

## I. Religion in Eighteenth-Century America

Generally, modern scholars identify a high level of religious energy in colonies after 1700. Religion was on the ascension and, in many parts of the colonies, in a state of "feverish growth." Figures on church attendance and church formation support these opinions. Between 1700 and 1740, an estimated 75 to 80 percent of the population attended churches, which were being built at a headlong pace.

Churches in 18<sup>th</sup>-century America came in all sizes and shapes, from the plain, modest buildings in newly settled rural areas to elegant edifices in the prosperous cities on the eastern seaboard. Churches reflected the customs and traditions as well as the wealth and social status of the denominations that built them.

Toward mid-century the country experienced its first major religious revival. The **Great Awakening** swept the English-speaking world, as religious enthusiasm vibrated between England, Wales, Scotland and the American colonies in the 1730s and 1740s. In America, the Awakening embraced an encompassing evangelicalism—the belief that the essence of religious experience was the "new birth," inspired by the preaching of the Word. It invigorated even as it divided churches. The supporters of the Awakening and its evangelical thrust—Presbyterians, Baptists and Methodists—became the largest American Protestant denominations by the first decades of the 19th century. Opponents of the Awakening or those split by it—Anglicans, Quakers, and Congregationalists—were left behind.

### **Personalities Associated with the Great Awakening**

#### **George Whitefield (1714 -1770)**

During the first decades of the 18th century in the Connecticut River Valley a series of local "awakenings" began. By the 1730s a general outpouring of the Spirit appeared to encompass the American colonies, England, Wales, and Scotland. In mass open-air revivals, powerful preachers like George Whitefield brought thousands of souls to the new birth.

Ordained in the Church of England, with which he was constantly at odds, Whitefield became a sensation throughout England, preaching to huge audiences. In 1738—at only 24 years old—he made the first of seven visits to America, where he gained such popular stature that he was compared to George Washington. Whitefield's preaching tour of the

colonies, from 1739 to 1741, was the high-water mark of the Great Awakening here. Whitefield's success has been attributed to his resonant voice, theatrical presentation, emotional stimulation, message simplification and clever exploitation of emerging advertising techniques. Some have compared him to modern televangelists.

The Great Awakening, which had spent its force in New England by the mid-1740s, split the Congregational and Presbyterian Churches into supporters—called "New Lights" and "New Side"—and opponents—the "Old Lights" and "Old Side." Many New England New Lights became Separate Baptists. Together with New Side Presbyterians—who were eventually reunited on their own terms with the Old Side—they carried the Great Awakening into the southern colonies, igniting a series of the revivals that lasted well into the nineteenth century.

### **Gilbert Tennent**

Gilbert Tennent (1703-1764) was the Presbyterian leader of the Great Awakening in the Middle Colonies. Upon George Whitefield's departure from the colonies in 1741, he deputized his friend Tennent to come from New Jersey to New England to "blow up the divine fire lately kindled there." Despite being ridiculed as "an awkward and ridiculous Ape of Whitefield," Tennent managed to keep the revival going for another year.

This famous sermon, which Tennent preached at Nottingham, Pennsylvania, in 1740, was characteristic of the polemics in which both the friends and enemies of the Great Awakening indulged. Tennent lashed ministerial opponents who had reservations about the theology of the new birth as "Pharisee-Shepherds" who "with the Craft of Foxes . . . did not forget to breathe the Cruelty of Wolves in a malicious [slander] of the Person of Christ."

### **Evangelical Colleges**

From the Great Awakening onward, evangelical Christians have founded colleges to train a ministry to deliver their message. The College of New Jersey (later Princeton University) was founded in 1746 by New Side Presbyterian sympathizers.

### **Samuel Davies**

Samuel Davies (1723-1761) was the spearhead of the efforts of New Side Presbyterians to evangelize Virginia and the South. Establishing himself in Hanover County, Virginia, in the 1740s, Davies was so successful in

converting members of the Church of England to the new birth that he was soon embroiled in disputes with local officials about his right to preach the gospel where he chose.

### **Presbyterian Communion Tokens**

The sacrament of Holy Communion was precious to colonial Presbyterians (and to members of other Christian churches). Presbyterians followed the Church of Scotland practice of "fencing the table"—of permitting members to take communion only after being examined by a minister who vouched for their spiritual soundness by issuing them a token that admitted them to the celebration of the sacrament. The custom continued in some Presbyterian churches until early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## **II. Religion and the American Revolution**

Religion played a major role in the American Revolution by offering a moral sanction for opposition to the British—an assurance to the average colonist that revolution was justified in the sight of God. As a recent scholar has observed, "by turning colonial resistance into a righteous cause, and by crying the message ... in all parts of the colonies, ministers did the work of secular radicalism and did it better."

Ministers served the American cause in many capacities during the Revolution: as military chaplains, as penmen for committees of correspondence, and as members of state legislatures, constitutional conventions and the Continental Congress. Some even took up arms, leading troops in battle.

The Revolution split some denominations, notably the Church of England, whose ministers were bound by oath to support the King, and the Quakers, who were traditionally pacifists. Religious practice suffered in certain places because of the absence of ministers and the destruction of churches, but in other areas, religion flourished.

### **Revolution Justified by God**

Many Revolutionary War clergy argued that the war against Britain was approved by God. In this sermon Abraham Ketteltas celebrated the American effort as "the cause of truth, against error and falsehood . . . the cause of pure and undefiled religion, against bigotry, superstition, and human invention . . . in short, it is the cause of heaven against hell--of the

kind Parent of the Universe against the prince of darkness, and the destroyer of the human race."

On the other hand, many Tories believed, that the Revolution was a religious quarrel, caused by Presbyterians and Congregationalists whose principles of religion and polity were contrary to those of the established Church and Government. The commonly held British view was that the American Revolution was inspired by the same kind of religious fanaticism that had fueled Oliver Cromwell's establishment of the Commonwealth of England more than a century earlier.

### **A Fighting Parson**

Peter Muhlenberg (1746-1807) was the prime example of a "fighting parson" during the Revolutionary War. The eldest son of the Lutheran patriarch, young Muhlenberg—at the conclusion of a sermon in January 1776 to his congregation in Woodstock, Virginia—threw off his clerical robes to reveal the uniform of a Virginia militia officer. Having served with distinction throughout the war, Muhlenberg commanded a brigade that successfully stormed the British lines at Yorktown. He retired from the army in 1783 as a brevetted major general.

### **John Witherspoon**

John Witherspoon (1723-1794) was the most important "political parson" of the Revolutionary period. He represented New Jersey in the Continental Congress from 1776 to 1782, in which capacity he signed the Declaration of Independence and served on more than one hundred committees. As president of Princeton, Witherspoon was accused of turning the institution into a "seminary of sedition."

### **The Quaker Schism**

Some Quakers were conscientiously convinced that they could, despite the Friends' peace testimony, take up arms against the British. Calling themselves "Free Quakers," they organized in Philadelphia. The majority of Quakers adhered to the denomination's traditional position of pacifism and disowned their belligerent brethren. This Free Quaker broadside declares that although the "regular" Quakers have "separated yourselves from us, and declared that you have no unity with us," the schism does not compromise the Free Quakers' rights to common property.

## **Problems for American Anglicans**

The American Revolution inflicted deeper wounds on the Church of England in America than on any other denomination because the King was the head of the church. Anglican priests, at their ordination, swore allegiance to the King. The Book of Common Prayer offered prayers for the monarch, beseeching God "to be his defender and keeper, giving him victory over all his enemies. Of course, those "enemies" in 1776 were Continental soldiers as well as friends and neighbors of American Anglicans. Thus, loyalty to the church and to its head could be construed as treason to the American cause. Patriotic American Anglicans, loathe to discard so fundamental a component of their faith as The Book of Common Prayer, revised it to conform to the political realities.

The Maryland Convention voted on May of 1776, "that every Prayer and Petition for the King's Majesty, in the book of Common Prayer . . . be henceforth omitted in all Churches and Chapels in this Province." The rector of Christ Church in St. Mary's County, placed over the offending passages strips of paper showing revised prayers composed for the Continental Congress.

## **Reforms in the Presbyterian Church**

Like the Anglicans and Methodists, Presbyterians reorganized their church as a distinctly American entity, thereby reducing some of the influence of the Church of Scotland. From debates at the synod of 1787 in New York emerged a new Plan of Government and Discipline, a Directory of Public Worship, and a revised version of the Westminster Confession, which was made "a part of the constitution." In the proceedings of the 1788 synod of Philadelphia, the Presbyterian Church, along with many other contemporary American churches, took a stand against slavery, recommending that Presbyterians work to "procure, eventually, the final abolition of slavery in America."

## **George Duffield, Congressional Chaplain**

In October of 1777—after Jacob Duché, Congress's first chaplain, defected to the British—Congress appointed joint chaplains: William White, Duché's successor at Philadelphia's Christ Church, and George Duffield, pastor of the Third Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia. By appointing chaplains of different denominations, Congress expressed a revolutionary egalitarianism in religion and its desire to prevent any single denomination from monopolizing government patronage. This policy was followed by the first

Congress under the Constitution, which on April 15, 1789, adopted a joint resolution requiring that the practice be continued.

### **III. Early Waterford and Leesburg**

#### **Waterford**

Waterford was founded about 1733 by Amos Janney, a Quaker from Bucks County, Pennsylvania. Other Quakers followed him there. Mills were built along Catoctin Creek. The village grew until—prior to the Civil War—it was the second largest town in Loudoun County. Many buildings still in use in the village were built before 1840. Known as Janney's Mill until the 1780s, the early commercial center became the village of Waterford.

The grandchildren of Quaker immigrants to the Philadelphia area in the 1680's, Amos & Mary Janney were enticed to move by reports of fertile land newly open to settlement in Virginia. In the early 1730s Amos bought 400 acres on the south fork of Catoctin Creek.

The new home must have suited the Janneys as they encouraged friends and relatives to join them from Pennsylvania. Among the first to follow were Mary's sister Jane and brother-in-law Francis Hague. In 1743 Hague bought 303 acres abutting Janney's land on the northeast. Francis settled his large family in a modest stone cottage on a hill above Catoctin Creek.

In succeeding years, Quakers arrived in growing numbers, drawn like Amos Janney by the promise of good land. Most of the Quakers came from the counties surrounding Philadelphia. By the 1730s, land was growing scarce and becoming expensive in Pennsylvania. The prolific Quakers looked south and began settling in Maryland, the lower Shenandoah Valley and Loudoun. Generally, they were well off, and in Loudoun, most were able to buy tracts of more than 400 acres.

Geographically, Janney's Mill, despite its fine soil, was an unlikely spot for a growing town. It was not on a major road, and its stream, the south fork of Catoctin Creek, was no more than 50 feet wide. And when Loudoun County was formed in 1757, the county's courthouse town, Leesburg, was a scant 5 1/2 miles away.

But the Quakers were a dogged lot. Blacksmith shops and stores followed the ever-enlarged and improved mill, and by 1806, there was a second mill, giving rise to the village's nickname, Milltown. For spiritual growth, a log Friends meetinghouse was erected about 1743. It became a substantial stone edifice in 1761 and was enlarged to twice its original size in 1771.

The Friends meetinghouse took the name Fairfax in 1745, honoring the county it was in at the time, though Loudoun County would be carved out of Fairfax 12 years later. Some people called the village Fairfax; others stuck with Janney's Mill.

Amos Janney died in 1747, leaving his estate to his sixteen-year-old son Mahlon. Within a few years young Mahlon replaced the original log mill with a new two-story structure of wood and stone. This second mill was erected on the site of the present brick mill. The county began to build and improve local roads to facilitate the movement of goods to and from Janney's Mill and, by the time Francis Hague died in 1780, the tiny village had begun to grow rapidly. Amos's cousin Joseph Janney bought 12 acres from Hague's estate and promptly laid out 15 lots on the south side of Main Street from the mill almost to the site of the present post office. Shops and dwellings soon followed, and sometime in the 1790s the growing village was renamed "Waterford."

Through the end of the 18th century, Waterford and its fertile hinterland continued to attract Quakers from Pennsylvania. And, increasingly, the Quakers were followed by Scotch-Irish Presbyterians and German Lutherans, also from Pennsylvania. Baptists and Methodists came too, adding to the lively social and ethnic mix. Besides their heritage and religious beliefs, these people brought their crafts and skills with them. Waterford became a bustling commercial town, supporting and serving a prosperous quarter of rural Loudoun County. By 1762 the ethnic mix included African-Americans, some of them slaves, but others, especially after the turn of the century, free blacks—a relative rarity elsewhere in Virginia.

## **Leesburg**

In 1757, the Assembly of Virginia selected this settlement for the location of the Loudoun County courthouse. Nicholas Minor, an initial town trustee, had his 60-acre property surveyed into 70 lots—divided by 3 north-south and 4 east-west streets—to form a town, which he called George Town. The town's name was changed to Leesburg, for the Lee family, by an Act of the Assembly in September 1758 that officially established the town.

Minor required purchasers to build on the lots, giving most 3 years to build a brick, stone or wood house 20 feet wide and 16 feet long. If they failed to build in a timely fashion, the property reverted back to Minor.

At the start of the American Revolution, Leesburg had fewer than 500 residents. Due in part to its ethnic and religious diversity, which included English, German, and Scotch-Irish belonging to Anglican, Baptist, Methodist, and Quaker (Society of Friends) congregations, many Leesburg residents supported the American Revolution.

## **IV. Presbyterians in Colonial America**

### **The Church of Scotland**

John Knox (1505–1572), a Scot who had spent time studying under John Calvin in Geneva, returned to Scotland and led the Parliament of Scotland to embrace the Reformation in 1560. The Church of Scotland was eventually reformed along Presbyterian lines, to become the national, established Church of Scotland. The Glorious Revolution of 1688 and the Acts of Union 1707 between Scotland and England guaranteed the Church of Scotland's form of government.

### **Presbyterians**

Presbyterians from northern Ireland (Ulster Scots) were by far the largest group of immigrants to join the Presbyterian Church in English Colonial America. Lured to northern Ireland from Scotland in substantial numbers during the first half of the seventeenth century, they met with increased restrictions, even persecution, whereupon they began their migration to the American Colonies. Their numbers increased dramatically after 1717 in the face of drastic rent increases by their Anglo-Irish landlords, government mismanagement, and famine. By the late 1740s these Ulster Scots were arriving at a rate of 12,000 per year. Estimates of total Scots-Irish immigration for the Colonial Period are between 200,000 and 250,000, mostly through ports in the Middle Colonies. These immigrants would come to comprise approximately one-third the population of the colony of Pennsylvania.

### **The Great Wagon Road**

The Great Wagon Road was a colonial American improved trail transiting the Great Appalachian Valley from Pennsylvania to North Carolina, and from there to Georgia.

The Great Wagon Road was the heavily traveled main route for settlement of the Southern United States, particularly the "backcountry". This was the area that received the great proportion of German and Scots-Irish immigrants in the 18th century.

Beginning at the port of Philadelphia, where many immigrants entered the colonies, this road passed through the towns of Lancaster and York in southeastern Pennsylvania. Portions of the Great Wagon Road traveled to present-day Mechanicsburg, about 30 miles northwest of York. Mechanicsburg derives its name from the many mechanics who set up shop there to do business with the numerous wagon trains traveling through town.

Turning southwest, the road crossed the Potomac River and entered the Shenandoah Valley at Winchester, Virginia, continuing south in the valley via the



Great Warriors' Trail, which was established by centuries of Native American travel. The Shenandoah portion of the road is also known as the Valley Pike.

During the colonial period, Presbyterianism was not one homogenous denomination. The various Presbyterian groups in America have, since colonial times, undergone a series of separations and unions. Resulting from this were such groups as the Reformed Presbyterians and Associate Presbyterians. It is thus important to be aware that a Scots-Irish ancestor may have belonged to one of several branches of Presbyterianism, each of which generated its own records.

Reformed churches were first established in the early 1600s with Presbyterians shaping the religious and political life of the newly established nation. The only clergyman to sign the Declaration of Independence, was a Presbyterian—Reverend John Witherspoon, who was mentioned earlier. In total, it appears that at least **12 signers** possessed close ties to the Presbyterian Church. Of these, **four were from Pennsylvania**—Benjamin Rush, James Smith, George Taylor, and James Wilson, **four from New Jersey**—Abraham Clark, Richard Stockton, John Hart, and John Witherspoon, **two from New York**—Philip Livingston and William Floyd, and **one each from New Hampshire and Delaware**—Mathew Thornton and Thomas McKean, respectively.

### **Kittocktin Presbyterian Church in Waterford**

Following closely on the heels of the Quakers who founded Waterford, Scots-Irish Presbyterians migrated south from Pennsylvania into Loudoun County around 1750. It was these immigrants who founded Catoctin Presbyterian Church, one of the oldest Presbyterian organizations in Virginia.

The church was founded in 1765 when Amos Thompson was ordained as the first pastor of Kittocktin Presbyterian Church. Thirty-four years old at the time, Rev. Thompson was from New Haven, CT. He graduated from New Jersey College, as Princeton was then called, in 1760 and was ordained in 1764. In 1769, a plot of land two miles south of Waterford was conveyed to the church, and a log church was built on that site. Today no trace of the original church building remains, but grave markers bearing the date 1776 still stand on that site.

### **Political Power From the Bottom Up**

The Presbyterians who made many of the greatest contributions to the revolutionary thought and opinion were mostly from that war torn Northern tip of Ireland. They were a people who were justly and righteously attached to their freedom. The church government lent itself favorably to this value. One of the

main points of contention between the Scottish Kirk and Anglican worship was the Bishop-oriented rule of the Church of England. The Scots held that every principle of the reformation taught that religious power was to be decentralized in order to be purified of what they felt was the Catholic propensity to abuse it. Congregations chose their minister rather than having one assigned. This was a very strong factor in allowing the American mind to contemplate self-government in the political sphere.

### **Back Country Buffer**

Scots-Irish immigrants to the New World experienced even more autonomy than the rest of colonial America. This was because they had been relegated to the back country at the foothills and deeper into the Appalachian Mountains. Their exile was because their Anglican neighbors in the flatlands nearer the coast made this bargain: They would not impose Anglican form of worship on these folks if they would confine themselves to the back country, act as a buffer between the coastal population and the Native Americans, and not "pollute" the Anglican religion with their Presbyterian theology. These rugged individualists felt no compunction in taking this deal. They knew first hand the hard work of establishing themselves in hostile territory. They also relished the freedom they were being given to determine their own destiny.

## **V. The Founding Fathers as Christians**

With respect to church-state separation in the United States, the Founders were all Christians, and to a degree that is almost impossible for Christians to imagine in the modern era. Also, apart from a few Jews, the U.S. population was overwhelmingly Christian, with few or no Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, etc. Thus, when government explicitly propounded Christian principles, no one complained.

But the Founders were also much more keenly aware of the various wars that Europeans had fought with each other over state-established religions in the centuries immediately preceding the American Revolution. The Wars of Religion occurred, not between Christians and non-Christians, but between Catholics and Protestants, including a Civil War and a "Glorious Revolution" in England during the century immediately before the American Revolution.

Further, the attitudes of various Founders toward Christianity hardly mirror those of modern Christian conservatives. Interestingly, Benjamin Franklin reports of himself that he was never much one for attending church, although he paid tithes to his Presbyterian congregation, seeing its value, but not holding the minister in much esteem.

Jefferson, of course, was, in many ways, the ultimate liberal. He gets the majority of the credit for writing the Declaration of Independence, that ultimately

liberal document that calls for throwing off the King of England—the symbolic and actual ultimate authority in the American community—in the name of god-given, individual rights. Jefferson also compiled his own version of the bible, in which he distilled what he saw as the essential moral teachings of Christ, and from which he eliminated all that he considered mere dogma.

Franklin and Jefferson thus exemplified the Christianity of the Founders: faith, but faith guided by human reason, empirical inquiry, and skepticism. Although many of the early American colonies are associated with religious freedom and the desire to flee European persecution, religious toleration within the colonies was anything but the norm. Weekly church attendance was mandatory: In the more egalitarian Virginia, an offender missing three consecutive Sundays in church could be put to death in the early days of the colony. New England Puritans, long viewed as a persecuted group in England, were the least tolerant of other faiths. In most of the thirteen colonies, Catholics and Jews were considered *persona non grata*.

The accepted churches within colonial boundaries were directly supported by the state and frequently involved in the political issues of the colony. In Massachusetts, the commonwealth was comprised of “godly communities” that reflected the theocratic order John Calvin had attempted in Geneva in the late 16th century.

In Virginia, no men could serve on a jury unless they were practicing members of the Anglican Church. Historians have pointed out, however, that earlier laws regulating church attendance were often ignored in later years, yet the official church still received tax support and preferential treatment.