

Green, James Henderson ^[1]

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by Steve Wood, 1986

21 June 1881–23 May 1955

James Henderson Green, Methodist^[2] holiness evangelist, radio preacher, and educator, was born in a one-room log cabin in Ashe County^[3] near Elk Cross Roads (now Todd). Of Dutch descent and the eldest of nine children, he was the son of James Tippicanoe Green, a Civil War veteran, and his wife, Mary Jane Cook. His early years were spent with his family on the farm, where he "learned physical culture at the end of a hoe handle." Green felt that God had blessed him with the "spirit of venture"; in his later evangelistic peregrinations, he preached some 15,000 sermons during fifty years of holiness evangelism^[4] and education in North Carolina.

Converted through the revival influence of Methodist circuit rider^[5] preachers L. P. Brogle and A. J. Burrus in 1898, Green experienced a dramatic call to prepare for his life's work and left home to attend Ashe Academy in Solitude (now Ashland), N.C. After graduation, he taught in several rural public schools in the area until 1905. He operated a private high school, Camp Academy, in Buncombe County^[6], for two years and supplemented his salary with sawmilling and farming. Although Green often spoke of the broadening influences of these experiences in his education, in 1901 he became disenchanted with teaching and received a "call" to the ministry. He was admitted on trial at the Methodist conference under Bishop A. W. Wilson in Greensboro in 1905 and met conference education requirements by correspondence courses from Vanderbilt University. He began his first pastorate with only two sermons, but eventually cultivated a homegrown homiletic style that made him a widely-known pulpiter and holiness evangelist throughout the South. Green employed various "measures" in his revivalism to create "religious excitement" or arouse attention. He prayed for people by name and exposed sin publicly. Well endowed with idiosyncracies, on one occasion, after being introduced as speaker, he crawled on his hands and knees across the platform several times before delivering the message.

Between 1905 and 1926 Green served nine pastorates, most of them rural charges, including the legendary Rock Springs Camp Meeting circuit near Gastonia. In 1916, after his pastorate at Rock Springs, during which his evangelistic appetite was whetted with nearly a year of continuous revival meetings, he was appointed a general conference evangelist in the Western North Carolina Conference of the Methodist church. For the next forty years his interest and energies were consumed with evangelistic passion. Unsited for the sedentary pastorate, in 1933 Green reflected that "evangelism was the ministry for which I was best suited." He conducted outstanding revival campaigns in small towns including Thomasville, Jamestown, Kannapolis, and Hiddenite. He was well known for his work in camp meetings^[7] and founded three such revival institutions, including Camp Free in Connelly Springs, Sunny South Camp in Greensboro, and with Henry Clay Morrison of Asbury College, Avon Park Camp Meeting^[8] in Florida; the latter was the first major national camp meeting "below the frost line." The Newlyn Street Methodist Church and the Jim Green Memorial Church in Greensboro are other Green institutional offspring.

Green "began his course in the holiness movement" during a pastorate at Clyde, N.C., between 1906 and 1910. "Scriptural holiness had recently invaded" the town of Clyde, but there was bitter opposition by both Baptists^[9] and Methodists in the community. Nevertheless, Green, recalling his "Christian Baptism" into "scriptural holiness" in an "eventful experience" in 1904, publicly recognized the holiness people in a community-wide evangelistic campaign. Increasingly bothered by the "baneful effects of the new methods and programs" sponsored by his church leaders, he felt that the Methodist church was drifting away from genuine revivals and toward a gradual apostasy from deep spirituality. According to him, the university-trained leadership did not believe in experiential religion or in the inspiration of the Scriptures. He believed that the church needed to recover "the original ways of Methodism," and this association with "holiness churches" early in his pastoral experiences influenced his career in the American holiness movement. Green's feeling that "modernism" was invading the Methodist church eventually led to secession from his parent church in 1926. Anguished by the decision, he described his leaving as "the saddest hour of my ministerial career. It almost killed me."

Afterwards he served as General Evangelist in the Nazarene Church from 1926 to 1930 and as pastor of the Lighthouse Mission, an independent rescue mission, in St. Louis, Mo., from 1929 to 1931. In 1938, with Helen Vincent Washburn and Kenneth Temple, Green organized an interdenominational evangelistic association. Ostensibly begun as a "chain of tabernacles" to provide preaching points for holiness propagation, the People's Christian Movement was actually an institutional consummation of Green's nearly forty years of personal tent and tabernacle revivalism throughout North Carolina. However, the movement became a full-fledged denomination when it assumed the name of People's Methodist church in 1942. At the time of its merger with the Evangelical Methodist church in 1962, the PMC consisted of 1,000 members in twenty-five churches scattered throughout North Carolina, Virginia, and Georgia. Ultimately, Green lamented secession from his ecclesiastical parent and after fomenting independent holiness institutionalism in North Carolina for over fifty years, he concluded his denominational odyssey and returned to the Methodist fold just six months before his death.

Affectionately known as "Brother Green," he left his mark all over the state and in many parts of the South through the various educational and ecclesiastical progeny of his "holiness revivalism." His most enduring influences may be seen in the two institutions, Avon Park Camp Meeting and [John Wesley College](#) ^[10]. Avon Park, located in western Florida, is a winter mecca for Wesleyan leaders and followers and is one of the major holiness camp meetings in America today. On 25 Jan. 1932, Green reopened the recently defunct Greensboro Bible and Literary School, an institutional victim of the depression in the spring of 1931, as People's Bible School. The institution had been established in 1903 by Winfred R. Cox, another North Carolina holiness pioneer in the wake of a southern "tidal wave of pentecostal evangelism" by Seth Cook Rees, to train ministers, missionaries, and evangelists in the perfectionist faith. In 1959, the name was changed to John Wesley College. Later, as North Carolina's oldest undergraduate theological institution, it advertised itself as "independent, interdenominational, evangelical." It served a wide spectrum of religious denominations, while retaining its Wesleyan-Arminian theological emphasis. Green was president of the college for twenty years until ill health forced him to resign in 1952. In 1932, he began *The People's Herald*, afterward the *Crusader*, as an official literary organ of the college. This holiness periodical attained a circulation of about 4,000.

Green married Minnie May Grogan of Ashe County. He died of a stroke, survived by three sons, James C., John Kilgo, and [Philip L.](#) ^[11], and by two daughters, Mrs. Max Kimmins and Mrs. W. P. Armstrong. Green and his wife were buried in Guilford Memorial Park, Greensboro.

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