The Rise of the Presbyterian Church
In Early America

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Anthropology 377
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May 26, 1978
The Scotch-Irish are Ulster immigrants from Scotland and almost exclusively of Lowland Scots blood. At the end of the 17th century, the English Parliament destroyed the wool-growing and cloth-manufacturing industries of Ulster by levying taxes and restricting the sales of their products. The Parliament also discriminated against the Presbyterian Church, which lies at the heart of the Scotch-Irish. The rising of the rents and the harshness of the landlords added to the hardships and led to the migration of the Scotch-Irish to America. By the time of the American Revolution, there were already 150,000 Scotch-Irish in America. The Presbyterian Church had a slow start in America, but with the help of the Scotch-Irish it made an everlasting impression on the American way of life. The Presbyterians seemed to be in a constant confrontation with the Congregational Church during the early Colonial period. The Church not only had to struggle with other religious beliefs, but it also had to fight its own destruction from the inside. Views and
Centres of Scotch-Irish Settlement
In Colonial America
practices needed to be changed in order for the Church to last and it brought on the struggle between the liberals and conservatives of the Church.

By 1640, 21,200 emigrants had arrived in New England and 4,000 were said to have been Presbyterians. The bulk of these were Calvinists from Holland and France, the remaining came from Ireland, Scotland, and England. A call was sent to Ulster from the Scotch-Irish settlements on the Chesapeake bay for ministerial supplies, which were hard pressed to find in the colonies at that time. Francis Makemie was sent in reply to the call by the Presbyterians to Maryland shortly after the call was sent in 1680. He was to organize the first american Presbytery. In 1704 Francis Makemie after long years in the colonies, went to London and appealed to the Presbyterian and Puritan leaders for support in America. The leaders agreed to send two missionaries for two years. Makemie returned to America in 1705 with the ministers John Hampton and George McNish, and were united with Jedediah Andrews, John Wilson, Nathaniel Taylor, and Samuel Davis, who were ministers at work in Pennsylvania, Delaware, and Maryland. They were united together to form the Presbytery of Philadelphia. The membership of the Presbytery was evenly divided between Irish and New England Presbyterians, but the Presbytery
was unquestionably led by the Scotch-Irish missionary, Francis Makemie. The organization definitely had a strong Scotch-Irish influence.

George Keith made Philadelphia the center of the religious controversy. He was once a zealous Quaker and converted into an equally zealous Church of England man. In 1692, Keith visited the parish of Makemie on the eastern shore of Virginia and challenged Makemie to a public dispute. Since Keith made Philadelphia the center of religious controversy, it was a strategic position for the Presbytery. After the first meeting of the Presbytery in 1706, Hampton and Makemie traveled to Boston for probably the purpose of speaking to the Puritan leaders, however they stopped in New York City to preach in favor of the Presbyterian Church. They were both arrested for preaching without a license, but only Makemie had to go to trial. He was acquitted on the grounds that he had acted within the Toleration Act, in spite of all this he had to pay the court costs. Sentiment for him was great by Puritans on both sides of the Atlantic. Feelings from this incident lasted so long and were so great that Governor Cornbury of New York was recalled by the home government in 1709.¹

In 1716 the Presbytery of Philadelphia had divided itself into three separate presbyteries with a fourth
being organized in Long Island. These prebyteries
were represented in the first American Synod in 1717.
Church historians say that the Synod was controlled
by twelve members from the total of forty-eight or so.
eleven of these controlling members were Irish and
the twelfth was of unknown origion. During the 1730's,
the zeal for religion had slackened in America. Empty
pews became evident and a need for someone to preach
feverishly grew.

In 1738 a religious transformation was taking place.
Evangelist George Whitefield made seven visits to America,
preaching while traveling up and down the Atlantic coast.
He drew enormous crowds as he preached and dozens of
ministers caught the fever also. In 1745, the Presby-
terian church split, because of the struggle over points
of doctrine, discipline, and practice. The conservative
side which was traditional and believed that man should
seek the church was called the Old Side. Those who
believed in Whitefield's teachings, which consisted of the
teaching of the New Testament and that the church should seek
the man was known as the New Side of New Lights. The
question of the time was "whether the Presbyterian Church
should continue in its accustomed ways or recognize the
fact that America needed new and different ways."²

The College of New Jersey at Princeton was founded by
the New Side Presbyterians in 1746 to train American ministers. The College of New Jersey was in a sense a declaration of independance from Scotland and England. Its purpose was to train its own ministers in American ideas for American parishes, in America. It was modeled after both Harvard and Yale. In 1758 the Old and New Side Presbyterians joined and formed the Synod of New York and Philadelphia. They agreed that they must provide for the needs of all their people. The Presbyterians now were comitted to missionary enterprise through almost all American funds and ministers.

In 1738, the Synod of Philadelphia combined the Presbytery of New Jersey and Presbytery of Long Island, and formed the Presbytery of New York. The Presbytery of New York's most distinguished member was Jonathon Dickinson, who was called by an historian "the ablest man in the American Presbyterian Church in the Colonial period." He was the influence that stopped the church from splitting permanently. He was also one of the men that helped to establish the college of New Jersey and was its first president. Next in importance to Dickinson in structural value was an Irishman named William Tennent. He had married the daughter of a Presbyterian minister who was ejected from Scotland and moved to Ireland. Despite the fact that he married into a Presbyterian family,
he turned to the Established Church. He disagreed with the requirements of the Established Church and sought peace in America. In 1726, he founded the famous Log College in Neshaminy, Bucks County, in eastern Pennsylvania. He taught Greek, Latin theology, and the "arts and sciences."
The historian, Dr. Briggs called him "the Father of Presbyterian Colleges in America." The son of William Tennent, Gilbert was a friend of Whitefield and was also an evangelist. He preached with an everlasting fever, traveling to towns all over New England. Gilbert's brother William, the second son, was also a distinguished Presbyterian minister. He, also an evangelist, traveled to Maryland and Virginia and settled in Freehold. An even younger brother, Charles, was also an eminent minister, who preached on the Eastern shore of Maryland. The Tennent family seems to have given body and soul for the growth of the Presbyterian church in America, with the contribution of five ministers. Dr Briggs claimed that "William Tennent (Sr.) is one of the grandest trophies won by Presbyterianism from the Episcopacy in the first quarter of the eighteenth century."

Lack of ministers' immigration to America caused a serious and immediate setback for every aspect of religion. Ministers were in great demand at the early colonial period. Presbyterianism required that ministers be well
educated, but few of these scholarly ministers wanted the frontier life. A "clergymen who went to America must feel true missionary zeal."³ Before the American schools began to graduate learned ministers, America attracted ministerial supply from Ulster Ireland. The home of the Scotch-Irish and the strong point of the Presbyterian Church. Ulster did not want to send all of its newly ordained ministers to America, but some men prepared for the ministry with the intention of going to America. Through this came a few bad ministers, who endangered the prestige and influence of the Presbyterian Church. In spite of this, the Presbyteries remained firm, and disposed of a few bad influences. The most well known of these cases was Rev. Hemphill, partly because of a famous friend who supported him in his battle with the Presbyterian Church and his friend and supporter was Benjamin Franklin. In 1734 Hemphill arrived in America as a young Presbyterian minister. Franklin described him as a man "who delivered with a good voice, and apparently extempore, most excellent discourses"⁴ that drew large crowds together of different persuasions. Franklin was one of many devoted listeners, who liked the style in the way he preached. The people who considered themselves to be orthodox Presbyterians disapproved of the sermons he gave. Joining them were the older ministers of the congregation who tried to prevent
him from preaching by having him arraigned of heterodoxy before the Synod. Hemphill had such a following that at one point the Synod and Presbytery were the target of a pamphlet warfare. Franklin wrote pamphlets in support of his friend. It was found out that Hemphill had copied his sermon from the publication of another. He admitted to Franklin that none of his sermons were his own and that he could memorize sermons after one reading. Franklin was still very much in support of Hemphill and thought that it was better to copy good sermons, than to preach bad ones, as some of Hemphill's fellow Presbyterian ministers did. Later, it was found that Hemphill had published a few of his sermons in England as his own, with the belief that they would never reach America. After learning of this, many of his followers left him and this led to his downfall. The ecclesiastical court met April 17, 1735 to decide the case of Hemphill. It was determined that his teachings were unsound and dangerous, he was suspended from the Presbyterian Church. The early Presbyterians seemed to be firm in their discipline, as can be noted by the unanimous decision to suspend Hemphill despite his large following. It illustrates "the courage and loyalty of the founders of the Presbyterian Church of the United States."

Around 1718, the Scotch-Irish immigrants who settled at Worcester, Massachusetts, with the Rev. Edward Fitz-
gerald had a heart-breaking confrontation with the congregation of the Congregational Church, that was a setback to Presbyterianism in New England. Shortly after the Scotch-Irish began to erect a building for their worship, one night "the best people in the town" led by the Deacon Daniel Heywood destroyed it. The reasoning was that they did not want to have to support two separate churches when only one was needed. Some of the settlers (Scotch-Irish) went to Sutton to worship, others settled in Londonderry New Hampshire, a stronghold in the Presbyterian Church. Another source says that some settlers went north of Worcester and established a settlement that was incorporated in 1922 as Rutland. After Fitzgerald left, Rev. William Johnston came to Worcester to establish a Presbyterian church. The remaining Scotch-Irish petitioned that the Presbyterians should be free of contributing to the support of the established Congregational Church. It is said to be recorded that "ye Irish petition" was voted down by "a grate majority". Johnston moved to Windham, New Hampshire, in 1742, where he would be greeted warmly. He became the first minister of the town, but the parish was too poor to support him, so he left.

Rev. James McGregor came to Boston in 1718, probably because he had a bad drinking experience with the Ulster synod, that left a blemish on his career. Cotton Mather
wanted to help McGregor find employment and in doing so wrote a recommendation of him as "a person of a very excellent character: and considerably qualified for the work of ye ministry as well for his ministerial abilities as his Christian piety, serious gravity, and as far as we have heard, every way unexceptionable behaviour." The small town of Dracut Massachusetts gave McGregor a trial, after they say the recommendation by Mather. It is rather surprising that it is recorded that McGregor had competed with fifteen other ministers for the position. The Presbyterian minister McGregor had settled as a Congregationalist minister in Dracut. The Scotch-Irish who had crossed the Atlantic with McGregor had settled in Nutfield, New Hampshire, which was also known as Londonderry. The settlement tried to encourage him to come to Londonderry and to become the Presbyterian minister of the new settlement. After Londonderry became a more stabilized community, McGregor left his secure position in Dracut and gave the first religious services in the new community in 1719. One of his sons was named David and became a famous Presbyterian preacher and controversialist. Some of the later Scotch-Irish immigrants who landed in Boston remained in Boston to settle. In 1727, the Rev. John Moorhead came to Boston and established a congregation that was known as the "Church of the Presbyterian strangers." In the early years of the congregation, the services were held in the barn of John Little, a deacon. A building was erected on a tract of
Little's land and later became known as the Federal Street Church. When Moorhead died, David McGregor of Londonderry preached the sermon at his funeral. "From the Londonderry settlement appears to have issued the first New England Presbytery." Constituted in 1729 by McGregor, Fitzgerald, LeMercier, pastor of the Huguenot Church at Boston, and unknown others. In 1736, there was a struggle in the Presbytery over the admission of Rev. James Hillhouse, because he was the pastor of the Congregational church at New London Connecticut, despite the fact that he was a Presbyterian. Only five ministers were present as both Hillhouse and David McGregor were ordained into the Presbytery. At the next meeting of the Presbytery, there was a large attendance that refused to recognize Hillhouse and McGregor. They also suspended Joseph Harvey and John Moorhead for the votes that they had cast in favor of their admission. The effect of this was supposed to break up the Presbytery. John Moorhead, David McGregor, and Robert Abercrombie formed the Boston Presbytery in 1745. These people had been excluded from the New England Presbytery in 1736. By 1768, the Boston Presbytery had grown to twelve members. The original Presbytery of Londonderry seems to have collapsed due to the scattering of its flock as they ventured West. On June 2, 1775, the Boston Presbytery had turned into a Synod. This was due to the fact that it had gained great strength. The Synod was divided into three Presbyteries: Newburyport, Londonderry,
and Palmer. Still the Presbyterian Church did not thrive in
New England.

Milford Connecticut was the scent of another clash between
the Presbyterian and Congregational Churches. In 1741, some
people revolted against the views of the minister in Milford
and formed a Presbyterian congregation. Rev. Samuel Finley
arrived to become the minister of the congregation and was
arrested as a disturber of the public peace and a vagrant, for
preaching to the revolting congregation. He was sentenced to
be transported out of the colony in answer to the offenses. It
seems that the Congregational Church won the battle, but they
lost the war as Finley later became the President at the college
of New Jersey. Many Scotch-Irish joined the Congregational
Church, probably because "the Scotch-Irish became enrolled in
the local Puritan congregation and as such were members of the
church and of the town meeting." 7 However, they did gather for
services when a Presbyterian minister visited the community.
"Thus Scotch-Irish emigration to New England tended rather to
furnish recruits to Congregationalism than to spread Presbyterian-
ism." 8 The same was also true with Presbyterian ministers who
converted to Congregationalism. They had found it too hard to
preach without Presbyteries or Synods and allowed themselves to
be converted.

Shortly after John Witherspoon came to America, in 1768,
he became the recognized leader of American Presbyterianism.
Furthermore, he was the only clergyman to sign the Declaration of Independance, as he was identified with the cause of American Independance. He was also a member of the Continental Congress, being elected to be a representative of New Jersey. He was a famed writer that helped influence the American cause for Independence, on both sides of the Atlantic. Another patriotic leader among the Presbyterian Church was John Rodgers, who was second in influence to Witherspoon for the American cause. He was the pastor of the Wall Street Presbyterian Church of New York and throughout the war he had participated in numerous patriotic activities. George Duffield was another Presbyterian minister who was a leading fighter for the American cause. He was a pastor at the third Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia and was a chaplin of the Continental Congress. The Presbyterians, most notably the Scotch-Irish, were almost 100% in support of the fight for Independance. This followed from the persecution the Church felt from England, especially when the Scotch-Irish lived in Ulster and the Presbyterian Church was denounced by the English Parliment. The Presbytery of Hanover was the first body of clergy that openly supported the cause of freedom and independance of America.

The first steps to nationalize the Presbyterian Church were in 1785 at the meeting of the Synod of New York and Philadelphia. A committee was organized and was headed by Witherspoon "to compile a system of general rules for the government of the
Synod and Presbyteries, 'and the people in their communion'....
A committee was also appointed to consider 'modes of Divine Worship' and were instructed to compose a 'version more suitable to our circumstances and tastes than any we yet have.' In 1786 the number of Presbyteries was increased from twelve to sixteen and they grouped themselves into four Synods. The Synod of 1786 also took steps in preparing a "book of discipline and government...accommodated to the state of the Presbyterian Church in America." "The General Assembly of 1791 proclaimed its desire 'to renew and strengthen every bond of union' between the Congregational and Presbyterian Churches." In 1801, Jonathan Edwards, President of Union College, proposed the "Plan of Union", which was to promote the cooperation of the Congregational and Presbyterian Churches in the West. The plan consisted of four parts: the first part was to "promote mutual forbearance, and a spirit of accommodation" between the churches. The next part was that if a Congregational church settled a Presbyterian minister, they will conduct their own affairs, according to Congregational usage. However, if trouble should arise between the minister and the congregation, it can be either referred to the Presbytery of the minister or to a council of equal members from each church. The third part states the rules for the regulation of a position where a Presbyterian church calls a Congregational minister. In this case, the prevailing element would be the Presbyterian regulations, but if the case was of internal
disagreement between the pastor and congregation, it would be either referred to the church of the minister or settled by a council. The last part provides certain regulations for the direction of churches consisting of both Congregationalists and of Presbyterians.¹¹

Augusta and Rockbridge Counties in the Valley of Virginia claim to be the most Scotch-Irish counties in the present day United States. It is also said that there are more Presbyterians than all the other denominations together. However, the faith of the Scotch-Irish was not represented anywhere in the 1730's in the Valley. In 1730, the Valley was being opened up and the Scotch-Irish moved in, because of three major happenings. The great Valley of Pennsylvania was largely settled and people were moving down into the Maryland upcountry. The second factor was that there was a heavy migration of Scotch-Irish from 1727-1737. The final influence was that Governor William Gooch of Virginia instituted the new land policy for great land tracts for the individual enterprisers. However, the Germans seemed to have been taking over the whole area in the Maryland upcountry and would take over the Valley of Virginia. The second and third major land grants by Gooch brought the great Scotch-Irish movement to the valley. After 1736, the Valley was so Irish that it was called the Irish tract. "The Scotch-Irish have long been famous for their exploits as pioneers of the Appalachian frontier."¹²
The Scotch-Irish also settled heavily in North and South Carolina, but Presbyterianism did not thrive as it did in Virginia and Pennsylvania. The Presbyterian Church required that their ministers be scholarly and of the few learned ministers in the colonial period, few wanted to venture into the frontier. The Baptist ministers were not required to be educated as the Presbyterian ministers were and this was the main reason why it flourished in the frontier, especially in the South. The Methodists followed the example of the Baptists and grew also. As the Baptist and Methodist Churches drew more and more people who thought little of tradition, the Presbyterian Church came nearer to the strict practices of true-blue Calvinism.\textsuperscript{13}

The great Scotch-Irish migration came to America at the start of the 1730's. It brought with it a population of ardent Presbyterians who helped to conquer the frontier. It also brought the Presbyterian Church, the Church growing in centres of Scotch-Irish population. They seemed to renovate the missions ways and appeared to be able frontiers men. The Congregational Church was an opponent of the early Presbyterian Church in America, but later they joined forces to conquer the wilderness and bring the words of God. They will forever be planted in the history of Colonial America for their influence on the fight for independance.
FOOTNOTES


2. Ibid., pg. 280

3. Ibid., pg. 276


5. Ibid. pg. 347

6. Ibid. pg. 345

7. Ibid. pg. 346

8. Ibid. pg. 314


10. Ibid. pg. 39

11. Ibid. pg. 41-42


1. Bolton, Scotch-Irish Pioneers, Boston: Bacon & Brown, 1910
2. A. Mervyn Davies, Presbyterian Heritage, Richmond: John Knox Press, 1965
7. J. Lewis Peyton, History of Augusta County, Staunton: Samuel M. Yost and Son, 1882