses on the (religious) diary of a Methodist plantation mistress, and since diaries of Baptist, Presbyterian, or even Anglican plantation mistresses from Jones’ time are virtually non-existent, a comparative study does not seem appropriate. I hope this may change as more manuscripts become available.

Now that it is clear what this study is not, what it is should be emphasized. This is a look at a single, white plantation mistress. Both colorful in action and word, she was one of a kind. If her dying words identifying herself with an Old Testament prophet were typical for women on their death beds, her pursuit of holiness while alive was not. It seems that everyone who wrote of her was impressed by her piety. Because she was so
unusual, some care is necessary in drawing conclusions about Methodism in general. On the other hand, a good deal might be extrapolated from examining the life of a woman who seemed to have all the comforts material wealth provided before her conversion to the Methodist cause. Given her prosperity, Jones’ commitment to Methodism is striking. Whatever attracted her to it had some serious drawing power. If we can understand why Jones felt compelled to join Methodism, what she found attractive in the movement, and why she stayed loyal to it, we might assume these factors also applied to others. In that case, Jones’ life becomes a prism more generally into Methodism and what it offered women, despite her uniqueness.
CHAPTER I

METHODISTS AND WOMEN: OPPORTUNITY OR NOT?

On the first day of summer in 1792, Sarah Jones felt herself locked in a deadly struggle. It did not involve what might be considered the typical trials of a southern plantation mistress, such as getting her slaves to follow their orders, or convincing her husband to buy a new piece of furniture for the front parlor. Instead, Jones was involved in a spiritual war. Her language is vivid: “Satan will not let me alone. Neither will I allow him where to set his foot with the bounds of my rights. It is awful, I truly feel it so. I have declared war perpetual with him, to give him no quarters, to kill or be killed, fight or die, make or break, win all or lose all. I am not for halving with hell. But I will conquer or die, and of a truth I do fight.” These words reveal Jones for who she was, a woman determined to face her spiritual archenemy and overcome, whatever the cost.

This passion for spiritual success did not always involve a martial tone. Sometimes her quest for spiritual intimacy with Christ involved less strenuous action, although no less descriptive language. On one occasion she recorded: “Long before day I was fixed on God and had silent, deep communion with him. The life which I now live is

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5 Sarah Jones, Diary 1792-1793, Ms. Sarah Anderson Jones Diary, Manuscripts and Rare Books Department, Swem Library, College of William and Mary, 21 June 1792. Hereafter cited as SJD. Deciphering Jones’ handwriting has not been an easy task. I have taken the liberty of standardizing inconsistent spelling and punctuation for the sake of readability.
by faith in the Son of God. I will sing early of him, 'for he hath done excellent things. This is known in all the earth.' [Isaiah 12:5] O faith, what may be said of thee? The adventure of faith brings a rich return. Trust the Lord, O my soul, trust him, O my friend."  

Jones wrote her nearly three-hundred-page diary from 1792-93. For years this source was attributed to an anonymous Quaker woman. As a result it has not received the attention it deserves as a means to reveal how Methodism shaped the life of at least one elite white woman in 1790s Virginia. Recently several historians have written extensively on women’s role and opportunities in evangelical religion, including Methodism, during the period of the early republic. But diaries of Methodist women from the South are extremely rare. The historiography has been limited to using women’s letters in combination with more abundant types (diaries, sermons, letters, etc.) of men’s writing.

Few have done an in-depth study of the writing (and life) of one Methodist woman as a means to arrive at larger conclusions about the movement and what it offered its female adherents. Yet such a focused study is valuable, for it can add to scholarship that has been forced, due to the nature of extant sources, to use a handful of scattered texts (often letters to ministers) from a variety of times and places as a way of drawing a composite sketch of the Methodist woman’s experience. Looking at a large amount of material from the life of one woman can complicate and enrich these generalized sketches. The study of Sarah Jones’ life is valuable, then, because it provides a lens through which we can examine religion, a dominant theme in the early republic. In

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6 SJD, 24 January 1793.

7 One notable exception to this is Diane Lobody’s dissertation, “Lost in the Ocean of Love: The Mystical Writings of Catherine Livingston Garrettson,” (Ph. D. diss., Drew University, 1990). However, Garrettson was a Methodist from the North (New York), and Lobody focuses on her life as a single person before marriage. Geographical location and marital status both distinguish Jones in my study.
studying Jones we will better understand how some elite Virginians, especially women, sought order in their lives during a period of drastic change. We will come to see that her diary and published letters support and complicate some recent historiographical conclusions. Her life shows how Methodism could alter relationships between women and men. Methodism was a potentially radical movement, for it gave women opportunities to participate in a sphere beyond the home. While its challenge to society had its limits, it threatened, and at times softened the patriarchal system.

Methodism’s earliest adherents probably failed to see its society-shattering potential. From its founding in 1730s England by brothers Charles and John Wesley, it was first a British movement within the Church of England. Its basic purpose was to promote discipline through activities like fasting and charity. Moreover, its earliest adherents advocated “holy living,” as works like Thomas à Kempis’ *Imitation of Christ* described it. As it developed, missionary zeal and a focus on religious experience became two defining elements. Experience included two aspects, justification (pardon from sin) and sanctification (the state of perfection, or living without sin). These did not usually come at the same time. But both involved a palpable event. This emphasis was a departure from traditional Anglican teaching, while the belief that salvation was open to all who desired it was not. Together these doctrines made for a unique religious blend.8

George Whitefield was another self-designated Methodist, having been associated with the Wesleys from the beginning of their movement. He was the first prominent member of their group to spend significant time evangelizing the American colonies, making a total of six preaching tours in them between 1738 and 1770. However, his doctrine differed from John Wesley’s. Whitefield emphasized Calvinist theology, which held that a limited number of people were “elect,” or eligible for salvation. “Wesleyan

Methodism,” however, suggested that anyone who wanted to respond to Christ could. It did not come to America until the 1760s, when large numbers of English migrants to the colonies included the first Wesleyans. By the end of this decade some of them had initiated contact with Wesley, alerted him to a dire need for preachers, and asked him to solve the problem.9

During the early 1770s, Wesley maintained ties with America, where he sent traveling preachers and supervised religious operations from afar. However, American missionaries largely supplanted British ones after the onset of war. These American men, led by (the British) Francis Asbury, managed successfully to recruit followers during the conflict, despite the perception that Methodists were loyalists. By 1782, Methodist societies claimed 11,785 adherents, up from 6,095 in 1778. In Virginia, they were particularly successful. A 1775-76 revival there, in the Brunswick circuit (a region within which preachers traveled), boosted the number of Methodists in that area to 1,611.10

It was likely in this revival—years before she wrote her diary—that Jones experienced the kind of conversion (justification) the Methodists emphasized, after which she joined their ranks. Although her diary makes no mention of it, her nineteenth-century biographer claimed she began her “spiritual race” around this time.11 Geographically, the proximity of the revival to Jones’ home would have placed her well within the region of

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9 Ibid., 24-25, 31-32, 36-37.
10 Ibid., 40-61.
11 Jeremiah Minter, Letters Spiritual, vii. The dating of her conversion is based on Minter’s calculation that, at her death in 1794, Jones had been in the “spiritual race . . . about eighteen years” (vii). John Lednum, a Methodist historian in the mid-nineteenth century, suggested Jones converted around 1786, under the itinerant John Easter. Yet I suspect this was a faulty assumption, based upon the idea that it occurred near the time of an episode involving Jones that the itinerant preacher Thomas Ware related in his journal. Since Minter was one of Jones’ closest friends, I am accepting his chronology over Lednum’s. For Lednum’s summary of Jones, see A History of the Rise of Methodism in America Containing Sketches of Methodist Itinerant Preachers, from 1736 to 1785 . . . (Philadelphia: John Lednum, 1859), microfiche, 354.
intensified religious fervor. Jones was a native of Mecklenburg County, but Brunswick circuit either included Mecklenburg or was within easy traveling distance from the county.\(^\text{12}\)

Unfortunately, we know little about Jones before her conversion. Jeremiah Minter, a one-time Methodist itinerant and close friend of Jones, published a biography of her in 1799. However, it has not survived. We can construct a limited sketch from other sources. She was born Sarah Anderson sometime in 1753 or 1754 to Thomas and Sarah Anderson. Anderson was a prominent name in the community, and had been since its founding. In 1722, John Anderson was one of the first to receive a patent of land in the area. In 1756, the Anglican vestry ordered a Thomas Anderson along with two other men to choose a suitable location for a new church. In 1764, a Thomas Anderson appeared on a list of tithables for St. James parish in Lunenburg County, indicating he owned 1,050 acres of land. In 1765, Mecklenburg County was founded from part of Lunenburg. At the meeting of the first court, a Thomas Anderson was one of thirteen “gentlemen” who comprised the first commission of the peace. Revolutionary War records listed Thomas Anderson, Sr., as supportive of the rebels’ cause, since he furnished supplies and served as a road overseer. Anderson’s wife continued to aid the revolution after her husband’s death by allowing pasturage to the Continental Army on two occasions: once for seventeen horses over fourteen days, another time for eighteen horses over ten days. Sarah’s brother, Thomas Jr., went further than his parents, providing pasturage for one hundred days, in addition to significant amounts of feed for the army’s animals. These

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\(^{12}\) Mecklenburg was not listed as a circuit in the Methodist records until 1779 (Minutes of the Methodist Conferences Annually Held in America from 1773 to 1813 Inclusive, Volume the First [New York: John C. Totten, 1813], microform, 21). Brunswick circuit, founded in 1774, included fourteen Virginia counties south of Petersburg along with two in North Carolina. It is possible that Mecklenburg County was included in this circuit before the Lunenburg circuit was renamed after Mecklenburg in 1779. See Susan L. Bracey, Life by the Roaring Roanoke: A History of Mecklenburg County, Virginia (Mecklenburg County: The Mecklenburg County Bicentennial Commission, 1977), 102; Jesse Lee, A Short History of the Methodists, in the United States of America, Beginning in 1765, and Continued Till 1809, to which is Prefixed a Brief Account of Their Rise in England, in the Year 1729 & c. (Baltimore: Magill and Clime, 1810), 67.
details are important. They all suggest that the Anderson family was both a prominent and wealthy one in the community.\textsuperscript{13}

Resources may have been strained, however, by the size of the Anderson family. It was a large one. Thomas Anderson’s will, dated 4 December 1779, listed ten children, three male and seven female. If the order in which Thomas listed them indicated birthrate, Sarah was the second oldest, next to brother Frances. Her affection for big brother must have run deep. One of her eldest sons bore the same name.\textsuperscript{14}

Marriage, however, may have impinged upon that relationship at an early age. In late 1767, Sarah Anderson married Tignal Jones, Sr., a young man of some promise in the community. He was involved in Mecklenburg County from its founding, when Thomas served on a commission which appointed him as a captain in the county militia. The two men must have been acquainted from at least that time. Tignal was also a man of wealth. The 1764 tithe held him accountable for 565 acres of land, a remarkable figure

\textsuperscript{13} Jones’ birth is calculated from Minter’s assertion that in 1794 she was “in the 41st year of her life” (Minter, Letters Spiritual, vii). The other facts are gleaned from Bracey, 26, 41, 57; Katherine B. Elliott, comp., Early Settlers Mecklenburg County Virginia, Volume I (South Hill, Va.: n.p., 1964), 151, 169; Katherine B. Elliott, comp., Revolutionary War Records Mecklenburg County Virginia (South Hill, Va.: n.p., 1964), 14. It is possible that the Thomas Anderson listed in conjunction with the county’s founding, as well as the church records, was a different Anderson than Sarah’s father, or that Thomas did not own the whole 1,065 acres. The tithe record of 1764 actually lists George, son of Thomas, as the owner of the land. However, the records commonly listed all land under a son. Moreover, since George was still a youth at the time, somewhere between the ages of sixteen and twenty-one, Thomas was charged for the tithe, so it is reasonable to suppose he actually owned the property. Katherine B. Elliott concurs on this point, and does not even consider that the landholding Thomas might be a different one from Sarah’s father. See Katherine B. Elliott, comp., Marriage Records 1765-1810 Mecklenburg County Virginia (South Hill, Va.: n.p., 1963), 187. My main reason for suggesting the possibility of two Thomas Andersons is because the George found in the tithe record is not listed in Thomas’ will (while Sarah and others are), dated 4 December 1779. He may have either died before his father or become estranged from him. Or, the tithe record may have been from a different line of Andersons. This, however, seems unlikely. Regardless, it is clear from the Revolutionary War records, which do link Thomas Anderson with his wife and Jones’ brother, that Anderson was wealthy, as both his widow and son had land or wealth to support the Revolution. Therefore, I do not think it a large leap to assume that the Thomas Anderson that other records indicate was a prominent citizen in the region is the same as Jones’ father. For Thomas Anderson’s will, see Katherine B. Elliott, comp., Early Wills 1765-1799 Mecklenburg County Virginia (South Hill, Va.: n.p., 1963), 9.

\textsuperscript{14} Elliott, Early Wills, 9; SJD, 1 September 1792 and 14 September 1792 both mention Jones’ son. The latter refers to him as “FJ”; Minter, Letters Spiritual, 131.
considering he was still under the age of twenty-one. The 1782 state enumeration record listed him with forty blacks in his household. This number grew significantly in succeeding years, by 1790 or so reaching between seventy and eighty slaves. Tobacco growing was prominent in the area. In one of her letters, Jones spoke about sending news via some men involved in transporting tobacco. By 1790, Tignal’s land holdings were large. He was taxed for over thirteen hundred acres. No doubt his many slaves grew the traditional cash crop on much of this land.15

From Jones’ writing, it is clear that some time in her formative years she received education of some kind. She wrote poetry and included it throughout her diary and letters. She displayed familiarity with the ancient thinker Seneca, quoting him several times. She criticized Ulysses’ inclination to wander. She displayed familiarity with Homer, Virgil, Pindar, and Horace. And she demonstrated at least rudimentary scientific knowledge by talking of “diverse metals commixed in melded flow,” in addition to a familiarity with Newton. Where or when Jones was educated is less clear. She wrote of visiting with a Mrs. Munford, “who took much pains with me in my youth to entrust me in things of high life [an education?]. She was educated in England, and she is yet remarkable kind to me.” Munford was another old name in the county, as well-known as

15 Elliott, *Marriage Records*, 75; Bracey, 57, 116; Elliott, *Early Settlers*, 156; Heads of Families at the First Census of the United States taken in the Year 1790: Records of the State Enumeration 1782 to 1785 Virginia (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1908; reprint, Bountiful, Utah: Accelerated Indexing Systems, 1978), 32; Minter, *Letters Spiritual*, 3-4, 7; Mecklenburg County Land Tax Books 1782-1811A, reel 188, Library of Virginia, microfilm. Marriage at the age of thirteen or fourteen is strikingly young. I have not been able to discover how common this was in colonial Virginia at the time. In Middlesex county (Va.), the mean age of women at marriage from 1740-49 was twenty-two (Darrett B. and Anita H. Rutman, *A Place in Time Explicatus* [New York: W. W. Norton, 1984], 64). However, earlier in neighboring Maryland colony, second generation daughters married quite young, averaging 16.5 years at marriage, so marriage at such a young age is plausible. See Lois Green Carr and Lorena S. Walsh, “The Planter’s Wife: The Experience of White Women in Seventeenth-Century Maryland” *William and Mary Quarterly* 34 (1977): 542-571. As far as I can tell, “Sr.” did not mean that he had a son by the same name at this time, but was used to differentiate between himself and a friend of his in the county, also named Tignal Jones. This second Tignal went by Tignal Jones, Jr., although his father was not named Tignal. See Elliott, *Early Settlers*, 156.
Anderson. We do not know whether this well-bred lady instructed Jones before her marriage, or nurtured her as a teenage bride.\textsuperscript{16}

Despite her education and affluence, Jones felt the need of something more. She found it in the Methodist religion. What was it about Wesley's religion that was so attractive to her? The historiography on women in early American Methodism has attempted to answer this question. A brief overview of it will provide several possible answers. Historians such as Dee E. Andrews, Nathan O. Hatch, Christine Leigh Heyrman, Cynthia Lynn Lyerly, and John H. Wigger have all published trenchant books in the last few years that treat the subject to greater or lesser degrees. Heyrman’s *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* traces the development of religion in the South from the mid-eighteenth through the early nineteenth century. She specifically deals with religion as it related to women and opportunities afforded them. Heyrman argues that close relationships between white women and both Methodist and Baptist ministers were common before about 1800. Evangelical clergy to some degree gave women autonomy to control their spirituality. In fact, preachers attributed greater spiritual prowess to women than to men. They allowed women to speak, pray, prophesy, and exhort, all in mixed, public gatherings. However, they drew the line at preaching. Neither Baptists nor Methodists allowed females to take the pulpit, either at home or abroad. And as the eighteenth century ended, there was a general trend to suppress any tendency toward female leadership within the church structure. It was only after a reversion to the status quo—exclusively male leadership—took place that large numbers entered the Methodist fold. What held promise to be a revolutionary movement fizzled, as it ultimately pandered to the patriarchal system in the South.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{16} SJD, 16 March 1792, 16 May 1992, 15 April 1792, 25 July 1792, 13 May 1792, 13 August 1792; Bracey, 26.

\textsuperscript{17} (New York: Knopf, 1997), 161-205.
Hatch, Lyerly, and Wigger, on the other hand, emphasize the revolutionary and popular appeal of the Methodist movement. It empowered those who previously had not had a voice in the church, including women. Leaders were little educated, unlike the elites found in Anglican, Congregationalist, and Presbyterian churches. In this religious milieu, women and slaves found a voice. Although the physical space of the pulpit was inaccessible to women, American Methodism was still essentially radical in the way it undermined previously held conceptions of who could properly speak as voices of moral authority. Women now had a voice, albeit restricted, in a family ordered not by blood, but by religion.18

Dee E. Andrews’ work is difficult to place with either Heyrman or Hatch, Lyerly, and Wigger. This is because she focuses less on Methodism’s radical or conservative nature, and more on how a British movement became an American one. To the extent that she deals with changes in Methodism after 1800, she tends to agree with Heyrman’s assessment that the move toward greater respectability within American society excluded women from masculine roles, and itinerants were no longer praised for their feminine qualities. Andrews disagrees with Heyrman’s chronology, however, suggesting that preachers portrayed themselves as masculine even as their popularity rose, rather than before it.

Andrews also emphasizes the hierarchical structure of American Methodism before 1800. Even so, it was an inclusive movement, and large numbers of women joined. Their dominant presence created “a unique social world, one in which female association predominated, separate from patriarchal family structures and community ties

alike.” This world was attractive to many women, despite the fact that it simply transferred patriarchy from flesh and blood husbands and fathers to an all male clergy. This did not mean that women were insignificant in promoting Methodism. They made vital contributions by supporting itinerants, sharing spiritual struggles with them, and leading private meetings of Methodist members. However, these contributions were often taken for granted, or “more often assumed than acknowledged,” and as the church grew in size it “consigned the largest segment of the Methodist population to an increasingly private sphere.”

In examining Jones’ writings as a way to build upon this work, particularly important are these questions: how radical or conservative was Methodism? What was its relationship to the prevailing social system? And what actions of Jones and the members of her household help to answer these questions?

Methodism’s character changed from the time of Jones’ conversion around 1776 and when she wrote (those letters with dates and published by her biographer start in 1788). Of most importance, it became its own denomination. Up until 1784, the Methodists still considered themselves under the authority of the Church of England, which by this time was practically defunct in America. A dearth of ordained ministers meant many Methodists went without important sacraments—or ordinances, to use Methodist vocabulary—such as baptism and communion. And many of those working as itinerants, often young and not well educated (and unordained), were not in a position to join forces with the degree-wielding Anglican clergy. These factors all contributed to the solution decided upon in 1784: the formation of the Methodist Episcopal Church of

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America (MEC). This body would provide much needed structure and seek to build upon its growing popularity.20

And popular it was. Methodism grew tremendously in the 1780s, concurrent with rising numbers of adherents in some other denominations. By 1788 the MEC claimed 30,809 white and 6,545 black members, a more than three hundred percent increase in just six years. In the Mecklenburg circuit, a recent revival had boosted Methodist numbers. Evangelicals in general, including Baptists and Presbyterians, cooperated together in this revival. Each denomination experienced increased spiritual fervor. Methodists in the circuit numbered 950 whites and 159 blacks in 1788. However, many spirits cooled in the region, even as overall numbers in the MEC increased. In 1789, itinerant James Meacham recorded the spiritual hardness he encountered in Mecklenburg. A few years earlier, “this part of McLenburg [sic] County was the flower of Virginia for Religion but now coldness and Dullness seems to overshadow the people.” Still, by 1791 there were more than five hundred members in Mecklenburg, which meant that Jones had plenty of brothers and sisters (Methodists addressed each other as “brother” or “sister”) near her home, even though they were a small minority in the area. Overall, the MEC claimed more than seventy-six thousand members.21


21 Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, 75, 106-107; Bracey, 106. For a general sketch on post-Revolutionary revivals, see Jon Butler, Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People (Cambridge: Harvard Univ., 1990), 221-224. On the revival among all three evangelical denominations, see John B. Boles, The Great Revival, 1787-1805: The Origins of the Southern Evangelical Mind (Lexington: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 1972), 7. Meacham’s 22 May 1789 diary entry has been reprinted in Historical Papers Published by The Trinity College Historical Society and The North Carolina Conference Historical Society, Series IX (1912), 67. Rough calculations reveal the percentage of Methodists in Mecklenburg County to be somewhere around three percent of the total population, six percent of the white population. This is based on census figures for 1782 and 1800, and the assumption that the population in 1791 was halfway between the two. (The 1790 census for Virginia uses 1782 state enumeration figures, as the 1790 schedules are not extant. See Heads of Families, 3). Census material taken from 1790 and 1800 tables at http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/cgi-local/censusbin/census/cen.pl. Internet; accessed 6 December 2003.
Jones must have been aware of this growth. The church regularly reassigned itinerants from one circuit to another, which could only have facilitated communication about what was going on in the new denomination. And she frequently wrote these preachers, who often responded in kind. On one occasion she spoke of having twenty letters to respond to, which indicates the volume of her correspondence. Significantly, these interactions with other preachers, as well as her own husband, shed light on the nature of women's role within Methodism, as well as the opportunities women seized to influence the growing movement.

Jones and her husband had a rocky marriage at times. After her conversion, her husband seems to have resisted Jones in her efforts to meet with other Methodists and hear the traveling preachers. One story in particular emphasizes this friction. Thomas Ware, who became a regular itinerant in 1783 at the age of twenty-four, recorded the episode:

A Sister Jones, of Meklenburgh, Virginia, had to pass through fiery trials. She was a woman of superior gifts as well as grace; and her courage and perseverance in the service of the Lord constrained all who knew her to acknowledge her deep sincerity. Her husband cherished the most bitter and inveterate prejudice against the Methodists; and being naturally a man of violent passions, and most ungovernable temper, he, by his threats, deterred her for a time from joining them. Nor did he stop there, but positively forbade her going to hear them. Soon after this, Mr. Easter, a man remarkably owned of God, and a favorite preacher of Mrs. Jones, was to preach in the neighborhood. Mrs. Jones told her husband she believed it to be a duty which she owed to God and herself to go and hear Mr. Easter, and begged his permission; but he refused. She then said she should be compelled, from a sense of obligation to a higher power, to disobey his command. At this he became enraged, and in his fury swore if she did, he would charge his gun and shoot her when she returned; but this tremendous threat did not deter her. During preaching she was remarkably blessed and strengthened; and on her return met her infuriated husband at the door, with his gun in hand. She accosted him mildly, and said 'My dear, if you take my life, you must obtain leave of my heavenly Spouse;' and thus saying, approached him, and took the deadly weapon out of his hand, without meeting any resistance. This virulent

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22 SJD, 31 July 1792.
temper God in due time softened and subdued, so that the tiger became a lamb. When on my way to my first quarterly meeting in Mecklenburgh . . . I called on Mr. Jones, and had the whole history of this transaction from the parties themselves, who, united with one heart in the service of God, accompanied me to the meeting.²³

It might be supposed that this episode is merely a kind of conversion narrative, a literary device commonly used by evangelicals to illustrate the wonders of God in bringing horrible sinners to repentance and conversion. Ware's story certainly illustrates Tignal's abusive nature and his subsequent transformation. However, as Catherine A. Brekus has found in her research on conversion narratives from the period, all of them included information on how the sinner became a saint. Often the impetus for the change was a hard circumstance of some kind, such as personal sickness or the death of a loved one. In their conversion narratives, both men and women related feeling weak before their spiritual rebirth.²⁴ Strikingly, this story departs significantly from these characteristics. Most importantly, there is no detail on how Mr. Jones converted. He moves from "tiger" to "lamb" with no explanation of the process this entailed. In short, there is little to suggest this story is a literary device used to illustrate conversion. Instead, whatever literary features it employs seem to be for the primary purpose of exonerating Jones as a figure of piety. This function is consistent with the publication of the event in the mid-nineteenth century volume, *Heroines of Methodism*, a book clearly intended to reveal contributions women had made to the Methodist cause.

As Christine Heyrman has suggested, the figure of a husband set in opposition to his wife's piety is a stereotype found in devotional literature from the period. We see the stock villain in Ware's story. Yet as Heyrman also points out, the frequent use of this

²³ Qtd. in George Coles, *Heroines of Methodism* (New York: Carlton and Porter, 1857), 165-166.

narrative convention reveals evangelicals’ “hope of fortifying the least powerful members of households to withstand family opposition.” This evangelical desire is also apparent in the account. Jones’ triumph over her husband elevated her status, and encouraged other women in similar circumstances to emulate her example. Significantly, admiration for the “masculine” quality of defiance in Jones, and for the “feminine” quality of submissiveness in Tignal, stands in sharp contrast to the move toward patriarchy and rejection of feminized religion that Susan Juster argues was taking place among Baptists in New England at the time.26

There is more to learn from Jones’ resistance and Tignal’s transformation than the didactic and hortatory purposes its author intended. The charged event illustrates the tension inherent within the relationship between Jones and her husband. More generally, it shows the fear men had about their wives running off to hear young males spend hours preaching and thereby exercising some degree of influence over them. It also demonstrates that men’s concerns about Methodism threatening to soften the patriarchal system were well-founded. That Ware recorded this story in terms that exonerated Jones as a paragon of “courage” and “perseverance” because she was willing to disobey her husband before she disobeyed God makes it clear that, if necessary, Methodists were not concerned about subverting the social structure. Though Ware does not say it outright, his message is that women are right to disobey their husbands in favor of following God, or even Methodist preachers. Moreover, such rebellion will turn out well in the end. In essence, there is now a check on patriarchy. Men’s authority—and by extension the southern culture of honor—is ignored if it means disobedience to God.27

25 Heyrman, Southern Cross, 86.


27 For the youth of the itinerants, see Andrews, 209.
Fear that evangelicals were assaulting honor by leading women away from their vocations as obedient housewives, or at least from the side of their menfolk, is echoed in other, less literary sources. Take, for example, the complaint of Virginian David Campbell to his wife Maria about her attendance at a Methodist class meeting: “Have you not often seen my anxiety about you at those places, and why would you be willing to go to them and run the hazard of being jostled about in a crowd of fanatics without my protecting arm?” Maria’s presence among a group of excessively pious people, without David’s presence as protector (and patriarch) was cause for concern. As Bertram Wyatt-Brown has argued, harm done to a woman was equivalent to an assault on her male relative. David’s absence—or Maria’s decision to attend—was harmful because it provided an opportunity for the besmirching of both his and his wife’s character.

Fortunately for the Jones’s domestic tranquility, Tignal did eventually join the MEC. As a man, he was likely in the minority, if the composition of the southern Methodist societies was anything like those in the North. Despite his joining, however, marital tensions remained over application of Methodist doctrine, especially concerning slavery. While the MEC in theory condemned it, the organization softened its stance after feeling fierce resistance from proslavery forces. Jones abhorred slavery even while her husband continued to own large numbers of slaves. Her diary poignantly expressed agony over the system:

28 David Campbell to Maria Campbell, 3 January 1823, Campbell Family Papers, Perkins Library, Duke University; qtd. in Heyrman, Southern Cross, 184.

29 Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1982), 53.

30 Ibid., 113, 126-127. Patricia U. Bonomi also documents the feminization of many congregations by the mid-eighteenth century, although her focus is on denominations with more professional clergy than the Methodists. See Under the Cope of Heaven: Religion, Society, and Politics in Colonial America, updated ed. (Oxford: Oxford Univ., 2003) 111-115. For a strong condemnation of the institution of slavery early in MEC history, see Minutes of Several Conversations between the Rev. Thomas Coke LL. D., the Rev. Francis Asbury and others . . . (Philadelphia: Charles Cist, 1785), 15. For the hasty abandonment of antislavery rules set forth in the 1784 conference, see Lee, A Short History, 102.
Sore sorrow about sunset in seeing the miseries of slavery. A poor Negro woman with an infant to walk near 20 miles from sunset before daybreak. A full, swimming creek to cross. My heart felt as breaking as the tears run from her eyes, parting with her mother, walk all night and then have a full task, or be cut in gashes. O God of gods, my heart melts at the inhuman Christians.31

Her distress was not always contained within her diary. Some of her letters echoed similar sentiments, including frustration that she was figuratively “bound” and “must go on beneath” the slave system. The vocabulary of bondage to describe her own status was ironic, though perhaps a way of identifying with slaves. Occasionally she debated the subject of slavery with others. And she seems to have lectured her children on the “blackness” of it.32

Other friction in the relationship with her husband centered around the raising of their children. By piecing together information gleaned from personal property tax records, Tignal’s will, and the few references Jones made to them, we know there were at least five children. There were three daughters and two sons: Sarah, Martha, Elizabeth, Francis and John. Sarah was married by the time Jones started her diary in 1792. Martha was married and had a daughter by 1802, but may well have been at home in the early 1790s. Francis was sixteen by 1795. John was not that old until 1802. Elizabeth’s age is less clear, but there is no indication she was not part of the household when Jones wrote.33

Thus, when Jones alluded to children in her diary, at least three or four of them were still under her care. One particular issue troubled her: their kind of apparel. Jones

31 SJD, 9 April 1792.
33 SJD, 5 October 1792; Wills, Mecklenburg County, Will Book No. 5, Reel 24, 1802-1807, Library of Virginia, 52-54, microfilm; Personal Property Tax Books, Mecklenburg County, Reel 230, 1782-1805, Library of Virginia, microfilm; Minter, Letters Spiritual, 35.
lost this battle. The Methodist rules discouraged “Superfluity of Apparel,” which included “High-Heads [a kind of hair style], enormous Bonnets, Ruffles . . . [and] Rings.” Jones lamented that “many of the dear people of God are grieved with poor me, about my children’s dress.” Yet her fellow Methodists did not know that her husband “positively commands my children to dress as others do.” Although she detested “dress and fashion, more than necessary decency,” she recognized that her husband was her “head,” so she submitted to his desires on the issue.34 Obviously, there were limits to Jones’ influence. How the children dressed was one area in which Tignal would not bend, and which Jones recognized she should not pester him about, her contrary opinion notwithstanding.

On the other hand, the educational institution their son attended seems to suggest that Tignal’s conversion did have tangible results. In September of 1792 Jones wrote of the departure of son Francis for Cokesbury College. An entry earlier that summer suggests that Francis was returning to the college at this time for another term.35 Cokesbury College was located in Abingdon, Maryland, north of Baltimore, and named after two of the leaders in American Methodism, Coke and Asbury. Plans for the college were announced at the famous Christmas conference of 1784, when the MEC became its own denomination. The school’s purpose was to provide free of charge an education for orphans and children of married preachers. It was also designed as an institution for other friends of Methodism, a place “where learning and religion may go hand in hand . . . [and] every advantage may be obtained which may promote the prosperity of the present life, without endangering the morals and religion of the children through those temptations, to which they are too much exposed in most of the public schools.”

34 Minutes of Several Conversations, 10; Minter, Letters Spiritual, 87-88; Lyerly, Methodism, 121.

35 SJD, 14 September 1792; In her entry for 16 July 1792, Jones wrote of speaking to her son “from college,” suggesting either he had spent time there or she was already anticipating his status as a student two months before his departure.
some it was supposed to serve as preparation for preaching. The school opened in December of 1787. It burned down eight years later, and eventually failed.\textsuperscript{36}

The details of the school's purpose are important for helping us understand what it meant for Francis to attend it. While Cokesbury was designed to do more than churn out preachers for the church, its foundation was nonetheless solidly Methodist. By allowing his son to go to Cokesbury, Tignal was at least tacitly approving of Methodist doctrine and practice. No doubt his son was exposed to plenty of both while there. And while his son attended, Tignal was lending his financial support to the church. Those who could afford to—and surely he could—were expected to pay for tuition and board, unless they had helped to fund the school through subscription. In addition, if Francis was anything like another student at the school, correspondence to his father likely entailed request for further support by way of clothing and cash.\textsuperscript{37}

The issues of slavery and clothing are consistent with the concept of patriarchy, which suggests inherent tension between the spouses as a result of the husband’s control. However, the placement of Francis is enough to suggest that Tignal’s conversion seems to have tempered this system by making his authority less harsh, even as it was still far-reaching. When it came to educating their son, Tignal allowed Francis to attend a Methodist institution. It must have thrilled his mother to see him sent there. In this case—even if it was a way for Tignal to extend his control into the religious realm—this decision reflects a power structure in the Jones’ household more complex than one of simple hierarchy.


Further evidence of Methodism as a mollifying influence is apparent upon examining how Jones acted within the plantation system, and how Tignal responded to the behavior of his wife and other Methodists. Upon looking at these relations, the converted "Mr. Jones" seems to be less of the gun wielding, threatening figure of earlier years, and more like a transformed and docile "lamb." Jones' involvement in the movement—and her husband's conversion—gave her a degree of freedom. It delivered her from the harsh confines of a system in which an irreligious—or perhaps Episcopal—husband's word not only was law, but cut against the entire value system of his evangelical wife. Tignal's support of the Methodists, and Jones' participation both underscore the change in the social system.

Jones' writing strongly supports this interpretation. In a letter to Minter, Jones said his words evoked a positive reaction from several, including her husband, causing "an open triumph and shout." In the context of Methodism and its characteristic religious enthusiasm, Tignal's cry was an affirmation of Minter's message. On another occasion, Jones entered a room to find "dear S. E., sister K. Jennet, and Mr. Jones all on fire. A storm of glory poured and we spent some hours in reading, praising and adoring the God of love, mixing much prayer, and frequent retirement for more Religion." When troubled by "wicked relations," Jones wrote, "only thank God Mr. Jones sticks by me." He gave practical as well as emotional support. He hosted a quarterly meeting, a large two day gathering of Methodists from the surrounding area. He provided land for a new meeting place for them. He not only allowed preaching in his house, but also lodged preachers. One itinerant described "bro. T. Jones" household as "an eminent place for religion."38

Some historians argue that men allowed itinerants into their homes to oversee what the preachers taught. It was a way to continue their control over women, and thus

38 Minter, Letters Spiritual, 18, 6, 30, 3-4; SJD, 17 May 1792, 5 June 1792; James Meacham Diary, 17 June 1789, in Historical Papers, 78.
the prevailing social system with its power relations. This suggestion ignores both the essential message in Methodism, as well as its practical result. As the story of the angry Tignal prior to his conversion illustrates, Methodism directly challenged the principle that men, in their positions of power, should be obeyed at any cost. God was the ultimate authority, and obedience to him as the “divine spouse” took precedence over any directions his earthly counterpart gave. For both men and women, this included eschewing behavior that society normally expected of them, such as deference or absolute control. They found a degree of freedom from social constraints as they chose to worry about piety more than what others thought of their religious exercises. That Tignal supported the presence of preachers echoing the biblical mandate to obey God rather than men undermines the conception of Methodists as simply panderers to the patriarchal system.

A summary of activities as found in Jones’ diary also suggests that her religious devotion involved activities atypical for one of her status. She often began the day by hearing a Bible verse, revealed by God or an angel. She frequently met with Christ, starting with the first day of her journaling: “Bright day, as I arose I stopped to look right at Jesus, whose sweet and rosy voice dropped the above words.” Sometimes she attended to family matters (what that involved is not very clear) in the morning until twelve o’clock, although that did not stop her from spending time in prayer after breakfast. Other times she was in “prayer all morning.” Almost every day at noon she slipped away from whatever was going on in the house to spend at least an hour (sometimes three or more) in private time with God, what she called “exercise” or “retirement.” Sometimes she left even when “many would have thought I was assisting about dinner and so on,” indicating a possible neglect of temporal duties. These daily periods were often when she

39 Christine Heyrman suggests this, arguing that by preaching in the home itinerants had to show deference to the men who ruled there. See Southern Cross, 190-192.
took time to write in her diary. Sometimes she wrote poetry, such as, "I am chained and fettered with love / My breath is flame at Jesus name / Today as yesterday the same / Almighty glories through me fly / While earth is far and heaven nigh." Many entries displayed her deep spirituality. One time she reflected that "this is a weeping world. It is a great hospital resounding with groans from every quarter. It is a field of battle where many are falling about us." Sometimes she grieved over her unconverted children. More frequently she wrestled over her own condition, crying "with Job, how hast thou helped her that is without power. How savest thou the arm that hast no strength, and counseled her that hath no wisdom." Ecstasy usually triumphed over despair, however. Often she felt near to heaven, one time so much so that she "rolled on the ground until my nerves felt almost useless. Jesus flamed through every sense and my body was properly weakened with the overcoming sight." She possessed "vehemence of burning thirst for more intimate communion with God" much of the time. She frequently wrote letters or entertained visitors. Sometimes "company robbed much retirement." Her attention to people usually appeared begrudging if it impinged upon her private devotion.40

It is noteworthy that religious devotion seems to dominate Jones' activities. Obviously, the nature of the diary is a large reason for this. Jones was more interested in recording details of her religious exercises than the intricacies of her household operations. Nevertheless, the consistent dedication to pious pursuits suggests Jones neglected, or was released from, those duties normally expected of a plantation mistress. According to Catherine Clinton, many responsibilities kept the plantation mistress constantly active six days a week.41 To be sure, plantation women did create time out of their busy schedules to read novels or other literature, thereby finding a kind of escape

40 SJD, 5 March 1792, 8 March 1792, 17 May 1792, 6 March 1792, 27 March 1792, 23 April 1792, 18 May 1792, 29 May 1792, 2 June 1792, 17 May 1792.

from their normal routine. However, there is little to suggest that their reading came at the expense of other duties. And in theory, the books they read reinforced their position within their family and society. Under such a regimen, she could not take the time to spend an entire weekday morning engaged in prayer.

In contrast, Jones’ devotion seems to have provoked opposition on occasion, probably because it was perceived as destructive to family and existing social norms. Perhaps she also neglected the household duties her husband expected of her. One weekday she recorded spending the whole morning in prayer. The same day she declined to dine with some wealthy guests, including her relatives. She chose instead to spend her time with God. This was not the harmless behavior involved in reading a novel. Her persistence in retirement the next day may have been the last provocation. This passage says much about her priorities and resolve in the face of perceived persecution:

I fasted and spent much of the morning in devotion, but I met with a cruel spear of hard reproach for my retirement and dedication. ‘Mine enemies would daily swallow me up, for they be many that fight against my soul. What time I am afraid’ [paraphrase of Psalm 56:2-3] I cried unto the Lord, ‘when mine heart is overwhelmed he leads me to a rock that is higher than I.’ [paraphrase of Psalm 61:2] ... save me from their cruelty, for ‘my soul dwelleth among lions, and their tongues are sharp swords.’ [paraphrase of Psalm 57:4] I kept very patient, at length walked away to open my burning heart, which almost killed me at the awfulness of realities. I thought much of getting some friend to tell my intricate hidden grief to, but concluded it would be better born in silent death. None, no not one knoweth my acute troubles, but God who countest my groans and ‘puttest my tears in His bottle.’ [paraphrase of Psalm 56:8] ‘In God have I put my trust, I will not be afraid what man can do unto me.’ [Psalm 56:11] I know Satan hates

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42 Clinton, Plantation Mistress, 172-174; Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina, 1988), 259-271. Both Clinton and Fox-Genovese fail adequately to explain the relationship between the many household duties of plantation mistresses and their ability to read literature. Both argue in their books that mistresses had many responsibilities, with Clinton giving extra emphasis to the long hours of work involved in maintaining a household with large numbers of slaves. Neither satisfactorily resolves the apparent contradiction between a life full of chores and time free to read.

43 SJD, 26 April 1792. This was a Thursday.
my praying breath, but it shall kindle heaps of fire on my adversaries. My work is prayer.44

It is unclear whether her “enemies” were spiritual or physical. Her appropriation of a biblical passage talking about tongues as sharp swords suggests the latter, and hints at the verbal abuse she experienced for her retirement. On the other hand, perhaps her opponents were merely spiritual. Regardless, opposition to her devotion was tangible. Yet she believed her work was not primarily to darn socks or tend sick slaves, but to pray.

Jones also spent time in “retirement” at night. She frequently took at least two hours for spiritual engagement in writing, reading, and praying. Between ten and eleven was a special time set aside for “covenant prayer.” This was when she and some of her friends (including Minter) had agreed to pray for each other from afar. It was a special time, knowing others prayed for her even as she reciprocated: “I truly felt the power and virtue and strength from covenant prayer. Let others that may, make light of it, but it is according to God’s holy word, if 2 only agree on earth as touching one thing, it shall be granted.”45

Methodist discipline called for rigorous devotion in praying, fasting, and reading of the Bible and other “pious books.” It seems apparent that Jones followed these rules in spirit, although sometimes not in particulars. She fasted most every Friday, if not limited by health concerns (she was often sick). Methodist rules explained fasting to mean “touching no Tea, Coffee or chocolate in the Morning, but (if we want it) half a Pint of Milk or Water-Gruel. Let us dine on Vegetables, and (if we need it) eat three or four Ounces of Flesh in the Evening. At other Times let us eat no Flesh-suppers.” Jones had

44 SJD, 27 April 1792. Once again, her devotion came on a weekday.

45 SJD, 18 March 1793; Minter, Letters Spiritual, 20.
a unique way of applying the discipline, as the following suggests: “Greatest part of this day in close, constant, earnest exercise. Used abstinence all day, took a small biscuit and a little coffee without sugar in the morning, and after 2 o’clock eat [sic] a piece of coarse bread and half a small cup of milk. My soul eats in heaven and I live above.” The rules also exhorted followers to spend an hour praying in the morning and evening. Besides these two hours, they also called for at least five hours of daily reading. It is unclear whether Jones was able to spend this much time in study. However, her reading material did include Thomas à Kempis, sermons of John Wesley, and of course the Bible. She demonstrated a keen knowledge of scripture, proof she spent many hours immersed in it.46

Jones’ involvement in spiritual affairs was not limited to her private times, but included public ministry, both outside and in the home. From her household she wrote many letters, both to itinerants and spiritual sisters. She also attended meetings and found an outlet there for her piety. Upon riding twenty miles to a quarterly meeting once, she found “many dear preachers. The Spirit of the Lord was upon me, and I opened my mouth and declared Christ, the Power of God.” The next day, at the members-only love feast (a more intimate time when adherents ate bread and drank water together in imitation of the early Church, sang, prayed, and testified about God’s work in their lives) she “spake openly and freely of Jesus as long as my strength would admit.” At another meeting two weeks later, she felt “a fire was kindled in my soul to speak my exercise upon it, which I did to the congregation publicly, and God so filled the house a dear Sister plunged into the swelling sea of sanctification.” Sometimes a great sermon evoked

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46 SJD, 26 July 1792, 24 March 1792, 6 July 1792; Minutes of Several Conversations, 18, 20. One example of Jones’ biblical literacy is sufficient. Feeling distressed on one occasion, she saw a white rock and felt encouraged by the promise it represented. Her alacrity in making a connection between it and a biblical passage reveals her familiarity with Revelation 2:12-17, outlining the message to the church in Pergamos, which promises a white stone to “him that overcometh.” SJD, 23 July 1792. When exactly it was that Jones read à Kempis is unclear, as she alluded in a communication to Minter that she had read him “years before” (Minter, Letters Spiritual, 52).
such a tremendous response that her “heart burnt in public prayer, while my courage in a congregation felt too great to tell.” Meeting at her son-in-law’s, she “prayed until heaven opened and Wm Boyd [likely her son-in-law’s brother] cried out aloud for the Lord to help him. The audience was seized with God’s power. Tears rolled, trembling and surprise filled the house.” Jones exercised leadership when no preacher appeared on at least two different occasions. One time she spoke, prayed, and sang. As a result of her ministry, “a rich merchant roared out, through conviction; and my son in law wept, with my daughter; and the place was shaken with the power of God.” Another time she and several other sisters consulted on a course of action to take in the absence of a preacher. Jones “felt like I would not flinch at the cross.” The absence of a preacher was a hardship that she decided to endure with the same resolve as Jesus did his crucifixion. “We sang and prayed. Tears rolled, heaven opened, and we were refreshed from the presence of the Lord.” Probably because of her husband’s prominence, important persons visited Jones’ home. This gave her the chance to address a captive audience: “Company of the great ones of this world in rich appearance, state, and pomp . . . with whom I took much delight in recommending Jesus. I talk freely, plainly, and warmly of God’s love to my soul.”47

Jones’ perception of her position in Methodism also suggests the social equality she felt the movement provided her. Psychologically—even if there was little material basis for it—she “really felt an associate with the Church of the First Born, joined in the assembly of glorified spirits, and dwell with the congregation of never ceasing

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47 SJD, 31 July 1792, 10 March 1792, 11 March 1792, 24 March 1792, 9 July 1792, 7 October 1792; Minter, Letters Spiritual, 124-125. The entirety of Letters Spiritual demonstrates that Jones’ wrote to many men and several women; SJD, 4 November 1792, 3 August 1792; on love feasts and quarterly meetings, see Wigger, Taking Heaven by Storm, 87-90.
worshippers, keeping by faith an always Sabbath. Continually in a congregation though far apart in body!'

Jones’ activities and her writing add to our understanding of Methodism at this time. In the 1790s, the MEC offered significant opportunities for women, especially compared to the high church tradition in which Virginia had developed for so long. This, in itself, made it potentially radical. At the same time, there were limits. Women could not free their husbands’ slaves. They could not dictate the clothing their children wore. These facts add to Heyrman’s argument by suggesting there were traditional elements embedded in Methodist practice as early as the 1790s. This made it that much easier for a conservative retrenchment among southern evangelicals—including Methodists in Virginia—which began sometime around the turn of the century. Or, to put it another way, reversion to the status quo was easier because Methodism had never been successful in convincing some of its adherents to embrace completely the life-changing call. Jones wrote at a unique time, when both “conservative” and “radical” were proper adjectives to describe evangelicals and the social structures they reshaped. In Jones’ writings there is no sense of an inevitable conservative victory. Instead, we catch a glimpse of what might have been. Women might have become itinerants in their own right—if not preachers, then powerful prayer warriors—traveling around to various meetings to exhort and support the church. In so doing they would have been tapping into an English Methodist tradition which allowed some women to preach, a freedom which Paul Wesley Chilcote suggests was the logical extension of John Wesley’s

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48 SJD, 18 June 1792.

teaching. American Methodist women might have focused less on household duties or typical plantation luxuries—from darning socks to reading novels—to become ministers of the letter, writing epistles and in their diaries to encourage their fellow pilgrims. Perhaps more significantly, slaveholding men might have been convinced that such transformation of their wives was appropriate and permissible. They might have embraced evangelical religion and the new ideas concerning shifting gender roles that were reflected in church practice. This would have rendered unnecessary any move by the church to convince patriarchs that the status quo would be preserved. In Tignal we see a man who converted and, despite resistance to aspects of Methodist practice, still supported his wife in religious activity that can only be described as atypical for a plantation mistress.

It is possible that Tignal contented himself with support of evangelical religion because of its limits in altering his life. He still profited from the labor of his slaves. His children retained their respectable appearance (at least in his eyes). Perhaps he felt that his magnanimity in allowing Jones to spend hours in devotion in the middle of the day, away from the more typical duties of a plantation mistress, was a small price to pay for some domestic peace. He might have been content to retire to his bed at nine o’clock every night, while his wife spent two hours scribbling in her diary, reading the Bible, and

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51 Lyerly sees no transformation in Tignal, but casts him as an “abusive and browbeating spouse” whom Jones had to endure up to her death. See Lyerly, “A Tale of Two Patriarchs,” 504.
praying fervently for her covenant partners. Possibly he reflected with pride upon the fact that it was his wife who publicly prayed, sang, exhorted, and even led a service on occasion, bringing audiences to tears of conviction. It could have been that he invited “great ones of the earth” to his house for the express purpose of allowing his wife to proselytize them. And maybe he thought his son’s attendance at a Methodist college would do minimal harm to Francis’ development.

Tignal may have believed he was still the all-powerful master of his household. If he did, however, it came at the expense of some significant compromises. The give and take involved in his relationship with Jones is enough to question the meaning of the patriarchal system. A redefinition might be in order. This becomes more apparent after examining the interactions Jones had with others, particularly Methodist itinerants, even if they occurred under her husband’s watchful eye. These relationships are striking, as they fail to fit the conception of the southern culture of honor.

Most interesting is the unique friendship Jones had Minter. Born in 1766 in Powhatan County, Virginia, Minter converted as a young man. He joined the Methodists shortly after because he found their strict rules on holiness attractive. The MEC ordained him as a preacher around age twenty-one. In 1789 he was appointed a deacon, and in 1790 he became an elder, a prominent position held by only sixty-six other men in the nationwide organization. In 1790 Minter was first assigned to the Mecklenburg circuit, although his previous appointments were close enough to bring him in contact with Jones. As early as 1788 they began corresponding, and Minter was a frequent visitor in the Jones household. In addition, Minter seems to have served as a leader of Jones’ class, or at least a participant in her group. As such, he would have had occasion regularly to
question Jones and the other class members on their spiritual condition, hear them express their feelings and struggles, and give them advice.\textsuperscript{52}

Minter’s fiery disposition, obvious dedication to a life of holiness, and rapid rise in the Methodist organization must have inspired Jones, some twelve years his senior. His zeal for souls led him to warn them of their damnation, despite their potentially unpleasant reactions. Once an inebriated man approached him in a tavern and offered to pay for the glass of wine Minter had ordered. Disgusted by his condition, Minter told the man he was “a drunken wretch, and if you do not repent you will go to hell.” This kind of commitment to proclaiming the truth apparently won Jones’ admiration. She herself knew what it was like to obey God despite danger. In Minter she found a spiritual soul mate.\textsuperscript{53}

Minter’s devotion took a turn for the bizarre sometime around 1790, when he decided to seek the blessing Christ promised in Matthew 19:12: “There be eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven’s sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.” Wanting to be “more entirely devoted to a holy, and heavenly[-]minded life,” undistracted by marriage, Minter, “by the aid of a surgeon, became an eunuch.”\textsuperscript{54}

Ten years after her death, Minter published a collection of Jones’ letters. She wrote Methodist sisters and several of the ministers, including Minter. From the first letter, it is evident that their friendship was a close one. Minter was Jones’ “partner in distress, yet happy brother.” She begged him to attend a quarterly meeting on behalf of

\textsuperscript{52} Jeremiah Minter, \textit{A Brief Account of the Religious Experiences}, 1, 5, 8-10, 13; Minter, \textit{Letters Spiritual}, 1, 36; \textit{Minutes of the Methodist Conferences}, 63, 73, 78, 82, 89, 92; on class meetings see Wigger, \textit{Taking Heaven by Storm}, 80-87.

\textsuperscript{53} Minter, \textit{A Brief Account}, 61.

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 13-14. It is possible that Jones, knowingly or not, influenced Minter in his decision. James Meacham, a fellow itinerant, recorded that Jones encouraged Meacham to hold fast his celibacy in early 1790. If Jones similarly encouraged Minter, his castration may have been a way of following her exhortation. See James Meacham Papers, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina, 25 April 1790.
herself and others: “Do pray come. I have been so near dying with the love [of] my dear JESUS to-day—pardon my short lines. I have a dagger in my heart of pure immortal love—I tremble—I am sick—O may Jesus overshadow thy burning soul.” She felt that “our union, in Jesus, is more like paradise than earth.” This unity came partly because of their covenant prayer every evening at ten, at which time she “met your [Minter’s] spirit as if fire was rolling from your breath.” She treasured their friendship, especially when tensions in other relationships arose. Although she thanked God for her husband’s support, she

strove to write to you [Minter], but hardly could; often when I would think of you, tears would flow, feeling I had a friend; (though slighted by my relations;) . . . I don’t remember I ever saw our Friendship [likely Minter’s emphasis] more precious on earth, because it has gone through the fire. Just now I had such a view of our spirits marching to glory, and our arrival in glory, my heart was broke with gratitude. . . . there is this one danger, this one misery, our friendship and affection as Christians may be so endeared we shall be too uneasy at weeks, let alone years, absence.55

The obviously intimate relationship between Jones and Minter led to suspicion that it was more than spiritually motivated, especially after Minter’s surgery somehow became public. Yet it is unlikely there was any kind of sexual dimension to their interaction. Instead, her letters suggest that she and Minter engaged in an intense kind of spiritual competition. Equals before God, they inspired each other to greater holiness. One of the ways they did this was through sharing their journals, as evident by this portion of a letter to Minter: “I have done your dear Journal, and O how it has convicted me. Thou provoking soul, what do you mean? If it takes my life-long I will try, you may depend upon it, I will try to steal a march upon you. How can I bear you to love my dear Jesus best.” Upon reading his letter another time

I flung it down just now, there it lies—and snatched my pen with my heart almost broke to think any living soul should torment me in such a manner as you do. And have you been to Heaven, and are you so near to my dear Jesus? Jeremiah, what do you mean? Would you be glad if I was dead? Do you want me dead? It may be you may see the time, for I do believe your provoking challenges will shorten my days, for if you knew what a stir there is in every quarter of my breast, and in the whole region of my soul, you might wonder. I never was nearer being vexed with you for fear you would outrun me, yet. You talk of pouting? If you could look at the room that belongs to you, at the table this now, and see how I look, I believe you would laugh; although I expect before I go out to have my share of crying. Well, I will watch my opportunity, and if possible steal one march upon you. I have not got much to say to you just now, I am beaten; but to my heart and soul am glad to hear my own good brother is so happy. Thank God Almighty for your heroic mind,—your courageous soul: I think either of us would die stone dead, and come to life again, and die again, before we would sin... Diana put your letter in my hand... I burnt for fear you had come nighest Heaven.56

In light of these words, the idea that there was anything sexual in their relationship seems far-fetched. These were two souls passionate about their devotion to "dear Jesus" more than anything else.57

However, it is understandable if some looked askance at their relationship, especially if they were aware of imagery Jones sometimes employed. For example, she wrote Minter, "Sometimes by faith I see us around a rich table, and how careful you are to help me; and at other times both spirits on Jesu's breast as twins, swallowing the streams of Love." The picture of Christ as a wet nurse was likely as shocking to southern sensibilities as her intimacy with Minter while suckling. If her husband approved of such thoughts, it is unlikely that most southern men did. The culture of honor involved men jealously guarding against the possibility of sexual impropriety, or any assault upon a

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56 Ibid., 42-43, 35-36.

57 Cynthia Lynn Lyerly argues that the scandal over Minter and Jones says more about the secular view of their contemporaries, in which male-female relationships were sexualized, than it does about anything untoward in their relationship. See Methodism and the Southern Mind, 159.
women's chastity. Moreover, women were supposed to keep their feelings in check, not yielding to passion allowed of men.\(^{58}\)

That Jones cast off restraint in expressing her feelings, and competed with Minter in a quest for holiness suggests she believed in their basic spiritual equality before God. After all, it would be foolish to try and equal a spiritual superior. Any impropriety in their friendship, according to Jones, was rooted in an admiration for each other's *piety*. This may have gone too far, as there was “danger of idolatry in setting each other up, which by many was sensoriously deemed carnal.”\(^{59}\) However, their relationship was innocent enough, even as it challenged social expectations about the proper distance between a married woman and single man.

Minter’s castration also alarmed his itinerant brethren. The leaders of the MEC were not pleased to hear of his surgery. His name is glaringly absent from the list of elders and preaching assignments for 1791, and does not appear again in the MEC records. Francis Asbury wrote in his journal that “[p]oor Minter’s case has given occasion for sinners and for the world to laugh, and talk, and write.” A Methodist conference condemned him for his act, calling it a “sin of ignorance.” They eventually sent him to preach in the West Indies, apparently the MEC equivalent of exile to Siberia. After six months there he returned to America, and in November of 1792 sought restoration. The preachers provided for his reunion “thro certain acknowledgments, that must have wounded my conscience and have brought me into the union of sin and deceit, and not holiness, so I would not accede to their terms.” In other words, it seems he was asked to admit he had sinned, and he would not. Consequently, they constrained him to

\(^{58}\) Ibid., 34; Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 52, 227; Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*, 87-89, 94; I am grateful to Heyrman for pointing out this scholarship on female chastity and male honor, in *Southern Cross*, 307, n37.

serving as a local preacher, a major demotion from his previous position. Work as an approved itinerant was over for Minter.60

Jones’ diary is largely silent on the scandal, although occasionally there are references to persecution of some kind. In May 1792, she paraphrased the psalmist in discovering that “an enemy had laid a snare for me [similar language used in Psalm 119:10].” Upon being told of some plot against her, she, along with her husband and a brother “searched my enemy, which I found dreadful yet much confounded. We examined him and left him.” She felt great sorrow over the incident. Two days later, her enemy came before her and begged forgiveness from her. In the presence of her and some Methodist brothers, “Br. R. acknowledged himself a liar and fell in the pit he had dug near 2 years ago for me.” A month later, she wrote, “I am in the fire but not burnt. I weep but am not sad; I am chastened but I die not. I have loss but ask for nothing but God’s will. His love is so kingly he will have a throne all alone in my soul.”

In November of the same year, after Minter had returned (and preached in her home), she believed that “he [God] knows what my enemies hath done and he will consume them with the brightness of his coming and by the sword of his mouth.”61 Whether any of these references were related to the scandal involving Minter is unclear, but plausible.

What is clear is Jones’ denial over any kind of impropriety, which indicates that such accusations existed. Also striking is her husband’s faith in her purity. If he had suspected some kind of shenanigans, Tignal might have challenged Minter to a duel.62 To the contrary, after Minter’s return from the West Indies, Tignal wanted Jones to write


61 SJD, 9 May 1792, 11 May 1792, 9 June 1792, 16 October 1792, 11 November 1792.

62 See Catherine Clinton, The Plantation Mistress, 108-109, for a discussion on the importance of planter reputation and the duel as a means to defend it.
Minter. She “found out much deceit in some who have done us great hurt, which Mr. Jones is convinced of.” Tignal even expressed a desire for Minter to visit them when he returned to the area. She wrote, “He says he believes you have more religion than ever you had.” Considering Minter had taken Matthew 19:12 seriously, such admiration is not surprising. Jones asserted their accusers would learn that “our meaning [was] innocent, and that we are under no bands nor covenants to each other, but to pray for one another, and to be holy.” She also denied that any agreement existed between them that they would marry after Tignal’s death, stating, “I assert upon my honor that our union was only in Christian friendship.”

Tignal’s faith in Jones’ innocence is, perhaps, a fitting place to end. That he supported her relationship with Minter, as well as her involvement with Methodism generally, illustrates a radical aspect of the movement in the early 1790s. To reiterate, we see a reformulation of planter authority. As women like Jones seized opportunities to minister in public and to fraternize with their spiritual brothers, they created a degree of space for themselves not typically allowed a plantation mistress. Itinerants were not substitute patriarchs, but cohorts. Most strikingly, at least some of the men who joined the MEC collaborated in seeing their wives attain spiritual and quasi-radical social freedom as they ministered and developed unusually close relationships with other men.

In considering how Methodism and its adherents reshaped social or power structures, it is important to keep in mind the slipperiness, and perhaps inappropriateness of terms such as “freedom” or “equality.” As Susan Juster has astutely noted in her work on northern evangelicals, “the term ‘equality’ itself is probably misleading when applied to things of the Spirit, for it smacks of the kind of earthly considerations evangelicals

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64 I disagree with Dee E. Andrews here, who suggests that in entering religious societies, “Methodist women simply exchanged one form of patriarchy for another” (The Methodists, 118).
eagerly left behind when they assembled in their congregations. The same things could be said of "freedom" or "power." Historians seem to be obsessed with the degree of social power or freedom evangelical religion provided, or which women seized by means of piety. Yet it may be that the participants themselves cared little about how power shifted from men to women, or vice versa. They might have been more concerned with pursuing holiness and what they perceived to be God's call in their lives. In such a world, both social expectations and the power structures that undergirded them were only to be considered—and challenged—as they inhibited one from becoming more holy, or more like God.

This qualification is important when we consider such things as Methodist women's active participation in public ministry, private piety, and egalitarian relationships with men, including preachers. These facets of Methodist practice are not a new revelation. But the intense spiritual competition women such as Jones saw herself a part of is. Also new is the idea that their husbands supported them in each of these aspects. This is a fascinating element in Methodism's character, one that deserves further exploration. When men like Tignal embraced Wesley's religion, they simultaneously refashioned some of their generations-old authority. Methodism reshaped the concept of what it meant for a man to be a patriarch in his household. In short, the practice of piety—by both men and women—created a limited amount of breathing space for women within a culture of honor that tended to restrict their roles. Whether this freedom was the fruit of a conscious effort to better their material condition is less clear than the fact that women such as Jones felt themselves engaged in an intense spiritual battle. The struggle was a matter of life or death, and they were determined to win at all costs.

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65 Juster, Disorderly Women, 12.
CHAPTER II
SPIDERS AND SLAVES: EXPLORING SELF-IMAGE

It was not a typical summer day on the Jones plantation. Summer temperatures in southern Virginia usually soared beyond the human comfort level, but on this day in late July of 1792, clouds brought temporary relief. The rain that fell under their watch not only brought moisture to thirsty tobacco crops and a temporary reprieve to slaves who otherwise would have been sweating in the sun. It also interrupted Jones’ normal routine. Instead of spending time outdoors, walking in the fields or sitting in a chair placed especially for her “meditation, reading, and contemplation,” she sought a roof under which she might conduct her religious exercises. She proceeded to a building some distance away, built specifically for prayer. However, Jones was reluctant to enter. She was afraid of spiders and other undesirable insects, and knew it was likely she would encounter such in the building. Despite her fear, she went in. Sure enough, plainly visible was a large spider. Mustering up her courage, she proceeded to sit down and began to read the Bible. As she did, she found words that comforted her. Consequently, “tears rolled as rivers while my poor heart dissolved in faith and love.”66 She had faced her fears and overcome them.

Mary Jones, another southern woman (no known relation to Sarah), had a similarly unpleasant experience with spiders in 1857. Fox-Genovese relates the episode

66 SJD, 26 June 1792, 28 July 1792.
as a way of supporting her contention that “women, to be ladies, had to have servants.” Mary discovered a spider in her bath, and loudly demanded her slave to remove it. The servant obeyed, disposing of it and two other spiders. Jones warned her attendant not to let one get on her, or she might react violently, and the slave would suffer severe consequences.67

While the arachnophobic reader may sympathize with both women, others may laugh. After all, a fear of spiders and other insects seems childish. Perhaps the stories appear trivial. Why does it matter that one grown woman read her Bible under the watchful presence of an arachnid, while the other cried for help from her slave? Despite their apparent insignificance, these stories are in important in juxtaposition. They help us to understand how Jones ordered her life as a plantation mistress differently from many other women of her class.

After spending some time focusing on how Methodism undercut the prevailing system of relations between men and women, reshaping it to something that was slightly more amenable to women like Jones, it is appropriate to look at her life from another angle. Specifically, based upon words and activities she described in her diary and letters, how did she think she fit into her world? Did her religion shape how she saw herself? In other words, even if Methodism did not temper the patriarchal system in any significant ways, did Jones see herself any differently from other women of her kind? To put it another way, how did her Methodist worldview embrace class, race, or gender? Questions like these concerning the internal machinations of this white elite southern woman can only be answered by a close examination of her “private” diary and letters. Doing so reveals much about the hold religion had on Jones. Entangled in a web made up of various strands, including gender, race, class, and religion, Jones chose to draw her

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67 *Within the Plantation Household*, 197.
"circle of we" in a way that can only be characterized as also somewhat atypical for an upper-class southern woman.

Obviously, it is necessary to support this claim by first describing how a "typical" plantation mistress viewed herself in relation to others. Catherine Clinton's *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South* and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese's *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* both provide composite sketches of plantation mistresses. Both studies focus on women in slaveholding households with twenty or more slaves.

In greatly distilled form, Clinton's thesis contends that plantation women between 1780-1835 were oppressed, lonely, and unfulfilled in their roles as wives of wealthy planters. Dominated by their husbands and fathers, "Every woman was an island, isolated unto herself and locked into place by the stormy and unsettling seas of plantation slavery."68 Because they were besieged by men and the system of bondage, Clinton seems to suggest that plantation women drew a very tight circle of we, one that included only themselves.

Fox-Genovese offers an alternate view. Her book covers the antebellum period more generally. Any comparison to Clinton’s study should be made with that caveat in mind. Fox-Genovese argues that in the antebellum south, despite the fact that plantation women were subordinate to their husbands, they “were still privileged members of a ruling class.” She agrees with Clinton concerning the isolation of women in their households, and their subordination to the master. But because of the power and privilege experienced as members of the ruling class, mistresses bought into the system that oppressed slaves, and they “drew the social line between themselves and other white women whom they perceived as their inferiors.” Their confinement alongside slave

women “bound them in the explosive intimacy of a shared world but not in a woman’s sphere.” While gender conventions “weighed equally on all women, regardless of race or class,” they did not unite across class lines. Instead, social distinctions remained important. Plantation mistresses aligned themselves by class, with the oppressor rather than the oppressed.69

Weighing in on the debate over how planters viewed their world is Jan Lewis’ seminal work, *The Pursuit of Happiness: Family and Values in Jefferson’s Virginia*. Lewis is less concerned with a focus on women. Still, her work should not be overlooked, as it wrestles with the status and change in the mental states of southern elites from the pre-Revolutionary to post-Revolutionary period, extending into the early nineteenth century. As such, it gives more context to Jones’ world of Virginian gentry, and to her vivid and often emotional language. Lewis argues that a pre-Revolution tendency toward moderation in the expression of emotion was replaced after independence with a flood of feeling. Economic hard times and an evangelical religion that denounced materialism were key factors in encouraging elites to turn for refuge from the public sphere to the home. The home became a place for the gentry to vent about and despair over the miseries of the present world, even as they looked to a better life in the next.70

Now that the framework has been laid for how plantation women and southern elites in general viewed their world, it is time to turn to Jones’ mental conception of herself. How do the constructions of Fox-Genovese and Clinton apply? Is there evidence in Jones’ diary or letters for the emotional despair that Lewis argues was partly

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a function of the evangelical emphasis on the affective? Because she composed her diary
before the transformation Lewis writes about had fully taken place, Jones is an important
case study. If Lewis is correct, there might be evidence of an ongoing transition in Jones’
writing towards the kind of emotional expression Lewis suggests was prevalent by the
turn of the eighteenth century.

Fox-Genovese asserts that for plantation women “the self came wrapped in
gender.” Fox-Genovese asserts that for plantation women “the self came wrapped in
gender.”\textsuperscript{71} Jones’ writing both supports and refutes this claim. While she at times
identified herself as a woman, and her activities were often along gendered lines, the
impression remains that, even as she recognized the pressure to fit the mold of what it
meant to be a woman, Jones thought in terms that transcended such categorization.

It is apparent that she interacted with women on a regular basis. Indeed, they
were prime targets of her ministry and consistent participants in her religious sphere. On
the way home from a quarterly meeting in March of 1792, Jones called to see a “penitent
woman. Pressed eternal things, with fervent prayer upon her. A melting time. 6 women
of us, where I used my utmost to stir them to prepare to meet God.” Almost a week later,
she counseled a “sister” who was depressed, until “God poured down his blessed spirit
and filled here with joy and the Holy Ghost. 3 sisters of us kept a private watch night in
solemn prayer.” Keeping “watch night” on the 18th of every month is a theme
throughout her diary. It seems that these were occasions when she gathered with other
women to pray, according to an arrangement made in 1785. She found courage from
these sessions, in ways similar to her nightly periods of “covenant prayer.” Take, for
example, this passage: “I felt covenant prayer pleasing to God this 18th day of the month.
Many precious souls are engaged to pray for each other. Oh how near they feel.”\textsuperscript{72}

\textsuperscript{71} Within the Plantation Household, 242.

\textsuperscript{72} SJD, 10 March 1792, 12 March 1792, 18 March 1792, 18 October 1792, 18 April 1793.
In addition to the spiritual consolation she found with other women, Jones also ministered to those of her own sex. She frequently visited sick women. In March of 1792, on her way home from a religious service, she went two miles out of her way to see a “very sick woman, who was styled the every great, and I exhorted her to make Christ her friend.” On another occasion Jones rode to visit a dear, sick, precious woman, very delicate. She told me with tears she had no peace with God. Several others were there, my heart burnt as fire. I retired upstairs, prayed, but fire and powerful reaching after God almost burnt me up. I went down, sang an hymn, and ask them to join me in prayer, which time I hope she found comfort. Tears drowned my eyes while bursting peals of melody filled the place.73

It seems apparent from this entry that Jones’ emphasis was not on material relief. If it was, there might have been some kind of description of the woman’s symptoms, and what Jones did to alleviate them. Instead, she spends less than a sentence describing the woman’s physical problems, and takes more ink to detail the religious component of her ministry. In doing so she spiritualizes a visit to the sick, turning it into a story that other Methodists not only can admire but learn from: plain, everyday activities such as alleviating illness can be sacralized, and used to extend the kingdom of God.

As Rhys Isaac has pointed out, visiting those who were ill was not an unusual activity for the genteel Virginian lady. However, Jones was atypical in her focus on the delivery of spiritual assistance, and the way she mixed religion with physical relief. This is not to suggest that her sole purpose in coming to the aid of the sickly was to pray, sing, and cry in an effort to give them spiritual comfort. Rather, she offered both material and non-material aid. A September 1792 entry suggests this combination: “visit the sick with necessary physic and nourishment. Pray with them, found their hearts melted with

73 SJD, 24 March 1792, 2 April 1792. Cynthia Lynn Lyerly also writes of her visits to the sick. See Methodism and the Southern Mind, 1770-1810 (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1998), 110.
gratitude.” Whether her patients appreciated her services more for their spiritual or material component is unclear. What is apparent is the demand for them. One evening Jones was summoned around ten o’clock to help with a sick person. Despite feeling ill herself, she “believed it the will of God,” so she went and gave aid until one o’clock in the morning. Sometimes, her role was more a spiritual mentor than nurse, as another visit suggests:

A day of note and tears. I was hastily summoned to see a tender young woman at the point to die, who begged to see me. I attended with others, and oh awful, awful sight, a soul about to launch the gulf unpardoned. We prayed until the place was full of God, his power searched the sinner’s heart, his grace gave repentance, and an awful time of lamentation and grief it was. I left her pleading for mercy. O may it be heard in heaven.”

Jones’ activity as a kind of nurse-priest usually involved other women, which suggests that gender conventions were at play in who she could assist. She does not write about helping a “sick man,” although on at least one occasion she did. However, in describing the episode she included the man’s name, O’Kelly. It is important to note that O’Kelly was a friend, neighbor, and Methodist minister. His familiarity with the Jones family may have been the reason she was allowed to help him. There is no indication that Jones aided sick men she did not know.

That Jones rarely nursed men may be important for different reasons than we think. Because Jones does not complain about restrictions along these lines, Fox-Genovese would probably interpret this lack of chagrin as proof that Jones accepted the prevailing social system. However, there is an alternative interpretation. Jones simply

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74 Rhys Isaac, Transformation of Virginia, 57; SJD, 1 September 1792, 15 November 1792, 29 August 1792.

75 SJD, 2 August 1792. In her entry for 25 July 1792, Jones visits an “afflicted brother.” It is not clear from the context whether his affliction was physical or spiritual. Regardless, her reference to him as “brother” suggests that this man, as a Methodist, was no stranger to her.
might not have cared that she couldn’t visit sick men, because she already saw herself in general as a player in what was considered a man’s domain. In other words, she thought (rightly or wrongly) that her role was not prescriptive, even as some of her experiences still suggested it might be.

The evidence to support this claim comes through diary passages which, added together, suggest a kind of schizophrenia about her gender. In March of 1792, she felt that “I am a favored woman indeed. I am a happy soul, striving against principalities and flesh and blood. I am happy, happy late at night.” Clearly this was a woman who felt contented with being a woman. Two months later she applied the words of Job 26:2-3 to her own life, switching the pronouns from “him” to “her” to fit: “I cry with Job, ‘how hast thou helped her that is without power, how savest thou the arm that hast no strength, and counseled her that hath no wisdom.’” In substituting “her” for “him,” Jones suggested that Scripture was as applicable to women as it was to men.

With this in mind, later passages are striking for their switch in self-image. Take this entry from early 1793: “I find some conflicts this morning but they end in my advantage. A solemn communion with God and my own heart hath settled . . . I find nothing can do us any good unless we stand as men who wait for the Lord. Ill pray. Ill praise and watch and look diligently and believe and hope and wait and persevere and thro Christ I’ll obtain eternal conquest.” The emphasis now is on standing “as men.” And it is most fascinating that Jones identifies herself as a man.

Identification this way is a theme in her diary. It is most evident when she considers Old Testament biblical characters, such as the aforementioned Job, as well as King David. For example, in June of 1792 she resigned herself to suffering of some kind, probably in connection to her physical illness: “Submission in my afflicting scenes, and

76 SJD, 16 March 1792, 18 May 1792.

77 SJD, 21 January 1793.
say with David when pain of mind dry my flesh.” Eight months later she quoted David and an anonymous psalmist, mixing two biblical passages in one entry: “David said ‘when I kept silence my bones waxed old.’ [Ps. 32:3] Neither can I be silent, ‘for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with me.’ [Ps. 116:7]” She used words from other men as well. In fact, her urge to speak as a (male) prophet is most evident in an entry from February of 1793, worth quoting at some length for the rich insight it reveals:

‘My son despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him, for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth.’ [Hebrews 12:5] These things are more to me than words can express. There is great things in them. ‘Light is come and the glory of the Lord is risen upon me.’ [paraphrase of Isaiah 60:1] After breakfast in a private room I found a strong resolve to get engaged, but behold my heart [g]rew remiss and dull. O, I began reasoning thus. Suppose a bank note of ten thousand pounds just brought in and offered me, if I would look on the king a little while without moving my eye or mind, would I not take some pains, even for money, which I count as dross. . . . [sic] When compared to the love of God this roused all within me and every power flew to work and glory was next. My happy soul was in a little entranced in the beauteous vision of a present savior. My heart glowed with a warm blush while a complete heaven opened around me, and now all my wants are enclosed in ONE, which is to gaze forever on his face. Constant prayer, close and powerful engagedness about one hour. Sun deep things I saw, paradisical delights until late.

There are several key facts to take away from this entry. First is the continuing use of gendered language, and Jones’ appropriation of a message given to a “son.” Also remarkable is the use of the prophetic text paraphrased from the book of Isaiah, especially when paired against the original, “Light is come and the glory of the Lord is

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78 SJD, 2 June 1792. This is not a direct biblical quote. Jones seems to have been paraphrasing Psalm 63:1, in which David says “O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is.” A later section of the same entry in the diary supports this conjecture. There, Jones talks about vehemently thirsting after more of God. This seems to be a plausible response to meditation on the quoted verse.

79 SJD, 14 February 1793. Two other places in which she identifies with Job and David respectively are SJD, 8 June 1793, and 6 August 1793.

80 SJD, 26 February 1793.
risen upon thee.” In switching the pronoun, Jones was proclaiming that she had received the prophesied blessing. She could have chosen a nearby passage that would have applied specifically to her sex. Isaiah 62:11 says, “Behold, the LORD hath proclaimed unto the end of the world, Say ye to the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy salvation cometh.” But this was unnecessary. Jones was a “son.” She did not need to rely on words given for a “daughter.”

Her shift to mental gymnastics as a way of testing her resolve to follow Christ further suggests her absorption into a man’s world, even if the proof is more tenuous. In describing her thought process concerning her devotion to God, Jones primarily may have been trying to demonstrate her piety. Note, however, the use of the bank note analogy. Instead of the temptation presenting itself in a form easily recognizable as a stereotypical snare for women, such as an exciting novel,81 she speaks of a bank note, a temptation more apt to entrap men. After all, as heads of their households, men were the ones likely to be conducting cash transactions. Jones’ triumph can only be a great one if the temptation was plausible. The attraction of a large sum of cash is best understood by a man. Her use of sacred language and secular image makes most sense if we understand that Jones, in some way, considered herself a man.

With this in mind, Jones’ writing becomes more complicated. For example, in a letter to her cousin and Methodist minister, William Spencer, she admonished him to “[t]ell all the dear Christians to arise and trim their lamps, the Bridegroom cometh; let us go out to meet him, let male and female, strong and weak, get to work.”82 Her statement comes suspiciously close to implying that “male” means “strong,” while “female” means “weak.” If that is her meaning, Jones debased her sex and gender. Or did she? Perhaps

81 See Fox-Genovese, 260-262, for a discussion of novel reading among plantation women, including the objections some made to books that allowed women to shirk their responsibilities.

82 Letters Spiritual, 135.
she saw herself as successfully having transcended her gender, in which case she had reason smugly to denounce other women for their weakness, even as she identified with the “male” and “strong.”

It would be foolish to say that whatever mental transformation Jones underwent resulted in commensurate material gain. Her self-image, after all, was not shared by society at large. While she frequently interacted with Methodist “brothers,” probably in ways that exceeded social norms, notions of gender did constrain her actions. Much of her ministry was to other women.

It might be assumed that frequent contact with other women would help Jones to feel sympathy for them as a group. This was not the case. To the contrary, those who did not measure up to her demands for piety met her sharp criticism, if not in public then at least in private. In the late summer of 1792, Jones lamented to her diary that “there are some effeminate ladies here.” Later, in a letter to Enoch George, she made it clear that this was not a compliment. “Effeminacy, and worldly desires, among both preachers and people” was a problem, whoever was guilty of them.83

Because she rejected some women for their “effeminacy,” and because she often viewed herself in male terms, it seems safe to conclude that Jones did not draw her circle based on gender, in which men were out and women in, or vice versa. And if “the self came wrapped in gender” for most plantation mistresses, for Jones it was a cloak easily thrown away. This supports Fox-Genovese’s contention more generally that women “accepted a discourse predominantly fashioned by men.” Fox-Genovese also suggests that women allowed men to embody their experiences in general culture, but wrote as women when corresponding in private.84 However, Jones’ writing indicates that at least

83 SJD, 18 September 1792; Letters Spiritual, 123.

84 Fox-Genovese, 288, 289.
one woman believed she transcended the gender gap. There was no need to grant men permission to represent her, because in a limited way she became a man.

Attempts to escape the confines of gender can be rooted in a long religious tradition. Hilary Hinds notes as much in God's Englishwoman: Seventeenth-Century Radical Sectarian Writing and Feminist Criticism. Hinds borrows Denise Riley's term, the "ungendered soul," to describe the Puritan notion that women were bodily inferior but spiritually equal to men.85 Jones seems to take this idea a step further, however, by introducing what might be described as the "transgendered soul." She was spiritually equal not because her soul was genderless, but because it had become male.

How this idea played itself out in her relations with others is difficult to determine. Did she only accept women whose souls had made the same transition? Her writing does not provide evidence to make such a leap. It is safe to say, however, that Jones accepted both men and women within her circle. If gender was not the most important factor for Jones, what was? As the wife of a slave-rich master, she was one of the Virginia elite. What role did class play in how Jones constructed her worldview?

Her diary suggests that she was aware when around those with social standing. In March of 1792, she spent a pleasant evening, in which she "dined with the great ones of the earth and really felt delight in recommending Jesus to a precious lady, who appeared all ear." Three weeks later she visited a dying woman with "th[e] great on earth around, before who I was enabled to declare Jesus."86

Jones frequently talked of Jesus when around the rich, or attempted to minister to their spiritual needs in some other way. In an August entry in the same year, she noted the "company of the great ones of this world in rich appearance, state and pomp . . . with whom I took much delight in recommending Jesus. I talked freely, plainly and warmly of


86 SJD, 22 March 1792, 15 April 1792.
God’s love to my soul.” Ten days later, she wrote of a group of ladies who came to her house to dine. They had attended meeting the day before. Apparently wanting to take advantage of their spiritual receptivity, Jones “talked freely and explicit to them” during their visit to her. As seen earlier, speaking “freely” meant that Jones spoke of Christ to them. In addition to receiving visitors, Jones traveled to minister. In October, God “led” her “to see a rich merchant lady, whose soul was crying for Jesus to pardon her sin. O, transporting abundant delight I have experienced this day.” Her work as an evangel to elites continued even when she was desperately sick. In March of 1793, Jones expected to die soon. Yet when “some great ones of the earth” came to visit, even then she “plainly acknowledged Jesus.”

While Jones can be described as an evangelist to her class, sometimes its members were a distraction to her public displays of piety. When this was the case, although she was aware of their presence, she struggled to keep it from hindering her. The following passage illustrates her cognizance and determination: “preacher preached a good sermon. My heart burnt in public prayer while my courage in a congregation felt too great to tell. Great ones by, but Jesus was my mark.” Jones was aware that those in her class might view her public piety as a social taboo. As Fox-Genovese has pointed out, “the early evangelicals promoted an ideal of womanhood that departed in significant respects from the myth of the lady.” In praying publicly, Jones was challenging this myth, doing something most ladies did not. And she was sensitive to her uniqueness in this regard. Her persistence in piety among potentially hostile observers shines through again in an undated letter to her friend, Anne Smith: “God poured his spirit out upon me, and I was at liberty in presence of my foes . . . and a woman of note . . . got converted.”

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87 SJD, 3 August 1792, 13 August 1792, 20 October 1792, 22 March 1793.

88 SJD, 9 July 1792; Fox-Genovese, 232; Letters Spiritual, 109.
From words like these we start to get the idea that Jones, while acutely aware of class, shunned it. Ironically, her interactions with “ladies” often were a result of her status. Her social circle would not have included “great ones” had she not been a plantation mistress and wife of a large slaveholder. Few Methodists were affluent, so her visits with other ladies were more a function of social status than religion. Yet her vision was to exercise devotion at whatever expense, even if it offended her class. Her actions spoke as loud as her words. As far as she was concerned, class could be damned. This included members of her family, elites in their own right. An episode at her niece’s funeral is worth quoting at some length for its vivid portrait of where her priorities lay:

Alexander’s trophies, with all the victories of his life, were shadows to the conquests of this day. In a congregation of polite rabbis [rabbi?] I confessed Jesus and subdued a man pleasing spirit, and sounded in loud and lofty singing, echoing that great name that angels sing in heaven, while every word which from my heart was poured promised new blessings, which I [count?] with every breath while the dear delicate dress ladies, my near relations and acquaintance cringed. I reckon they wished me stopped up in a prison rather than disgrace their painted honors with the cross of Christ. Good heaven, it was a proper trial to my graces, which mounted the hill with more courage than mortals can tell. I regarded the grandeurs of the world no more than butterflies. A triumphant feast we had, and at the expense of reputation, I brought away laurels and rose buds, spices and wine, which poured out its virtuous essence until after ten at night. I believe I never heard many such sermons as Br. O’Kelly preached in my mother’s house, a funeral sermon over my eldest brother’s daughter.90

It seems that Jones was not afraid to take advantage of a captive audience to speak (and sing) what was on her mind! She suspected the “dear delicate dress ladies” felt insulted by her religious expression, but she plunged ahead with it anyway, and found great blessing, despite the repercussions to her social standing that may have resulted.

89 John B. Boles, Great Revival, 169.

90 SJD, 30 July 1792.
It is in such a vignette that we see glimpses of Methodism as a counterculture that stood in opposition to and distinct from the larger world. In other words, the social transformation Rhys Isaac traced up to 1790 in Virginia, not surprisingly, continued after that time. In the culture of honor, insults to those in one's own class and family were both serious affronts. Jones was keenly aware of the tension caused by her spirituality, and how it cut against the social grain. But her comments that she "regarded the grandeurs of the world no more than butterflies" and that her actions were "at the expense of reputation" illustrate her resolve to risk speaking for God at the expense of social and family disgrace.

What was motivating such rebellion against the reputation accorded her by society? Her description of a Sunday meeting outburst on another occasion provides a clue: "[T]he truth that set me and keeps me free I could not imprison, but spake boldly for God, not fearing hell's wrath. Oh peaceful day, oh happy hours. To obey the Spirit is better than whole burnt offerings, but to quench the Spirit is disobedience to the plain command of God. O how blest I was in beseeching sinners to come to Christ." It seems then that Jones felt a burning obligation to speak about Jesus, for the purpose of saving sinners. To remain silent would be disobedience to the Spirit, the third manifestation of the triune God. Often acutely aware of the tension she caused by her behavior, nevertheless she responded to the commands of a higher power.

More concretely at stake than obedience to the divine was Jones' reputation for piety. For in rejecting whatever standing she had among her social peers, Jones must have simultaneously added to her status among Methodists, and improved her image as a woman of great spirituality. That George Coles included her in his Heroines of Methodism over sixty years after her death is a testament to her success along these lines.

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91 SJD, 21 October 1792.
Closer to her passing, Francis Asbury recorded words of admiration for her, remembering that "she would pray in any place, and before any people; she reproved with pointed severity, and sung with great sweetness." 92

This is not to suggest that Jones was merely concerned about her image among "brothers" and "sisters." Such an assumption would allow us to admire her creativity in dreaming up colorful language to describe her experiences. "Laurels and rose buds, spices and wine, which poured out its virtuous essence" seems like language ready-made for a dime novel. But if her chief motive was to impress others, her spirituality would be reduced to mere chicanery. With the evidence available it is impossible to prove that Jones wasn't merely a spiritual con artist. But such a conclusion seems unlikely.

It is her more private rejections of class that support the idea that Jones' piety was often an end in itself. In other words, there were occasions when her spirituality led her to private expression or internal examination more for its own sake than for how it would impress others. In April of 1792 she wrote in her journal, "Softly refused to dine with the great and my near relatives, but chose rather to withdraw from all earthly beings and pour out my soul to God, and oh, awful day and glorious hour, that God listened to my sorrows." 93 If Jones was merely trying to impress future journal readers, surely there would have been more drama in this account. She would have dined with her relatives, but shunned their impious behavior. She would have risen to her feet and spoken to them of Jesus, even as they wished her "stopped up in a prison." Sinners might have come to Christ. Tears would have rolled. Instead, in "softly" refusing to eat with them, Jones' family might not have even known why she was absent from the table. In this case, there was little tension and little glory, except for God's ear.


93 SJD, 26 April 1792.
That Jones seems to have sincerely believed in the pursuit of piety is important to remember, especially since in most of her interactions with elites she publicly rejected their value system. In other words, she wasn’t playing the hypocrite. Her sincerity is further evident in an episode that took place a month after her refusal to dine with the “great.” Once again she responded privately to an encounter with wealth: “It was lately told me what splendor some very near me lived in. Just past me on a visit with a new carriage and horses of near two hundred pounds, and oh how little it felt to me. I cried oh Lord, rather give me grace and deep abasement and thy presence while my dear Sister seeks earthly. Give me the true riches.”

This could have turned into a public confrontation. After all, as her spiritual sibling, Jones could have stopped the carriage and admonished her for her ostentatious behavior. With Asbury’s comment about Jones’ ability to reprove in mind, such an action would not have been out of character for her. Instead, she internalized her judgment, and purposed to do better than this woman.

After examining multiple instances in which Jones rejected the trappings of her class, it seems that her life makes problematic Fox-Genovese’s contention for the centrality of class among plantation women. Certainly Jones was a privileged woman who experienced many material benefits as a member of the elite. Yet she did not embrace her class to the degree that Fox-Genovese says slaveholding women did. To the contrary, Jones consciously rejected class identity, choosing instead to internalize a

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94 SJD, 30 May 1792.

95 This sister was one by spiritual connection, not blood relation. “Sister” was a generic term used by Methodists to describe any of the church’s female adherents. In two of the three references in her diary where she talks of a blood sister, Jones makes it clear by adding the modifier “in the flesh.” In the third case where the phrase is absent, she includes her sister’s initials, “MJ.” This would have allowed any knowledgeable reader to discern that she was not speaking of a Methodist sister. With this in mind it is safe to conclude that, if this was a sister “in the flesh,” Jones would have indicated so. See SJD, 29 June 1792, 19 May 1793, 9 June 1793.
spiritual ideology that ran contrary to prevailing social norms. In drawing her circle, class was a very low priority for Jones.

What about another factor, that of race? Slavery as an institution dominated both Mecklenburg County generally and Jones’ household particularly. Almost half of the county’s inhabitants when Jones wrote her diary were slaves. In 1792, personal property tax rolls listed her husband with thirty slaves over the age of twelve. It is likely that Tignal owned thirty more under that age. Therefore, wherever she turned, Jones faced the reality of chattel bondage.

Given this fact, it is a little surprising that she does not mention her slaves more often than she does. They rarely make an appearance in her writing. On the rare occasions when they do, they are introduced in typically coded language, such as “my maid,” or “a boy.” The reason for this paucity of acknowledgement might be evidence for her acceptance of the system as a normal part of life. Or, it might be that her pain about slavery was as real as her impotence to stop it, given her legally subordinate position as a planter’s wife. Cynthia Lynn Lyerly has examined her published letters and embraced the latter argument.

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96 See Fox-Genovese, 44-45, for her articulation of slaveholding women’s embrace of slaveholding ideology.

97 The exact percentage of slaves as a part of total population in 1792 is difficult to determine, since the extant material for the 1790 census comes from the 1782 state enumerations. In 1782, slaves comprised forty-six percent of the county’s total population. By 1800 that percentage had grown to fifty-one. Census figures taken from http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/cgi-local/censusbin/census/cen.pl; Internet; accessed 5 May 2004; Personal Property Tax Books, Mecklenburg County, 1782-1805, Library of Virginia, Reel 230; microfilm. It is unclear how many slaves under age twelve were in the household in 1792, because personal property tax records stopped recording that demographic group after 1787. However, in 1786 the tax record lists Tignal with thirty slaves under and twenty-one above the age of sixteen. Given these facts, it is not unreasonable to think that six years later there were at least thirty slave children under age twelve.

98 SJD, 17 May 1792, 1 July 1792.

99 Methodism and the Southern Mind, 185-186.
Lyerly has already done a commendable job in interpreting Jones’ view on slavery in her letters. However, it remains to see how the diary adds to our understanding. In it, Jones repeated the antislavery rhetoric of her letters. Recall, for example, when she expressed “Sore sorrow about sunset in seeing the miseries of slavery.” Three months later she recorded her agony over it again: “Precious evening in conversing with my son from college and 2 young daughters of righteousness and judgment and justice and mercy and the blackness of Negro slavery. O what a shame to Christians to hold them in chains. O how I grieve for it.” On another occasion she “gently” argued over it: “in the evening I was miserable through stiff debate upon slavery. I felt zeal and power, took great care. It was gently conducted.”

This antislavery feeling should be contextualized within the larger Methodist movement. In 1785, the church had soundly condemned the institution, and even circulated a petition in Virginia attempting to get the state legislature to abolish it. While this was rejected, and the official Methodist stance against slavery softened, undercurrents of agitation against it continued. In 1796, the general conference would recommend measures against the selling of slaves by certain of its members. Men like Jones’ neighbor, James O’Kelly, went so far as to write publicly against slavery. In 1789, O’Kelly published his Essay on Negro-Slavery, which attacked Christians for supporting the gospel through the sweat of slaves.

With preachers like O’Kelly railing against bondage, it is not surprising that Jones also expressed dismay over it. In doing so, she no doubt encouraged O’Kelly and others in continuing their firm opposition. But is there evidence to suggest that her distress was

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100 In fact, Lyerly suggests that Jones identified with slaves more than her gentility class in “A Tale of Two Patriarchs,” 502.

101 SJD, 9 April 1792, 16 July 1792, 1 April 1792.

more than rhetoric, that she wasn’t merely trying to gain acceptance among her Methodist "brothers" and "sisters" by writing against it? Did she act in ways that supported her words?

It is difficult to answer this question with any degree of certainty, because Jones rarely mentions slaves. However, in examining the few places she does write of them, we might answer in the affirmative. In one instance, she writes of an "evening spent in reading for those with me [her slaves?] on the very weighty subject of anger, the unreasonables [sic] of anger and how like hell fire it is. O, what a night I had in company with Jesus half unveiled. I got in reach of his ear, as sure as I am born." On the surface, this looks like a clever way of using religion to support the existing system, through the inculcation of docility. Yet coupled with her instruction was a great spiritual experience. That this took place among her listeners ("in company") suggests her inclusion of slaves within her spirituality, and thus within her circle.

Slaves appear as a part of her religious experience on other occasions as well. One morning upon waking up late, "which hurried my spirits," Jones "applied to a black woman of my society living with me to give out a hymn, as Mr. Jones sing [sic] poorly." Besides the insult to Tignal’s honor that such a declaration might have entailed, this entry is noteworthy for how it reveals Jones’ mentality toward particular slaves. This slave woman had religious stature, as a member of the Methodist “society.” While her race was important enough to note, Jones did not think it an obstacle to prevent her from ministering by song. The ability of slaves to pass on spiritual good to Jones is further evident from this most fascinating of entries: “In deep converse with a dear Negro woman who loved God. My eyes flowed and my faith strengthened. She told me great things, and with the rest that God gave her, everything she asked for. A long professor I

103 SJD, 29 April 1792.
knew her to be and a constant attendant at meeting in our ow[n] society. She said [she?] knew angels attended her.”104 Here we have a reversal from Jones as teacher. In this case, Jones is the pupil, the slave woman is the tutor. This is by far the strongest evidence that race was not an obstacle in how Jones constructed her circle, and that her opposition to slavery went beyond rhetoric. Provided the slave had the proper spiritual credentials, such as membership in the Methodist church, Jones was willing to accept her as an equal on some level. In Jones’ world, race was not nearly as important as religion.

In fact, religion seems to be the only important factor left, after examining the relative unimportance to Jones of gender, class, and race. However, it would be too simplistic to say it was all about religion, and leave it at that. For Jones rejected some people of faith, even as she embraced some from other denominations. Fellow Methodists did not escape her sharp criticism. Within the broad circle of faith, Jones drew more exclusive circles, ones that did not correspond to denomination. Not surprisingly, she seems to have been a part of the innermost ring.

In March of 1792, Jones encountered some Baptist preaching:

I stopped and listened, and after a while went in where a few. [sic] Preached from these words ‘I will praise the Lord, although he was angry with me, his anger is turned away and he comforteth me.’ The text was enough, my soul felt like bursting her prison in the echoing sound of ‘I will praise the Lord’ and oh, milk and honey was the stream where all my soul was drowned. I was wrapped in flames of love and over running joys divine. I dined at my Sisters I M’s with the Baptist preachers. I liked their preaching better than their conversation, which was pointed directly at me, but I would not, yea I told them so.105

We can only imagine what provoked her negative response at the dinner table. Perhaps it was a suggestion that she needed to be baptized. Whatever it was, the point is that she

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104 SJD, 31 May 1792, 20 May 1793.

105 SJD, 23 March 1792. Curiously, this text, nor anything close to it, is in the Bible. It may be that in reconstructing the sermon later in her diary Jones pieced together different parts of different verses in the sermon.
was not afraid to both interact with and listen to sermons preached by Baptists. Nor was she repulsed by Presbyterians. In October of 1792, she traveled twenty-five miles to attend a meeting. While there she stayed in the home of some Presbyterians. Her memorable experience provoked her to proclaim, “Presbyterians, they made us welcome, and Jesus poured out his abundant blessings upon us. I was called to pray amid many, and the Lord was powerfully present. Mourners wept, saints rejoiced, and sinners felt the shock. . . . Br. Low again called on me to pray, and oh, infinite wonders.” In a letter to William Spencer less than two weeks later, Jones wrote of an important Presbyterian (“one of the great ones”) coming to see her, because “God blessed me with them” at an earlier meeting.\footnote{SJD, 13 October 1792; \textit{Letters Spiritual}, 131.} 106 No doubt this anticipated visit was a result of her friendly and spiritual interaction two weeks earlier.

This kind of ecumenism was consistent with the larger evangelical movement in the early national period, in which denominations occasionally worked with each other, although not without tension. In the 1787-88 revival in the vicinity of Hampden-Sydney College, for example, Presbyterians cooperated with Methodists and Baptists in seeing souls converted. Even then, however, differences were apparent. Presbyterians gave the Methodist James O’Kelly a cool reception when he came and preached near the college, due to his lack of education.\footnote{Wesley M. Gewehr, \textit{The Great Awakening in Virginia, 1740-1790} (1930; reprint Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1965), 167-168. Interdenominational cooperation continued, or at least reappeared, in early nineteenth-century Virginia. See Boles, \textit{Great Revival}, 84-85.} 107

Despite her ecumenism, Jones could also be very exclusive. However, she seems to have reserved her sharpest criticism for those fellow Methodists (“professors”), which suggests her focus was less on being from the right denomination than it was on aligning with what she believed the Bible demanded. Take, for example, this extraordinary entry:
I found something in this command, worth thousands 'Let your loins be girded about and your lights burning and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for the Lord, that when he returns from the wedding and knocketh, we may open unto him immediately. Blessed are those servants when the Lord shall come are found watching.' [Luke 12:35-37, partially paraphrased] I think these words enough to alarm every slothful soul on earth, enough to arouse all my powers to activity. I will my Lord, I will. David says 'I have sworn and I will perform it that I will keep thy righteous judgments.' [Ps. 119:106] Why not more say with David. 'Oh,' says one as I was talking of it just now, 'I don’t think David was right. He was a professor too.' Harken to that, professors denying the word. Well, we may expect persecution. I never saw faithfulness the way to God, so plain on earth, and I am bound and rebound to pass through, if I lose my breath up the steep ascent to God.108

Here we have a fascinating picture. It is worth fleshing out a little to emphasize its importance. The pious Jones uses scripture to excite herself to greater devotion, and suggests that others should also do the same. She talks of her conviction, and another Methodist disagrees with her, stating that David was human, therefore fallible, and not to be heeded. With great indignation Jones huffs to her diary about the impudence of a fellow “professor” denying holy writ. She then writes it off as persecution, the inevitable lot of the believer, and determines to stick to her belief no matter what. In this episode there is no question about who is right. Jones is the spiritual one; the other Methodist is (albeit surprisingly) a heretic, the persecutor, and by extension an instrument of the devil.

While this entry is one of the more vivid ones in its drawing of spiritual lines, Jones often spoke with a tone of spiritual authority. Another time she saw “the levity of man, even professors. I warned some to watch more and to shun trifling company, which I think a great hurt to Christians.”109 By her testimony, Jones substantiates Asbury’s description of her as a woman who reproved with “pointed severity”: “I attended meeting, dealt plainly with our dear society. A profitable time, but oh, I meet deep and

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108 SJD, 24 March 1792.

109 SJD, 10 April 1792.
weary trials from sinners, such that is not small. But oh, Jesus drank a bitter cup, left only a little in order for us to pledge him.” Her remonstrance seemed to meet with resistance, but that was alright, as she was following Jesus’ example in facing “weary trials.” Not one to back down from anyone, Jones included ministers among those she warned. In a letter to Enoch George, she stated that “[i]f we don’t take care, Methodism will feel judgment without mercy! Pride, that accursed wedge, is hid in our camp.”

When Jones felt personal resistance to her pursuit of Christ, her predictable response was to wax spiritual. Once, when she faced opposition to her attendance at a meeting, but was finally allowed to go, she responded with her own homily on attendance at spiritual services, in which she warned readers of the devil’s favorite biblical text:

Satan would keep souls if he could from preaching, for I know there is unspeakable profit in that mean of grace, it cannot be told. But it is as one that sets in company with a councilor, they are indeed instructed in many things, and the fell virtue flowing from this fund, which cannot be had without it, nor expressed therefore. Others will not believe us that don’t go, but stay at home and many times get well instructed by the devil all day, for he can turn preacher when congregations stay at home on purpose to hear him. Then he takes his favorite text: ‘he that taketh not care for his own house have denied the faith and is worse than an infidel.’ [paraphrase of 1 Timothy 5:8] I reckon that text of Scripture is more in the mouths of half hearts than any other in the bible. I can set and hear dear woman talk over that passage as smooth as if they went to school to learn just that [portion?]. May I set this as an answer, ‘except ye repent ye will likewise perish.’ [paraphrase of Luke 13:3, 5]

After exploring these passages it seems evident that Jones’ circle of we was tightly drawn, and based upon religion. More specifically, however, religious belief had to meet her expectations. She did not tolerate half-hearted devotion. She boldly spoke against those she thought were out of line. And her own piety gave her the authority to encourage or condemn others.

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110 SJD, 13 May 1792; Letters Spiritual, 123.

111 SJD, 30 June 1792.
The spiritual authority that Jones believed she possessed raises important questions past scholarship has not addressed, even as it calls for a reexamination of some interpretations. Catherine Clinton may be quite right in her analysis that plantation women largely were oppressed individuals, islands in their households. But even if the noncollective approach to religion advocated by the "planter patriarchy" kept women from making material gains, \textsuperscript{112} did women care? Or did they use religion to fashion a self-image that transcended their oppression? Clinton's work is important for its gendered, groundbreaking view of plantation life. However, it falls short in its treatment of female agency. Women come across as all-too-passive victims of oppression. Their resistance is muted, or nonexistent. Jones provides a voice to that struggle. She is an example of one who used religion to triumph over the material circumstances allotted her by society. Perhaps other women used religion in a similar way.

Elizabeth Fox-Genovese does a better job in attributing agency to her subjects. She has made a valuable contribution in attempting to explain why slaveholding women bought into the system. Once again, however, it may be that she has overlooked the importance of religion. Women may have been more aloof to their legal subordination than they were supporters of it. Perhaps the spiritual authority women like Jones felt—so evident in the descriptions of her self-image—was powerful enough to compensate for their legal and material position.

It is certain that Jones does not fit Fox-Genovese's construct, in which women bought into class ideology because of the privileges it afforded them. In Jones we see a woman who did not weave "religious responsibilities . . . into their ideals of rank," \textsuperscript{113} but used religion to criticize rank and its values. In other words, her faith was not a fragile instrument that the status quo successfully commandeered to protect its interests. Rather,

\textsuperscript{112} \textit{Plantation Mistress}, 162.

\textsuperscript{113} \textit{Within the Plantation Household}, 232.
religion was a central and powerful force that shaped how she viewed class, race, and gender, sometimes in contradiction to social norms. As a Methodist plantation mistress, Jones was a rare breed. But it seems unlikely that she was only one of a kind. Further study of other elite women of faith will need to be done before we know that Jones represents any kind of general model. In the meantime, her example calls into question the stereotypical slaveholding woman that Fox-Genovese depicts.

It is easier to accept the themes in *The Pursuit of Happiness*, if only because Jones' writing can say little about a broader study of how elite Virginian men changed from before to after the Revolution. Still, the diary and letters support and add to Lewis' work. The emotional language that Lewis contends dominated evangelical writing in post-Revolutionary Virginia resounds throughout Jones' diary. A more vivid example of affective language would be hard to find. However, Jones' anticipation of the next life and misery during the current one is complemented by frequent emotional highs. There seems to be more emphasis on positive emotional experiences in Jones than Lewis suggests was true of Virginian elites more generally. But perhaps the dichotomy of feeling Jones displayed adds to our understanding about elite emotional life by explaining why many of the gentry embraced more affective religion. The possibility of closeness to Christ—and the great peaks of emotion that accompanied such experiences—counterbalanced the times when separation from God or evidence of the world's sinfulness evoked despair and depression.

The contrast between Mary Jones in 1857 and Sarah Jones in 1792 could not be sharper. Mary depended on her power as a plantation mistress over her slaves to demand

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114 For a discussion of the emotion and ecstasy southern Methodist women experienced in their religion, and how Jones was a model of this emotion, see Cynthia Lynn Lyerly, “Passion, Desire, and Ecstasy,” 168-186.

115 For example, see SJD, 11 March 1792, 14 March 1792, 24 March 1792, all of which speak of experiencing pleasure in this life.
they meet her every need. Her power and status were intricately linked to chattel bondage. Sarah also feared spiders. However, she faced her fears without the help of servants, even though she might easily have asked for their assistance. By not doing so, she essentially rejected her status as a plantation mistress. Instead of ordering her life around class, she turned to religion. It was faith that provided her the courage to sit in plain sight of an arachnid. Similarly, it was faith that revolutionized her entire worldview.
CONCLUSION

Catherine A. Brekus examines more than a hundred women evangelical preachers in her book, *Strangers and Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America, 1740-1845*. In it, she suggests why these women largely have been ignored, both by evangelicals who lived alongside them, and by women’s rights activists. According to Brekus, “female preachers had been too conservative to be remembered by women’s rights activists, but too radical to be remembered by evangelicals” (7).

This observation is an astute one. Although Jones does not appear in Brekus’ study, the same could be said of her, and may be why her role in early Methodism was quickly forgotten. While she “preached,” prayed, sang, and exhorted in public, she never appears to have demanded access to the pulpit. While she claimed to abhor slavery, she continued to benefit by it. Despite her refusal to put on fashionable clothes, she couldn’t stop her children from wearing them. She even recognized her husband as her “head.” And her close friendships with men like Minter and O’Kelly, while unusual as a plantation mistress, were not necessarily in opposition to her husband’s wishes. It is plausible that he even approved of them. Tignal’s (eventual) cooperation with Methodism mutes any rebelliousness in Jones. Couple this with her desire to stay within Methodist parameters concerning women’s roles—free to speak in public, but nevertheless restricted—and Jones falls far short of the feminist mold. Even so, there have been recent efforts to fit Jones into such a construct. This has been done, predictably, by depicting her as one who rose above the oppressiveness of her husband to
find solace and comfort in Methodism and the community it provided.\footnote{See Cynthia Lynn Lyerly, “A Tale of Two Patriarchs,” 490-509; “Passion, Desire, and Ecstasy,” 168-186.}

While Jones is not a great model for women right’s activists, neither was she the type that southern evangelicals wanted to trumpet, especially as they moved toward a conservative retrenchment by the 1830s.\footnote{See Heyrman, \textit{Southern Cross}.} Although her story of defying Tignal in attending a service was repeated as late as 1857,\footnote{See Coles, \textit{Heroines of Methodism}.} it seems the only person after 1800 to record evidence of her speaking, exhorting and other public ministry was Minter, who by that time had become somewhat of a Methodist renegade.\footnote{See Minter, \textit{A Brief Account of the Religious Experiences}.} Methodists seem to have fallen silent, or possibly have forgotten, the sister who had been so warmly referred to by several itinerants, including Minter, Meacham, Ware, and Asbury. While this silence may have been partly due to the alleged scandal with Minter, which probably dampened any enthusiasm for repeating her name, it is just as plausible that it had to do with the fact that, as they institutionalized, Methodists desired to promote more traditional examples of female piety. Jones did not fit this model, so she was forgotten.

Her diary adds tremendously to our historical understanding. I have tried to show why her life is important. Her story is one that supports the scholarship suggesting that Methodism gave women significant opportunities, despite its limitations. Jones also gives us a glimpse into the power and limits the Methodist religion had in changing those men who embraced its tenets. And her example reveals a fascinating kind of spiritual competition between men and women, which indicates that the Methodist rhetoric for spiritual equality meant something more than nice-sounding words. At the same time that Methodists were competing with each other it seems they set themselves up—
whether purposefully or simply in response to God's call—against the planter class culture, perhaps in imitation of their Baptist brethren a generation earlier. Internally, Jones' writing shows us how her worldview was transformed by her religion. To the extent that she focused on the spiritual, she seems to have transcended traditional boundaries imposed by gender. For her, being a Methodist included reordering her circle to include those who were properly religious (as she defined it), irregardless of race, class, gender, or even denomination. The resulting egalitarian, family-like atmosphere undoubtedly was a strong attraction, both to Jones and many others who joined the Methodist movement.¹²⁰

Jones' example might offer a tentative answer to why women were reticent to resist changes which, to the eyes of the twenty-first century historian, diminished their authority and did them harm. Simply put, she was too focused on intangible goals and spiritual rewards to concern herself with issues that consume historians today, such as political authority. Historians have not given enough consideration as to why women allowed the conservative retrenchment of evangelical religion. This is a glaring oversight, given the dominant numbers of women in the church.¹²¹ We should be wondering why the male leadership was successful by the 1830s or so in transforming what was originally a more democratic church—and one that seemed to be willing to transform gender roles in a limited way—into a hierarchical institution with defined roles that took back from women some of the opportunities they had been allowed earlier. It is not enough to say that women's absence from positions of church governance explain their inability to resist the changes. After all, attendance at an evangelical church was not

¹²⁰ Lyerly also suggests that the family-like quality in Methodism attracted Jones. See "A Tale of Two Patriarchs."

a requirement. Women, as the majority of the laity, were in a position of tremendous power, and had to have recognized it. Had they been so inclined, they could have voted with their feet and left those evangelical congregations which insulted them, thereby gutting them of their members, and damaging their reputation.

Recall Susan Juster’s point that “equality” was not a term evangelicals likely used, because it was too earthly-minded.¹²² This could describe Jones. Her worldview was otherworldly in its focus. This is not to ignore the influence religion had in changing how she interacted with those of different classes, races, or genders. Yet issues such as house-keeping and church-keeping concerned her far less than bringing souls to Christ and becoming more holy. In fact, in 1793 she had a chance to join O’Kelly in breaking away from the Asbury-led Methodists to form a more democratic-minded (according to O’Kelly) church. She chose to back Asbury instead, and suffered persecution from O’Kelly and others for her loyalty.¹²³ Her support of Asbury underscores not only her satisfaction with what mainstream Methodism provided her (recall “I really feel an associate with the church of the first born”), but also a concern more for the spiritual equality she felt than the hierarchical (and political) structure of the church.¹²⁴

This other-worldly focus is difficult for historians to grapple with, probably because it is often foreign to their experience. Yet if we are to learn about subjects of historical inquiry, we need to make every effort to understand them, including their concern for spiritual realities more than material ones, for the next life over this one. With this mindset, statements such as the following become less relevant: “however vital and empowering evangelical religion was for colonial women, it offered but a slender

¹²² Juster, Disorderly Women, 12.

¹²³ For an overview on the schism, see Kilgore, Charles Franklin, The James O’Kelly Schism in the Methodist Episcopal Church (Mexico, D.F.: Casa Unida de Publicaciones, 1963). For references to Asbury and persecution suffered from O’Kelly and others, see SJD, 4 January 1793, 29 July 1793, 11 August 1793.

¹²⁴ SJD, 18 June 1792.
reed upon which to build a more egalitarian vision of society.” While Jones might agree with the basic truth in this idea, she would probably add “here on earth.” She had no less an egalitarian vision than any of her contemporaries. The difference was that the utopia she pictured, and the one that was most important to her, would ultimately be realized in a different location. It included streets of gold instead of dirt, and mansions built by angels instead of slaves. Her anticipation of this eventuality led her to embrace spiritual equality in the present as a dim reflection of the way things would be in a future life. Because of her focus on the hereafter, she seems to have accepted more easily the reality that her present condition was not egalitarian. To put it crudely, Methodism led her to focus less on material realities than spiritual ones. The immaterial benefits she found diminished the importance of inequalities in the present, such as the denial by men of women’s access to the pulpit.

To suggest that women such as Jones cared little about what today might be characterized as oppressive characteristics of the MEC is not to deny their existence. However, we should ask whether these aspects of the movement were as real to the women who “suffered” by them as they are to those who now write of their second-class status. In other words, to what extent did women recognize their exploitation? If many were content with the system, is it even appropriate to cast the debate in these terms? If Jones is at all representative of women in her time and place, these questions are due for some serious consideration. Perhaps the time has come to reevaluate who shaped the roles of women in late-eighteenth to early-nineteenth-century evangelical religion in Virginia. More specifically, we might appreciate the radical potential evangelical religion had, and how its embrace transformed planter authority, even while recognizing this fact: the reason it never developed into a full-blown social revolution may have been...

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125 Juster, *Disorderly Women*, 12.
less a function of men’s authority than women’s apathy. Women like Jones were content with modifying social relations. They did not experience a social revolution in their churches because they never wanted one.
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VITA

Chad Sandford

Chad Sandford was born in Dade City, Florida, on April 26, 1978. In 2003 he received a B.A. in History from Saint Anselm College. The same year he entered the M.A. program in U.S. History at the College of William and Mary. He served as an editorial assistant for *Eighteenth-Century Life* while there.

In the summer of 2004, Chad returned to his native New Hampshire, where he currently resides. There he finds a daily mix of pleasure and frustration in attempting to pass on his love for history to high school students while teaching them the subject.