

Bumpass, Frances Webb ^[1]

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By Paula S. Jordan, 1979

26 Sept. 1819–8 May 1898



"Frances Webb Bumpass at midlife." Photo courtesy of the

Troy Bumpass Inn webpage. ^[2]Frances Webb Bumpass, newspaper publisher, teacher, and church worker, was born in Halifax, Va., to Henry and Harriet Dickens Webb. Educated by her parents and by private teachers in North Carolina, she also studied Greek and other advanced subjects with the Reverend D. C. Doak, a Presbyterian clergyman of [Orange County](#) ^[3], North Carolina. As she recorded in her journal, her parents early impressed upon her that "the duties of domestic life were not to occupy her time, but that . . . she should train the minds and instruct the souls of others." Frances Webb began teaching in [Granville County](#) ^[4] soon after passing her own examinations. In 1842 she married the Reverend Sidney Bumpass, a scholarly Methodist clergyman, and for several years they moved from one rural congregation to another as his assignments dictated. Because he often was sent to "build up" small congregations, his stipend was low and Frances Bumpass taught to add to the family income.

In 1847 the Reverend Mr. Bumpass was appointed presiding elder of the Greensboro District and trustee of Greensboro Female College, a Methodist institution of which he had been an early advocate. After he built a home in Greensboro, Frances became a prominent participant in the college and church community. The couple had often talked of publishing a newspaper for the Methodists of North Carolina, and in May 1851 the *Weekly Message* first appeared as a special number of the *Greensboro Patriot*. Having acquired his own press, Bumpass began regular publication in October but shortly after contracted typhoid fever. He died in December, barely three months after beginning the newspaper. Other ministers and various friends advised Frances Bumpass to sell the press, but she announced promptly that she intended to continue publication at least until November 1852, when she expected the annual Methodist conference would discuss the possibility of adopting the *Weekly Message* as a church publication.

The public looked askance at a woman doing business, so she hired a manager in order to avoid the social stigma. He proved to be undependable, however, and the paper fell into financial difficulties that were so serious the conference declined to take it over. At this point Mrs. Bumpass took over publication herself in her own home and, with servants and boarding students from Greensboro College trained to run the press, kept the *Weekly Message* on a regular schedule for twenty years. In the turbulent years before the Civil War her editorials urged moderation and order. After North Carolina seceded she called for prudence and reason, unselfish work for God, and survival in the face of war. When the shortage of paper forced rationing in the state, pleas were sent to the governor to allow the *Message* to continue. He consented and only during the few months of the Federal occupation of Greensboro in 1865 did it cease publication. In 1872, when the Methodist Church began to publish the *North Carolina Advocate* Mrs. Bumpass finally closed the *Weekly Message*. She then opened a school in her home as a source of income and turned her organizational skills to building a recognized place in the church for women's activities. "Too long," she said, had women "hesitated, fearful, lest it be said they were stepping beyond their sphere." College educated women, she argued, should be sent as missionaries throughout the world. She was instrumental in the 1878 organization of the Women's Foreign Mission Society of the Methodist Church and traveled extensively for the society, helping to arouse the interest of women throughout the country, until failing health immobilized her. She served as corresponding secretary, first of the North Carolina Conference division of the Society, then of the Western North Carolina Conference division, from 1878 until her death. She was buried in Greensboro.

The Reverend and Mrs. Bumpass were the parents of four children: Duella Bumpass Troy, Eugenia, the Reverend Robah Bumpass, and Terrelus, who died in childhood.

References:

Eugenia H. Bumpass, *Frances Webb Bumpass, Autobiography and Journal* (1899)

Nell Craig, "Mrs. Frances Bumpass Edited for Twenty Years the 'Weekly Message,'" *Greensboro Daily News*, 10 May 1925

Emily Hedrick, "Past is Alive and Well in Ante-Bellum Home," *Greensboro Daily News* , 21 July 1968

Ethel Troy, chapters from an unfinished biography of Frances Webb Bumpass, in the possession of Sue Vernon Williams, Greensboro; Ethel Troy, "Frances Webb Bumpass, Lady Editor, Ran Newspaper in Old Greensboro," *Greensboro Record* , 10 Mar. 1951

Image Credit:

"Frances Webb Bumpass at midlife." Photo courtesy of the Troy Bumpass Inn webage. Available from <http://troy-bumpasinn.com/2012/03/04/when-the-civil-war-came-to-the-troy-bumpas-inn/> ^[2] (accessed April 10, 2012).

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