WITHIN A RADIUS of twenty-five miles from Petersburg for a quarter century and more no one in the fields of education and religion was better known than Moses Waddel. Born in North Carolina in 1770, he came to Georgia as a young man of eighteen and settled for a time in Greene County as a teacher. Being of a contemplative and religious nature he was soon drawn into the Presbyterian Church and a little later was licensed to preach.¹

Combining teaching with preaching in the mid-1790’s he moved into Columbia County, down the Savannah from Petersburg, and set up a school “on the Kiokas [Creek],” about two miles below Appling, the county seat. The school was known as Carmel Academy, but it seems that it was also designated as Columbia County Academy in order to receive a state endowment. In 1797 it was announced that Carmel Academy would hold its “exhibition,” on October 19, at which two plays would be acted and “about twelve or fifteen speeches will be spoken.”² Two years later Abraham Baldwin, who had written the charter of the University of Georgia in 1785, as one of the commissioners announced that Columbia Academy would open for its second year “under the care and instruction of the Revd. Moses Waddle [this spelling indicating how the name was at that time pronounced].”³ In the meantime, on one of his preaching expeditions, Waddel had turned up in the “Calhoun Settlement,” on the South Carolina side, some miles to the eastward of Petersburg, and had met Catherine Calhoun, the only sister of John C. Calhoun, and had married her. John C. Calhoun now attended Waddel’s school in Columbia County, where he was prepared to enter the Junior Class at Yale. Another one of Waddel’s students was William H. Crawford; it was here that Crawford received all the formal schooling he ever had.
Catherine died only a year after her marriage, as announced in April, 1796: "Died. On Sunday the 10th instant, in the 22d year of her age, the lovely Kitty Waddel, wife of the Rev. Moses Waddel, of Columbia County. The fortitude with which she endured her tedious illness, and the resignation with which she met her dissolution, were such as excited the admiration of all who attended her at that time, and afforded a comfortable hope of her having made a happy exit." While Waddel had been a student at Hampden-Sydney College from 1790 to 1793 he had met Miss Eliza Woodson Pleasants, who in 1800 became his second wife.

Waddel never became an actual resident of Petersburg, however, in 1801 he moved from Columbia County and settled in Vienna, which was removed from Petersburg only by a ferry-ride across the Savannah. Here he set up his Vienna Academy, which served equally Petersburg and Vienna. LeRoy Pope acted as financial agent in making collections of tuition in Petersburg. Waddel's school served not only as a highly efficient educational institution but it also became a center for social and intellectual activities for this "tri-city" area. Several times a year it held its "exhibitions," which consisted of plays, declamations, and orations; and it held its annual examinations, where the patrons could come and enjoy the festivities, later called "commencements," when they could see and hear the students perform their part in being examined for promotion. In 1803, when Petersburg neglected to appoint a Fourth of July orator, Waddel held a school exhibition, supplemented by a barbecue, which drew many of the Petersburgers across the river.

One of the Petersburg boys, who had moved to Savannah, attended the exhibition in May (1803) and wrote to his friend Larkin Newby, now in Fayetteville, North Carolina, that "we had an exhibition in Waddles School which of course drew together all the Neighboring Girls & boys on either side [of the river]—we had a large party—and in the evening went over to Petersburg where we had a very social hop—early next morning I bid them a final adieu for I never more do expect to trouble the place again. I quitted them with great reluctance yet it was obliged to be so."

John Williams Walker, one of Waddle's students who was preparing to enter Princeton, was now studying Latin and Greek and was entranced with Virgil. He prepared an oration on the "Death of Washington" for an exhibition to be held in May, 1804, when there were also to be given two plays, in one of which he was to have a part. The plays were Oliver Goldsmith's "She
Stoops to Conquer, or the Mistakes of a Night" and Joseph Addison's "The Haunted House." Many other Petersburg youths were crossing the river to attend Waddel's school.

In 1804 Waddel moved his school to his plantation about five or six miles to the southeast near Willington, where it continued a record already established when it was at Vienna, adjudged as "equal to any institution of the kind in the United States." There as David Ramsay, the South Carolinian historian, wrote in 1809, "The melody and majesty of Homer delight the ear and charm the understanding in the very spot, and under the identical trees, which sixty years ago resounded with the war-whoops and horrid yellings of savage Indians."

Thither young Walker followed Waddel, and he could report to his friend Newby: "I am now in the midst of a wood, leaning against a stately and venerable oak, with my ink stand by my side, and a sheet of paper on my knee." The next year he entered the Junior Class at Princeton. Waddel's school was to be often praised, but not too often or too much, for among the hundreds of students who came under his tutelage, there were such outstanding leaders as John C. Calhoun, George McDuffie, George R. Gilmer, and Abraham Baldwin Longstreet.

Waddel was often in Petersburg to preach regularly every sixth Sunday in 1806 and thereafter for sometime, to deliver funeral sermons, to visit among the families (the Waddels and Hillyers being especially close friends), to perform marriage ceremonies, and to trade at Petersburg stores. He preached the funeral of Memorable Walker on May 29, 1803, using as his text Job, Chapter 14, verses 10, 11, and 12: "But man dieth, and wasteth away: yea, man giveth up the ghost, and where is he? As the waters fail from the sea, and the flood decayeth and drieth up: So man lieth down, and riseth not, till the heavens be no more, they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep." A little later in the year he gave an "eloquent and appropriate discourse" at the burial of John R. Ragland. When Mary, the wife of Joseph Watkins, died, Waddel was called on for the funeral oration. Waddel remained at his Willington school and made himself handy in Petersburg until 1819, when he was elected President of the University of Georgia and moved to Athens.

There were other schools in the neighborhood of Petersburg and in the town itself there were schoolmasters and schoolmistresses, however, no one approached Waddel in scholarship or in excellence of instruction. Not far from Willington and nearer to
Petersburg was a school which Charles Tew of Charleston announced he was establishing to teach reading, writing, arithmetic, grammar, and geography. He added that “Mrs. Tew will (if sufficiently patronized) instruct young Ladies in every branch of needle work.” This school was a far cry from Waddel’s Willington academy.

In an attempt to emulate Waddel, James Armor under the heading of “Education & Health” announced in 1809 that he had commenced a private academy in the neighborhood of “Col. Benjamin Taliaferro, in Wilkes county, on Broad River, about seven or eight miles above Petersburg, in a high, healthy and moral neighborhood—in which Academy students will be taught the Latin, Greek and English languages correctly, and likewise, all those different branches of science, which are necessary to prepare them for entering a College or University.” “Good and decent board” could be had for $5.00 or $6.00 a month or $72.00 for the year.

In Petersburg itself there were schools run by a Mr. Reid and Nathan Warner, and there was Mrs. Solomon Roundtree’s school catering especially to “young ladies.” Mrs. Roundtree being the wife of a Petersburg merchant who had come down from New York, advertised herself as having had great success in teaching in that Northern city, and thought that she should “merit the patronage of a generous public.” The purpose of her school was for “Educating young Ladies, in the useful and ornamental arts of Tambor Embroidery, Lacework, Plain Work, also Reading, Writing and Drawing.” Many of the young Petersburg girls attended this school, including Rebecca Freeman (Mrs. Shaler Hillyer), her cousin Polly Freeman (Mrs. William Wyatt Bibb), and Sarah Herndon Watkins (Mrs. Stephen Willis Harris).

Just as some of the Petersburg boys attended the University of Georgia and even went as far away as Princeton and Yale, so some of the Petersburg girls continued their education at Salem College in North Carolina and especially at the Moravian College in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. In 1803 Matilda Pope “together with some of her acquaintances” was off to Bethlehem. With her were Prudence and Sally Oliver, daughters of John Oliver (son of old Dionysus). Matilda’s going North to school was not pleasing to John Williams Walker, her sweetheart, for he was afraid “that this Northern College will make ‘old things become entirely new,’ will render the disposition of Matty quite the contrary of what it was. Or will put such highflying notions into her head that she
may become short sighted toward her former acquaintances, and to your humble servant among them." Only three years later Walker himself entered Princeton, but in neither case did their Northern education wean them from each other, for in due time they were married and on their way to Alabama, where Walker became one of the outstanding leaders of that state.

School books were for sale by the Petersburg merchants, who as the forerunners of department stores sold anything a person might want and be able to buy. Noah Webster's "Blue-Back Spellers" was a stand-by for the elementary schools, and for the academies the ancient classics were always in good supply. In 1806 Oliver & Watkins announced in the Petersburg newspaper that they had "a choice collection of Latin & Greek Books, of nearly every description taught in the schools of this country." School children read books because they were made to do so by their teachers, but the intellectual atmosphere in Petersburg was so well developed as to lead grown-ups to buy books and read them for pleasure and profit. John Marshall's *Life of George Washington*, which was being published during the years 1804 to 1807, was a favorite in Petersburg; LeRoy Pope, the sales agent for Petersburg, was helping to make it so. Robert Thompson ("Old Blue"), the merchant, was promoting the sale of a religious work, *Solemn Truths, Stated and Urged in a Lecture & Sermon: By the Late Rev. John Springer, A. M. To which is Prefaced a Short Sketch of the Author's Life.*

A Petersburger signing himself "Observer" called attention in 1806 to the heritage recorded in books, awaiting all who would bestir themselves to read them. "The living world," he wrote, "is but a small part of the scope of human intellect. No man can be wise, who is contented with passing events, and he only, who combines the past with the present; he alone is able to predict the future." He proposed a library to serve Petersburg and the surrounding country, to be financed by the issuance of one hundred shares at $6.00 a share, with no one allowed to own more than three shares. Three volumes could be borrowed for each share and be kept for one month. He estimated that with the $600 which would be secured by the sale of the one hundred shares the co-operative library would be able to buy 300 volumes, since he believed that books could be bought at an average of $2.00 a volume. There should be histories, biographies, travels, voyages, ethics, sermons, novels, and "well selected" poetry. He noted, "Newspapers are excellent means of scattering informa-
tion, but a man must be a miserable ignoramus, who has no other source of information.”

There is no record indicating that this proposed library association ever came into existence; however, there was going at this time the Petersburg Union Society, which had been incorporated in 1802. The purpose of the Society was stated in the preamble of the act: “Whereas it is a matter of the highest importance in a free government, to increase and diffuse knowledge, and the height of benevolence to alleviate the wants of distress,” the people composing the Society “have formed themselves together for the above laudable purpose.” This statement of purpose was in such general terms that it left a question as to what the Society intended to do. Other records indicate that it resolved itself into a debating society, which certainly could result in diffusing knowledge among its members. In the act of incorporation the membership was listed, with Shaler Hillyer as president and John Williams Walker as secretary. There were eighteen members, including such important Petersburgers as Robert Watkins, William Wyatt Bibb, and his brother Thomas.

There was no more perfect combination of teacher and preacher than was to be found in Moses Waddel. As was understood in those days, education without religion was hardly worthwhile. Petersburg was not imbued with a religious complex equal to some communities in Puritanical Massachusetts, but there was a wholesome respect for preachers and an attempt to follow their teachings—and certainly some of the Petersburgers had as tender a regard for the welfare of their souls as did anyone in New England have for the welfare of his soul or the souls of others.

Anyone coming down east of the mountains and wanting to enter Georgia north of Augusta would likely find it most convenient to cross the Savannah at Petersburg—or in the reverse direction anyone leaving Georgia to go through central or upper South Carolina would likewise cross at Petersburg. This strategic location led William Bartram there in 1776, just as it led John Lyon, another botanist and plant-hunter less well known, there in 1803 and 1808. So it was, then, that Bishop Francis Asbury in spreading Methodism in Georgia entered and left Georgia through Petersburg at least a dozen times. He first came to Georgia in 1788 and noted in his journal for April 1, “We crossed the Savannah at the Forks, and came where I much wanted to be, in Georgia.” Although Petersburg was now about two years old, he referred to the place as “the Forks.” The next day he rested, and
on the fifth he noted that he began preaching at the quarterly meeting, and on "Sunday 6. There was a moving on the souls of the people." On the ninth he wrote in his journal, "Our conference began at the Forks of Broad-River, where six members, and four probationers attended." And during the next two days, "I felt free, and preached with light and liberty each day. Many that had no religion in Virginia, have found it after their removal into Georgia and South Carolina: here at least the seed sprung up, wherever else it may have been sown."32

Since this was the first Methodist Conference to have been held in Georgia, there has long been confusion and dispute as to the exact spot. There is reason to believe that it might have been in Petersburg, for Asbury first referred to Petersburg as "the Forks," and when he named "the Forks of Broad-River" as the location of the Conference, it would seem logical to think that he meant the same "Forks." At that time the only other place the term "Forks of Broad River" came to be used was where the South Fork entered Broad River more than thirty miles above Petersburg, in a region wild and uninhabited. Whether or not the Conference was held in Petersburg, it was somewhere in the vicinity of that town,33 and the Bishop might have used the term to refer to any place in that extensive triangle between the Broad and Savannah rivers.

In 1792 Bishop Asbury passed through Petersburg on his way out of Georgia,34 and after another visit in 1796 he noted "I must needs go through Petersburg."35 Three years later he came back, crossing the Savannah at the Cherokee Ford, some miles above Petersburg, and went on to the home of William Tait, who lived up the Broad river some distance. He wrote in his journal for November 18, "We attended at Tait's chapel, in the Forks [a term which undoubtedly meant the region above Petersburg, but in the forks of the Broad and Savannah rivers]": and continuing, "it was a cold day. I gave a short exhortation on Rev. XXI, 7. I passed a night with Charles Tait, formerly of Cokesbury [College in Maryland], and was made exceedingly welcome and comfortable."36 The next year he was in Georgia again and after wandering around in the upper Broad River Valley, "then had we to cross Broad-River, and pierce through the woods, scratch and go in the by-paths—wind round the plantations—creep across the newly cleared ground by clambering over trees, boughs, and fence-rails: thus we made our way fifteen miles to Charles Tait's, in Elbert County." Pushing on down the river to Petersburg he
crossed the Savannah on Robert Martin's ferry, a few miles above the town.\textsuperscript{37}

For two years in succession the Bishop had been making visits to Georgia, and now in November, 1801, after a ride "in the rain and evening damps we arrived at Richard Easter's in Petersburg, at the junction of the rivers, on which are the towns of Lisbon and Vienna in South-Carolina." After describing Petersburg as previously quoted in this narrative,\textsuperscript{38} Asbury continued, "At noon we held a meeting; the day was cold, and the house open. At night I preached in Richard Easter's house on Isai. XL, 31; the people were very attentive." He journeyed on up the Broad River Valley, where he ran into Baptists and Presbyterians, and noted that "I was often interrupted by singing and shouting"—not making it clear whether these manifestations were by his own people or as hostile gestures by the other denominations.\textsuperscript{39}

Asbury must have been especially attracted to Petersburg, for some of the Petersburghers were his fast friends. Skipping a year, "On Saturday [December 10, 1803] I came to Petersburg. The text for today was Thess. V. 8, 9." The next day "It rained. I spoke in a very open house on Ephes. VI. 18, 19. I lodged at Mr. [John] Oliver's. The face of affairs here is greatly altered for the better; but I expect greater things yet: We have a society, it is true; but we want a house of our own to preach in." He went on up Broad River and lodged at the home of his friend "Judge Tait [Charles Tait, it was, who was now judge of the Superior Court of the Western Circuit]."\textsuperscript{40}

Two years later, Asbury was back in Petersburg, where there was a going Methodist congregation or "society." On October 30, 1805, he had ridden twenty miles through South Carolina and had crossed the Savannah into Petersburg before he had breakfast. He lodged at the home of John Oliver. The next day he preached at 11 o'clock. He had hoped that he would find a commodious Methodist Church building: "Instead of building a small convenient house, they have bought an old house, and fitted up a room for every body: this did not please me." Here he ran across a volume of John Marshall's \textit{Life of George Washington}, and could hardly put the book down before reading 400 pages. He judged it to be a wonderful book. He was soon visiting Richard Easter and Judge Charles Tait, two families in addition to John Oliver's, whom he especially admired.\textsuperscript{41}

Back in Georgia again in 1806, the Bishop rode into Petersburg
from (Wilkes County), a distance of thirty-two miles; after that long ride he preached in the evening at 7 o'clock. "Reverend—Cummins [Francis Cummins] and Reverend—Doke [Samuel Doak?], our Presbyterian brethren, were present." Apparently the Presbyterians were paying some attention to Petersburg. Whenever Asbury came near Petersburg he was impelled to ride to the home of "Charles Tait, a judge," and to preach in "Tait's meeting-house." He came again into Petersburg the next year with his companion Daniel Hitt. The latter "preached at John Oliver's: our host has a son-in-law converted at camp meeting. Our preachers have passed by this town, but the Lord will not pass by Petersburg, but will visit precious souls here." The next day they rode on to Judge Tait's. Asbury inferred that the Methodists were sowing the seeds of repentance through the fervor of their camp meetings, but many of these seeds of repentance were sprouting up Baptists.

For the next half dozen years Bishop Asbury was neglecting Petersburg and Georgia; however, in 1813 he arrived again in Petersburg, went on and "lodged at senator Tait's [being now a United States Senator], and I retired to bed with a fever." There was a drought and much sickness in the Valley. On the 14th of November he "preached at Peter Oliver's: my host and wife are both sick." During the months of December, 1814, and January, 1815, Asbury made his last visit to Georgia, passing over the Savannah at Petersburg into South Carolina. The next year he was dead. He had undergone amazing hardships in his travels over the eastern United States, moving mostly on horseback but sometimes in a gig. He had devoted more time to Petersburg than had any other Methodist preacher of that period, and Methodism there was largely his handiwork.

A little of the religious awakening that had come to Petersburg grew out of several visits by Lorenzo Dow, one of the most eccentric and yet most powerful preachers who operated on the early American frontiers. "Crazy Dow," as he was often called, was born in Connecticut in 1777 and lived until 1834. He first appeared in Petersburg in February, 1802, with an introduction to Solomon Roundtree, who opened his house for a meeting, and, as Dow wrote, "showed me the greatest kindness of any man since I came to the south." To drum up a crowd Dow had walked the streets of Petersburg passing out handbills; so great an impression did he make on the people, that they offered him $10.00 and a horse
to ride to Augusta. He accepted the money but true to his method of traveling, he set out walking. Before leaving Petersburg he visited Vienna and Lisbon.48

The same month, a year later, he made his way into Petersburg, having passed down through South Carolina, where the Methodists treated him very cool—although claiming to be a Methodist he was not very orthodox. He had a better reception in Petersburg, for “as soon as I entered Petersburg,” he said, “a lad knew me, and soon word flew over the town that the walking preacher had got back, and I spoke to an assembly of magnitude that night.” He added, “A society of Methodists was raised here when I was walking this country last year, though religion was cold. Now it seemed to flourish, my way was opened, and I sent appointments, and visited the country extensively as Providence enabled me to succeed.”49 John Williams Walker wrote to his friend Newby a few weeks later, “Lorenzo Dow has been here sometime ago—the same eccentric genius—the same logical reasoner—the same insignificance in his appearance.”50

Dow had a habit of announcing months ahead just when he would be at a given place to preach. When he had left Petersburg in February he promised to be back about eight months later, and true to his word he turned up at the appointed time. Traveling without purse or profit, he depended on the people he met to take care of his wants. “Here [in Petersburg],” he wrote, “my wants were relieved, mostly by Major John Oliver, who came and called me his spiritual father, and so did several others, and I saw a great alteration in the inhabitants.” The Major told him that “when you preached in Petersburg last, your text was constantly ringing in my ears, for days together, whether I would deal kindly and truly with the master, &c. So I had no peace until I set out to seek the Lord; and since, my wife and I have been brought to rejoice in the Almighty.”

Dow continued, “He gave me a vest, pantaloons, umbrella, stockings, handkerchief, and a watch, &c. Another gave me a pair of shoes and a coat; and a third a cloak; and a few shillings for spending money from a few others.” Satisfied with what he had accomplished in Petersburg, he set out to the westward.51

John Williams Walker, a son of old Jere Walker, was duly religious, but was often called a Deist because he stated his rule of conduct thus: “Be a good man—Be religious if you choose but do not be a fanatical bigot.”52 Walker had this comment on Dow’s latest visit to Petersburg: “That eccentric preacher, Lorenzo Dow,
has made an appointment to preach in Petersburg this evening, and I have no doubt but what the house will be very much crowded.” Furthermore, “this man Dow, altho of the most contemtible appearance, impeded in his utterance and of the most inharmonious voice, is yet heard with a great deal of pleasure, and is admired as a great preacher. Tho I am convinced that the oddity of his manner is the principal foundation of his fame, yet I will not do him so much injustice as to insinuate that this is his only talent, for to speak truth, he has one of the soundest and most cogent reasons I ever heard: and with this one advantage I think the mean appearance of his person and the badness of his enunciation do but serve to set him off.”

Dow was no orator nor was Bishop Asbury a spellbinder. No one who passed up and down the Broad River Valley was the equal of James Russell in winning converts both by his personality and his powerful language. He was of lowly and obscure ancestry and was said to have been born in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, about 1786. Being left an orphan early in life he did not learn to read and write until he was grown—according to general agreement, “while not the greatest, certainly the most remarkable man in Georgia Methodism.” Bishop James O. Andrew, around whom the Methodist Church split into Northern and Southern branches, in his youth heard Russell with “feelings of awe and veneration.” Russell’s great oratorical power and an unparalleled ability at pathos and exhortation brought conversion to thousands of his hearers.

In 1812 he moved down to Savannah to establish Methodism, where in Colonial times, John Wesley as a minister of the Church of England had preached. To build a meeting house Russell cut the timber and did the construction with little help from anyone. To support himself he cut and sold marsh grass; however, by the time Bishop Asbury visited Savannah in 1813, Russell had awakened the people and gained their support sufficiently for him to present to the Bishop a gig, costing $45.00. His acumen extended beyond employing the methods of saving souls, for about the end of the War of 1812 he deserted the ministry and entered into speculations which gained him a small fortune. He moved back into the Petersburg region, where he engaged in some business ventures and settled in Vienna; here it seems he had visions of building the town into a great metropolis largely to be his own. This grand scheme soon failed and left him with nothing. Hereafter he led a pathetic life; it was said that he tried to make a
living in Augusta by delivering packages in a wheelbarrow. He
died in Abbeville, South Carolina, in 1825.57

Preachers came and went through Petersburg and the Broad
River Valley, seeking to gather their hearers into the church.
Most of these men who had heard the call to preach the Gospel
were Methodists and Baptists, but some like Moses Waddel were
Presbyterians, less colorful and more stationary. Now and then
an impostor would turn up, as did a person calling himself John
Malona and asserting that he represented the Baptists. Charged
with immorality he demanded a trial, but not appearing, he "was
proved by incontrovertable evidence to be a Drunkard, a Lyar,
a Boaster, in fine a common Rake, to the discredit of the Chris-
tian name."58

Religion became entrenched as much in Petersburg as probably
in any other town in the state. John Williams Walker in his cor-
respondence with his friend Newby was a faithful reporter of
most happenings in Petersburg during the first decade of the
nineteenth century. He wrote in 1804 that "the people of Peters-
burg are getting very religious," and noted that wives were fast
converting their husbands.59 It is not known how many church
buildings there were in Petersburg; but certainly there was one,60
which might have served different congregations—this in addition
to the meeting house which had displeased Bishop Asbury.