

AMERICAN METHODISM TO 1784

A COMPACT HISTORY



AMERICAN METHODISM TO 1784: A COMPACT HISTORY

- I. Today we're going to make some new friends – founders of the Methodist movement in America.
 - a. They are lay and clergy, male and female, educated and uneducated, farmers and sea captains. They are English, Irish, and German.
 - b. Their theological backgrounds are Lutheran, Moravian, Anglican, Mennonite, and English Methodist.
 - c. On previous trips to Savannah, Georgia, and England, as well as in the movie we saw in our first pre-trip lecture, we already met some of these new friends...
 - i. John and Charles Wesley in England, along with their parents, Samuel and Susanna Wesley.
 - ii. George Whitefield who introduced John Wesley to field preaching in Bristol, and then who later became an important part of the First Great Awakening (and whose thumb we are going to see!).
 - iii. Last time, Al told us about the influence of German Pietism on the Wesleys through the Moravians Phillip Spangenberg and Peter Boehler.
 - d. Today we'll meet others, many of whom we'll also encounter on our trip...
 - i. Another German Pietist, William Phillip Otterbein
 - ii. A Mennonite, Martin Boehm
 - iii. Irish Methodist lay preacher, Robert Strawbridge, and his wife Elizabeth
 - iv. Irish Methodists Barbara Heck and her cousin, Philip Embury
 - v. The one-eyed Englishman, Captain Thomas Webb, who along with Barbara Heck and Philip Embury, played a huge role in the founding of

John Street Methodist Church in NYC, in which we will worship our first full day in New York.

History of American Methodism to 1784

- 1735-1766: The Wesleys in America and George Whitefield
- 1767-1775: Methodism Prior to the Revolutionary War
- 1776-1784: From the Revolutionary War to the Ordination of Francis Asbury

- e. I'm going to split today's look at the history of American Methodism into three sections:
 - i. 1735-1766: The Wesleys in America and George Whitefield
 - ii. 1767-1775: Methodism Prior to the Revolutionary War
 - iii. 1776-1784: From the Revolutionary War to the Ordination of Francis Asbury
- f. This is all just a scratching at the surface. There is so much more fascinating material. And this is only to 1784.
 - i. For more, go to our trip web-site at **MethodistHeritageTour.com**

1735-1766: The Wesleys in America and George Whitefield



Charles Wesley



John Wesley

- I. In October, 1735, 32-year old John and 28-year old Charles Wesley left England for America
 - a. They were part of General James Oglethorpe's social experiment in the Georgia colony.
 - b. John would last there roughly 3-years, Charles lasted less than 1-year.
 - c. Their time in America was a horrible experience for both Wesleys.



George Whitefield

- d. In 1738, after John Wesley returned to England – where he would soon have his Aldersgate spiritual awakening experience – George Whitefield followed him as pastor to the Georgia colony.
 - i. Whitefield had been John’s friend from his Oxford days and who would later introduce him to field preaching in Bristol.
 - ii. Now the Georgia colony chaplain, Whitefield soon noticed the large number of orphans in Georgia and the need to build an orphanage to care for them.
 1. The Bethesda orphanage which he eventually built – the oldest charity in America -- is still there just outside Savannah, though today it is a children’s home and not strictly an orphanage.
 - iii. To raise money, Whitefield began accepting invitations to preach at various churches up and down the eastern seaboard.
- II. Whitefield returned to England in 1739 on a fund raising mission for his new orphanage.
 - a. It was on that trip that Whitefield introduced John Wesley to the technique of field preaching.
 - b. He returned to America in 1740, where he continued preaching to raise money for his project.
 - c. Whitefield, a cross-eyes man, was an amazingly good preacher.
 - d. He popularized and legitimated extemporaneous, expressive, open-air preaching.
 - e. He showed the power of itinerant evangelists to stir conversions among diverse peoples and across confessional lines in America. This was new.
 - f. He made theatrical revivalism the prototypical American religious style.
 - i. Which would later be copied by the likes of Charles Grandison Finney, Dwight L. Moody, and eventually, Billy Graham.
 - g. Like his contemporary and acquaintance, Jonathan Edwards, Whitefield was very much a part of what has come to be called The First Great Awakening in America.

- h. He preached staunchly Calvinist theology that was in line with the "moderate Calvinism" of the Anglican Church.
 - i. While explicitly affirming God's sole agency in salvation, Whitefield freely offered the Gospel, saying at the end of his sermons: "Come poor, lost, undone sinner, come just as you are to Christ."
- III. It is not hyperbole to describe George Whitefield as a star celebrity.
 - a. If he lived today, he would be the equivalent of a Billy Graham, and he would appear on the covers of *People* and *Time* magazines and be interviewed on TV's *60 Minutes* and *Good Morning, America*.
 - b. He would be a master of the use of social media in service of the gospel.
- IV. One of my favorite stories is how Whitefield impressed Benjamin Franklin, who describes in his journal the immediate and dramatic effects of Whitefield's preaching on colonists – including Franklin himself – shortly after Whitefield's arrival in 1739.
 - a. While raising money to build that Bethesda orphanage, Whitefield began preaching up and down the eastern seaboard.
 - b. Benjamin Franklin, while agreeing with the need for the orphanage, thought it ought to be built near Philadelphia, and the children brought there – conditions in Georgia being so difficult. When Whitefield refused Franklin's suggestion, ole Ben refused to financially support the project.
 - c. However, in his journal, Franklin records what happened next:

"I happened soon after to attend one of his Sermons, in the Course of which I perceived he intended to finish with a Collection, and I silently resolved he should get nothing from me. I had in my Pocket a Handful of Copper Money, three or four silver Dollars and five Pistoles [Spanish coins] in Gold. As he proceeded I began to soften, and concluded to give the Coppers. Another Stroke of his Oratory made me ashamed of that, and determin'd me to give the Silver; and he finish'd so admirably, that I emptied my Pocket wholly into the Collector's Dish, Gold and all."
 - d. So yes, George Whitefield preached a few Benjamins out of the wallet of Benjamin Franklin!
- V. Let's talk about how it is that we'll get to see George Whitefield's thumb at the museum at Drew University!
 - a. Whitefield died in the parsonage of Old South Presbyterian Church, Newburyport, Massachusetts, on September 30, 1770.
 - i. John Wesley preached a funeral sermon in London, at Whitefield's request.
 - ii. He was buried, according to his wishes, in a crypt under the pulpit of this church.

- iii. There is where the story begins to take a strange turn that leads to our seeing his thumb.
- b. In 1775, when the American colonists in Boston were preparing to battle the British in what would become known as the Battle of Bunker Hill, they thought they could fend off the British if they only had some cannon to mount on top of the opposing hills overlooking Boston.
 - i. They hatched a plan in which Benedict Arnold — yes, THAT Benedict Arnold — and Ethan Allen of Vermont’s “Green Mountain Boys” would travel to Fort Ticonderoga in New York, capture the poorly defended fort (and eventually others as well as they made their way to Quebec), and drag the cannons back to Boston.
 - ii. This they actually did, though they failed to take Quebec.
 - iii. But first, they travelled south from Boston to Newburyport and stopped at the grave of the famous evangelist, opened his grave and for sure took some of his clothes, and perhaps some bone, with them for good luck, or divine favor, or whatever.
- c. Rev. Samuel Spring was the chaplain to the troops of Benedict Arnold. As described in J. T. Headley’s, *The Chaplains and Clergy of the Revolution*, the scene at Whitefield’s tomb unfolded like this:

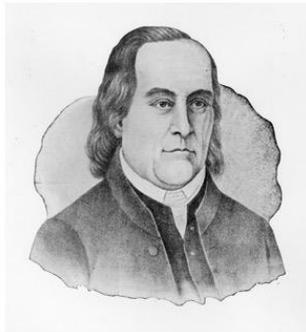
Mr. Spring said, “I preached over the grave of Whitefield. After the service the general officers gathered around me. Some one requested a visit to Whitefield’s tomb. The sexton was hunted up, the key procured, and we descended to his coffin. It had lain in the tomb six years, but was in good preservation. The officers induced the sexton to take off the lid of the coffin. The body had nearly all returned to dust. Some portions of his grave-clothes remained. His collar and wristbands, in the best preservation, were taken and carefully cut in little pieces, and divided among them.” The chaplain, with the haughty Arnold, the chivalrous Morgan, and group of officers, gathered in the dark vault around the tomb of Whitefield, formed a scene worthy of a painter. The clank of steel had a strange sound around the sainted sleeper, while the hallowed atmosphere filled all hearts with solemn awe and reverence.”



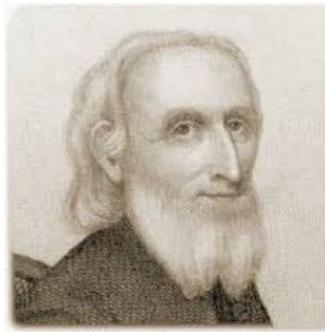
- d. Perhaps it was at this moment that Whitefield’s thumb left his body.

- i. As history records, the colonists DID succeed at the Battle of Bunker Hill. I'm not sure what part Mr. Whitefield's clothes and bones played in that event.
- ii. History doesn't tell us what happened to all the bones the colonists took of Mr. Whitefield's.
- iii. But we do know that the Methodist Center at Drew University today contains what purports to be the dessicated thumb of the famous evangelist.

1767-1775: Methodism Prior to the Revolutionary War



William Philip Otterbein



Martin Boehm

- I. Spontaneous Beginnings: 1760–68
 - a. Last time, Al Hoppe introduced us to German Pietism, which had a huge impact on Methodism, in England via John Wesley, and also in America.
 - b. MEET: William Philip Otterbein and Martin Boehm, two pastors – one German Reformed, one Mennonite – both influenced by German Pietism
 - i. TRIP CONNECTION: We will visit **Old Otterbein Church** in Baltimore, which was once the pulpit of Otterbein. It was also one of the sites where in 1784 the Methodist Episcopal Church was organized as we'll see in a moment.
 - c. William Philip Otterbein: (1726–1813) belonged to a family of pastor-theologians steeped in the German Reformed tradition and the Pietism of their native Herborn, Germany.
 - i. After studying theology and becoming a pastor in 1749, Otterbein responded to a plea for ministers made on behalf of the Pennsylvania (Reformed) synod and became pastor in the important Reformed community of **Lancaster, PA**, in 1752.
 - ii. In 1755 Otterbein experienced “a more perfect consciousness of salvation in Christ” (conversion experience) and redoubled his efforts to

hold himself and his people to a covenanted and disciplined life through prayer and Bible groups.

- d. During one of Otterbein's travels, he attended a "great meeting" at Long's Barn (a UMC Heritage Landmark which we, unfortunately, won't see), near Neffsville in Lancaster County.
 - i. The event, perhaps in 1767, was a several-day gathering, sort of like later camp meetings, which had been common in the colonial German community since the early 1720s.
 - ii. The leader at this event was Martin Boehm, a Mennonite preacher whose evangelistic style, personal religious experience, and insistence on assurance of faith resembled those of Otterbein.
 - iii. After hearing Boehm preach, Otterbein embraced him, announcing, "Wir sind Bruder!" ("We are brothers!")
 - 1. Thus began an association that would eventually lead to the formation of the United Brethren in Christ, one of the predecessor denominations later to form the United Methodist Church in 1967.
 - 2. Otterbein will return to our story later.

- g. Wesleyan Initiatives
 - i. Similar "spontaneous" initiatives at creating faith communities sprung up elsewhere, faith communities that identified themselves with the Wesleyan movement.
 - ii. But as I tell their stories, notice the absence of any official commissioning by John Wesley!
 - 1. This makes the actual beginnings of Methodism tricky to specify, one reason for a long-standing and ongoing-bragging-rights contest between New York and Baltimore Methodists concerning who came first that we may encounter when we're there.



Barbara Heck



Philip Embury

- h. The beginnings of Methodism trace to Barbara Heck and Philip Embury in New York City and Robert and Elizabeth Strawbridge in Frederick County, Maryland, in the mid-1760s
 - i. TRIP CONNECTION: We will visit **John St. UMC** in New York, which was the result of the ministry of Barbara Heck and Philip Embury. And we'll

see the roots of Methodism in Baltimore near where the Strawbridges lived and ministered.

- ii. Try to keep in mind during this story the increasingly brittle political climate between the colonies and Britain.
 - 1. Note that all these early initiatives came from lay people. No clergy were involved at first.
 - 2. Note also how both the New York and the Maryland ventures involved important female as well as male initiatives.
 - 3. Both also drew in black as well as white converts, both expressed the aspiration of immigrants for the order and sense of that Pietism provided, as AI mentioned last time.
- i. Several families of German immigrants, including some who had associated with the Methodists in Ireland, settled in among the New York Lutheran community.
 - i. Among these was a woman named Barbara Ruckle Heck.
 - 1. One day she found members of her family playing cards. She was alarmed because she considered this wasting away precious time.
 - 2. She swept the cards into the fire and implored her cousin, Philip Embury, also a layman and who had been a Methodist class leader and local preacher in Ireland: “Philip, you must preach to us, or shall we all go to hell together, and God will require our blood at your hands!”
 - 3. He complied. Embury preached. Then, in his own room with five others, including two servants, one a Black woman named Betty, Embury formed a Methodist class meeting.
 - 4. Class meetings, in which 8-12 openly shared how it was with their soul, were the backbone of the Methodist movement, both in England and in America.
 - 5. With continued preaching, the members soon outgrew Embury’s room and moved to a ship’s rigging loft.



Robert Strawbridge

Elizabeth Strawbridge

- ii. Shifting our attention south, layman Robert Strawbridge – with his wife, Elizabeth -- is an important Methodist ancestor to know about. He was something of a missionary renegade.

1. A local Methodist preacher before emigrating from Ireland, he began preaching and established, with the help of his wife, Elizabeth, a Methodist class meeting in their home at Sam's Creek in Maryland and subsequently erected a log meeting house there.
2. Elizabeth gained the first convert, John Evans, who became the class leader.
3. Robert Strawbridge itinerated – travelled around, preaching -- in Maryland, both the Eastern and Western Shores, in Virginia, and into Pennsylvania.
4. He established Methodist class meetings that became the nucleus of later societies in Baltimore, Georgetown, Washington, D.C., and Leesburg, VA.
5. Strawbridge, though not ordained, began to baptize as early as 1762/63 and eventually to offer the Lord's Supper, celebrating out of a sense of mission to his new flock and their needs.
 - a. This would later become very controversial to Francis Asbury.
 - b. Strawbridge issued no plea to Wesley to send preachers, to provide for ordinations, or to spread his wing of approval over Strawbridge's efforts.
6. Initially cooperative with Wesley's early missionaries, Strawbridge resisted their efforts to bring him and his circles into conformity, thus showing something of the Irish spirit that he and others built into the foundations of Methodism.



Captain Thomas Webb

- iii. Onto Embury's small Methodist community in New York in 1767 stumbled Captain Thomas Webb.
 1. Webb had seen military service in the colonies during the Seven Years' War (French and Indian War), during which he had lost an eye, married, became barrack master at Albany, returned to England to sell his commission, underwent conversion, gravitated into the Methodist orbit, did some preaching as a local preacher,

- returned to Albany, and there began preaching and conducting meetings.
2. In 1766 he and his wife moved to Jamaica, New York, and he began preaching there.
 - a. He converted two dozen people, over half of them African Americans.
 - b. Wherever he met success, he established Methodist class meetings in true Wesleyan fashion.
 3. Eventually, he came across Philip Embury. Webb encouraged the New York Methodists to buy land on John Street and build a preaching house there. He himself provided the largest donation (thirty pounds) and he raised a comparable amount.
 - a. Thus began the **John Street Methodist Church** in which we will worship the day after our arrival.
 - b. Philip Embury preached a dedication sermon in the church on October 30, 1768 – 247 years before our arrival.
 4. Later, on a fund-raising trip to Philadelphia, Captain Webb encountered another small group, a legacy of George Whitefield's efforts, and organized what would become **St. George's Church**, in which we will also worship.
 - a. Like Otterbein, Boehm, and Strawbridge, Webb itinerated widely to preach and to organize class meetings.
 - b. In addition to his work establishing the John Street and St. George's Churches, his efforts contributed to Methodist beginnings...
 - i. at Albany and Schenectady in NY,
 - ii. on Long Island,
 - iii. in the Philadelphia area (Chester and Bristol),
 - iv. in New Jersey (Trenton, Burlington, and New Mills),
 - v. and in Delaware (Wilmington and New Castle).
 - c. American Methodism owes a lot to Captain Thomas Webb, someone, who before today, you probably never heard of.

1769-1784: From the Revolution to the Ordination of Francis Asbury



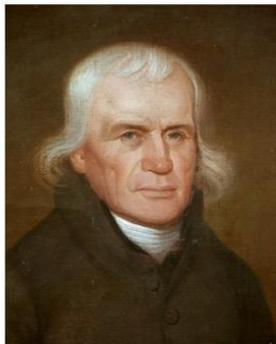
Joseph Pilmore



Richard Boardman

-
- II. So now we see that spontaneously, Methodism was springing up in America without any direct influence of clergy of any kind, or specifically, of John Wesley, from England.
- a. But the new American societies could only go so far without help. Eventually, they cried out to Wesley for that help.
 - b. Wesley eventually became involved by responding to those pleas from the infant Methodist societies in North America.
 - a. Wesley sent over four successive pairs, a total of 8, itinerant Methodist preachers from England. Now, most of these weren't ordained clergy, but they were local preachers riding the Methodist circuits in England and who were hand picked by Mr. Wesley.
 - c. The first to come were Joseph Pilmore and Richard Boardman in 1769.
 - d. Two years later came a young 26-year old named **Francis Asbury** and Richard Wright in 1771.
 - a. Asbury would never return to England again.
 - e. Thomas Rankin and George Shadford came in 1773.
 - f. James Dempster and Martin Rodda in 1774.
 - g. Additionally, some preachers came on their own including John King, Joseph Yearbry, and William Glendenning.
 - h. Wesley's itinerants came to bring order to the young Methodist societies which had been birthed by Pietist ferment and enthusiasm.
 - a. Landing on October 22, 1769, Pilmore encountered Captain Webb, "a real Methodist," he called him in his journal, and discovered the Philadelphia society.
 - b. He and Boardman began to bring order by implementing "the Wesleyan system" ...
 - i. preaching in the open air,
 - ii. itinerating on a planned basis,
 - iii. inviting into connection with other Methodists all of any confession who would "flee the wrath to come,"
 - iv. admitting those who responded as probationary members,
 - v. organizing class meetings,
 - vi. holding love feasts,

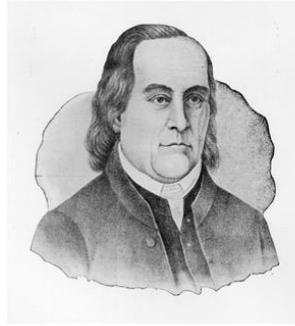
- vii. establishing circuits, or, groups of societies served by one preacher
- viii. cultivating good relations with the churches and their clergy,
- ix. discerning those who could serve in leadership— steward, class leader, exhorter, local preacher— and appointing them to these key local posts.
- c. In late November, 1769, Pilmore cooperating with Captain Thomas Webb, acquired a shell of a building from the “Dutch Presbyterians” (German Reformed), and **St. George’s Church in Philadelphia** was born.
- i. Wesley’s appointees faced three large challenges.
 - a. The *ecclesiastical* challenge was how to stay within the Church of England and, in general, how to sustain the Methodist commitment, as Pilmore explained it, not “to make divisions ... or promote a Schism but to gather together in one the people of God that are scattered abroad, and revive spiritual religion.”
 - b. A *theological* challenge, how to advance Methodist doctrines, particularly those of free grace and free will, in a context where “rigid predestinarians” (Puritans) took pains to keep their families and servants from hearing the Methodist gospel.
 - c. The third, a *social* challenge, was how to negotiate the social and class structure of American society and especially to make space among the Methodists and in a slaveholding context for the many “poor Affricans” (sic) who proved “obedient to the faith.”
 - d. Thus, Pilmore established the leadership imperatives:
 - i. sustain Wesley’s commitment to remain within the Church of England;
 - ii. do theological battle with the Calvinists;
 - iii. build a biracial fellowship



Francis Asbury

III. Responding to a plea from John Wesley to help the Methodist brethren in America, Francis Asbury set out from Bristol, England, in 1771.

- a. A young, 26-year old man, he had responded to the preaching of a Methodist circuit rider and became a local preacher himself.
 - i. When he left Bristol in the fall of 1771, he never saw his homeland or his parents ever again.
- b. When he arrived in America with Richard Wright, Francis Asbury judged as defective the order that Boardman and Pilmore had achieved.
 - i. The societies in New York and Philadelphia did not sufficiently heed Methodist discipline, he believed. By that he meant particularly that the class meetings did not operate according to good Wesleyan order.
 - ii. And Boardman and Pilmore did not sufficiently heed the Methodist preacher's self-discipline— itinerancy.
 - 1. They were content "to be shut up in the cities" Asbury wrote.
 - 2. Asbury exclaimed, "I have not yet the thing which I seek— a circulation of preachers, to avoid partiality and popularity."
 - 3. In response, the early leaders spread themselves out among the colonies and began to itinerate.
- c. Asbury modeled itinerancy, establishing an effective continental strategy. He travelled all over what was then America.
 - i. Travelling by horseback, in all sorts of weather, he was continually in bad health. But on he rode. Preaching and organizing.
- d. From the start – despite being British -- Asbury also exhibited a remarkable capacity to understand the North American situation, to connect with its people, to speak its language, and to adapt as the unfolding political crisis brought revolution.
 - i. Under the Methodists like Asbury, good order AND liberty belonged together.
- e. In December 1772, exercising his role as assistant, Asbury convened a quarterly meeting - the body in the Wesleyan system charged with oversight of a circuit - the first for which records remain.
 - i. One of the tensions the conference dealt with was the issue of sacramental authority:
 - 1. Would the inertias of Methodism's spontaneous beginnings or the imperatives of Wesleyan order prevail?
 - 2. Should the Robert Strawbridge's, the planters of American Methodism, set policy, ordain themselves, and carry sacramental authority?
 - 3. Or should the Wesleyan principle of not separating, so zealously preached by Pilmore, prevail?
 - 4. For now, Strawbridge resolved to quit serving Communion, but the issue would not go away.
 - ii. Thus was established the importance of conferencing, a Methodist tradition that remains to this day.



William Philip Otterbein

- f. Tensions and Controversies as Revolution Looms
 - i. In May, 1774, William Phillip Otterbein relocated from Pennsylvania to Baltimore to become pastor of its German Reformed Church (**Old Otterbein church**, which we will visit).
 - ii. Both Otterbein's and Asbury's movements continued association with their respective "mother" churches – one in Germany, and one, of course, in England -- and experienced disruptions during the Revolution.
 - iii. They would become good friends and Otterbein will once again, return to our story later.

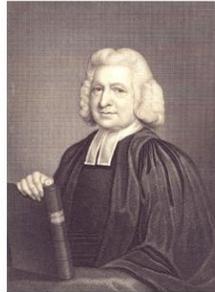


Thomas Rankin

- g. Thomas Rankin, who had arrived with George Shadord in the third wave of Wesley's preachers, was originally appointed by Wesley as America's superintendent.
 - i. He sought to bring order and unity, but ironically he also sowed discord.
 - ii. This was a consequence of Rankin rankling the Americans by their having British leadership in a colonial society riven with crisis over that exact point— British control. Remember, this is the mid-1770s.
 - iii. And Rankin proved unusually adept at inviting Americans to view Methodists as Tories.

1. He spoke out frequently and publicly in criticism of colonial self-indulgence, pride, and ingratitude and warning Americans of divine judgment.
 2. He also offended colonists, including members of the Provincial Congress (in Philadelphia in 1776), by speaking of the hypocrisy of slaveholders raising the banner of liberty.
 - a. What “a farce it was,” he noted, “for them to contend for liberty, when they themselves, kept some hundreds of thousands of poor blacks in most cruel bondage.”
 - b. Many confessed it was true, but it was not now the time to set them at liberty.
- iv. Was Methodism part of the feared Anglican plot to impose an episcopate on the colonies? Was it a friend or foe to the colonial cause and American liberties? These questions were very much on everyone’s mind.
- v. Just as Thomas Rankin’s stay in America would turn out to be short-lived, soon to be replaced by the leadership of Francis Asbury, so the period of English (i.e., Wesley’s) control over American Methodism was also brief.
1. At the second annual conference in 1774 well over half the appointments went to colonists vs. British preachers.
 2. Boardman and Pilmore had, by now, returned to England.
 3. In early 1775, John and Charles Wesley wrote Rankin and “all the preachers” counseling neutrality, peacemaking, love to all parties and silence (politically) and “full union with each other”.
 4. The third annual conference heeding Wesley’s advice met in May 1775 in Philadelphia, **the very time and place of the Second Continental Congress.**
 - a. The Methodist conference declared a “general fast for the prosperity of the work, and for the peace of America, on Tuesday the 18th of July” at the very time the engine of public opinion was gearing up for independence from Britain.
- vi. Unfortunately Wesley did not heed his own counsel.
1. He issued in 1775 the first of several publications on the American situation, *A Calm Address to Our American Colonies*, a Tory tract largely extracted from Samuel Johnson’s *Taxation No Tyranny*.
 2. This publication led many in America to view Methodism as a Tory movement.
- h. Despite that public impression, Methodists could be found along the complete spectrum of opinions on the Revolution.
- i. Francis Asbury, the consummate centrist and the man who would eventually get a statue built in his honor unveiled by a President in Washington, D.C., in March 1778 went into hiding at Thomas White’s home in Delaware because the heat from the flames of war had become too intense.

- ii. The Tory image of Methodism, brought hardship, suffering, beatings, and imprisonment on many, including especially leaders, whose loyalties belonged either to the patriot cause or to kingdoms quite beyond this world.
 - 1. Philip Gatch was tarred and threatened with whipping.
 - 2. Caleb Pedicord bore whipping scars to his grave.
 - 3. Samuel Spragg escaped a mob.
- j. By the start of the war in 1775, all the British Methodist preachers had fled, one-by-one, back to England – Pilmore, Boardman, Rankin, Shadford, Dempster, Rodda, and all the rest – all except Francis Asbury (but he was in hiding).
 - iii. Guidance from Wesley, tinged as it was with war-related overtones, was problematic.
 - iv. Were they on their own as a church? Should they begin ordinations and assume sacramental authority? This was a very hot topic!



Charles Wesley



John Wesley

- i. Peace comes and brings new challenges to the Methodists
 - i. The signing of the Peace of Paris in 1783 and recognition of the United States of America prompted action from Mr. Wesley on behalf of the American Methodists.
 - 1. Wesley gradually came to see his stature as a scriptural bishop, of his right to ordain.
 - a. He had exhausted the obvious— Robert Lowth, bishop of London, responsible for the religious order of the colonies, rebuffed requests for regular ordinations.
 - b. Wesley put to work on the case his new assistant and troubleshooter, Dr. Thomas Coke, who had earned a law degree and taken clergy orders in the Church of England before affiliating with the Methodists.
 - j. On September 1 and 2, 1784, despite opposition from virtually all others in his inner circle of counselors and **without his brother Charles' knowledge**, John Wesley ordained Richard Whatcoat and Thomas Vasey as deacons, the following day as elders, and Rev. Dr. Thomas Coke as a "Superintendent."

- i. When Charles found out that his brother had ordained people, because John was not a bishop, Charles was appalled, shocked, and deeply hurt by his brother's lack of candor.
 - 1. Charles responded by applying his art as a hymn writer, penning a hymn which is NOT in our hymnal...

So easily are Bishops made
 By man's, or woman's whim?
 W_____ his hands on C_____ hath laid,
 But who laid hands on him?

Hands on himself he laid, and took
 An Apostolic Chair:
 And then ordained his Creature C_____
 His Heir and Successor.

Episcopalians, now no more
 With Presbyterians fight,
 But give your needless Contest o're
 'Whose Ordination's right?'

It matter not, if Both are One,
 Or different in degree,
 For lo! ye see contain'd in John
 The whole Presbytery!



Thomas Coke

- j. Provisioning an American Church
 - i. So, in 1784, the now Rev.'s Whatcoat, Vasey, and Supt. Coke set sail for the United States of America.
 - ii. Wesley did not send Coke empty-handed.
 - 1. In a letter to his American brethren, Wesley announced that he had "drawn up a little Sketch" for a new church order, appointed "Dr. Coke and Mr. Francis Asbury (not yet ordained), to be joint

- Superintendents over our Brethren in North America,” and drafted a liturgy for the new church.
2. He then exhorted American Methodists to be “at full liberty, simply to follow the Scriptures and the Primitive Church.”
 3. He sent as provisions revisions or analogues of documents which constituted his beloved Church of England.
 - a. In his “liturgy,” The Sunday Service for the Methodists in North America, in which Wesley revised the Book of Common Prayer (BCP)
 - b. He reduced the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion of the Anglican Church to twenty-four
 - c. Provided a Psalter, A Collection of Psalms and Hymns for the Lord’s Day
 - d. His book, *Sermons and Notes*, served as the doctrinal boundary-setting tradition of the Anglican *Book of Homilies*
 - e. A revised book called the “Large Minutes,” became the Discipline and held all these church-defining documents together
- iii. When Coke arrived, he met Francis Asbury for the first time at a quarterly conference in Nov, 1784, at **Barratt’s Chapel, Delaware** (which we will see).
1. Coke doubtless expected simply to announce the new order and ordain Asbury into it. At most, Asbury was “respectfully to be consulted in respect to every part of the execution of it.”
 2. However, Asbury countered with precedent-setting gestures that revealed he did not intend to hand over leadership of the new church to Wesley’s Dr. Coke.
 3. Asbury said that if all the Methodist preachers in conference ELECTED him superintendent, then he would serve. This was unprecedented, but completely in keeping with the spirit of the new nation, which the British-born Asbury understood so well.
 4. In a further presumption of authority and notwithstanding Coke’s credentials and sole title then as superintendent, Asbury sent Coke on a thousand-mile circuit with celebrated black preacher, Harry Hoosier to call the preachers to conference.



- k. The Christmas Conference (December, 1784)
- i. In December of 1784, a preachers-only assembly, known as the Christmas Conference, met at Lovely Lane Chapel and Otterbein's new brick church in Baltimore. (TRIP CONNECTION: We'll see both of these, or at least the site of the Lovely Lane Chapel which no longer exists, unfortunately.)
 - ii. "We were in great haste, and did much business in a little time," Asbury explained, entering into his Journal for December 24th.
 - iii. "We then rode to Baltimore, where we met a few preachers: it was agreed to form ourselves into an Episcopal (meaning, having bishops) Church, and to have superintendents, elders, and deacons. When the conference was seated, Dr. Coke and myself were unanimously elected to the superintendency of the Church, and my ordination followed, after being previously ordained deacon and elder."
 - iv. Thus, Asbury was ordained by Rev. Thomas Coke as deacon one day, then elder the next, and then "superintendent."
 1. At Asbury's request, William Philip Otterbein – who has been part of our story so many times already -- participated in the laying on of hands for the episcopal ordination.
 - v. So even as early as 1784, Methodists anticipated the American religious future by...
 1. embracing disestablishment,
 2. offering a denominational ordering of religion,
 3. achieving autonomy from European headquarters,
 4. institutionalizing voluntarism.
 - vi. The Christmas Conference indeed made or confirmed a number of denomination-shaping decisions.
 1. It accepted John Wesley's plan for the church, in principle if not in every detail, including ...
 - a. his prepared liturgy,
 - b. hymnbook,

- c. and revised Articles of Religion.
2. It explicitly conceded final authority to Wesley: “During the life of Rev. Mr. Wesley, we acknowledge ourselves his Sons in the Gospel, ready in Matters belonging to Church-Government, to obey his Commands,” a rubric that interestingly, would soon be struck out.
 3. On the other hand...
 - a. It chose to make decisions by debate and majority rule, thereby claiming the prerogative to approve, alter, add to, and subtract from what had been Wesley’s document (the “Large Minutes”).
 - b. It added to the Articles of Religion a rubric on U. S. political autonomy and
 - c. It removed the phrase “descent into hell” from the Apostles Creed. The reason why is the subject of one of my blog posts which you can read at our trip web-site.
 - d. It followed Anglican, Catholic, and ancient precedent in adopting a threefold ministry of superintendents (bishops), elders, and deacons, proclaiming the new church to be episcopal and naming it “Methodist Episcopal.”
 - e. Balancing its deferential acknowledgment of Wesley’s authority, it provided for election of superintendents by and for their accountability to the conference.
 - f. It selected elders (thirteen or so) and by charging them with supervisory as well as sacramental roles created the office of presiding elder (today’s district superintendent).
 - g. It prohibited “Ministers or Travelling-Preachers” from drinking “spirituous Liquors,” a sentiment that would remain in our Book of Discipline for a long time.
 - h. It legislated courageously and extensively against slavery, mandating that all Methodists, laity as well as preachers, emancipate their slaves.
 - i. But it also provided for white oversight of African American gatherings.
 - i. It embraced a proposal for a college and naming it for the two superintendents (Cokesbury College in Abingdon, MD)
 - i. And thereby carried on Wesley’s priority on education which continues among Methodists to this day as can be seen in Chapelwood’s wholehearted participation in SBISD’s T-2-4 initiative.
 - j. It set a common salary for all the preachers at twenty-four pounds per year.

- k. It approved missionaries for Nova Scotia (Freeborn Garrettson and James Cromwell).
- l. And it recast Wesley's connectional mission statement in terms apt for the new nation and the yawning American continent. "God's Design, in raising up the Preachers called Methodists," the Discipline said, was "To reform the Continent, and spread scriptural Holiness over these Lands."