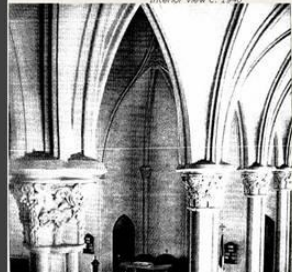


ASBURY IN THE COLONIES



According to his journal, Asbury finally preached in current day Westchester County at New Rochelle on December 10th 1771. Passing through Mamaroneck on the way to Rye, it was the first time he preached in the area.

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Mamaroneck United Methodist Church – An Historical Overview

The Journey Begins

(1769 - 1813)

Francis Asbury

To write the history of the Mamaroneck United Methodist Church, one can only begin with the story of the Methodist itinerant preacher whose sermons in December of 1771 inspired the beginning of eight churches in southern Westchester County.

Francis Asbury, often referred to as the "Prophet of the Long Road," is said to have ridden nearly 350,000 miles on horseback in the American colonies, preaching the Good News of Jesus Christ and the social holiness practice of Methodism. Asbury literally preached on the frontier as it moved westward, starting hundreds of Methodist societies and converting thousands of people to the Christian life.

The story of American Methodism began at the Bristol conference led by John Wesley, who only wished to bring renewal to the Church of England in the last half of the **18th** century. At this conference, the minutes of the meeting for Tuesday, August 17 show that John Wesley asks: "Our Brethren in America call aloud for help. Who are to go over and help them?" The answer recorded says that five were willing; the two appointed were Francis Asbury and Richard Wright. Thus in a few terse words, we

In 1831, Alexis de Tocqueville, a young French Aristocrat, spent nine months on a quest to understand the American democratic government. He *traveled* throughout the young country, conducting personal interviews. His trek brought him to several areas where pioneers were clearing the land to build homes and plant vegetables. In Michigan, he was told "almost every summer ... some Methodist preachers would come to make a tour of the new settlements. The noise of their arrival spreads with unbelievable rapidity from cabin to cabin: it is great news of the day." In the Ohio valley he *was* informed, "The sect of *Methodists prevails* in all the Mississippi and Ohio *Valley*." And in Alabama, "The Methodist sect dominates."

know that John Wesley approved Asbury's willingness and sent him on a mission that was to change a nation and the course of the Methodist movement.

It was on **September 4th, 1771**, that Francis Asbury set sail from Pill in the Bristol Channel and turned his back forever on one country, that he might, without reservation, give himself to the Colonies. Asbury had no money, but friends gave him some clothing and ten pounds in cash. It seems that he even broke off a romance to a Miss Nancy Brooks as he departed from England.

What sort of person was he? His parents, **Elizabeth** and **Joseph Asbury**, opened their small home at West Bromwich to traveling preachers, and the parents' religious experience was deepened by the death of a small daughter, their only other child. We are told that **Francis Asbury** was so apt a pupil that he was able to read the entire Bible by age seven.

Asbury had to leave *school* at a young age and was apprenticed at thirteen and a half to the Old Forge, which was owned by a Methodist named Foxall. Asbury at once became an intimate friend of **Henry Foxall**, the son, who later became a local Methodist preacher and a rich iron merchant in America. Asbury was converted to Methodism after entering the blacksmith apprenticeship. He attended a Methodist meeting at where a large Methodist Society developed in spite of bitter persecution. He was greatly impressed by the singing and the spontaneity of the service and soon became an and leader within this society. At the age of eighteen he became a local preacher.

In **1766** he left the Forge and took the place of an ailing itinerant preacher in and Gloucestershire for nine months. The following year, he entered the Methodist conference of itinerant preachers on a trial basis and became a traveling preacher in Bedfordshire and Wiltshire. In **1768**, he was admitted to the ministry and appointed first to Colchester, then Bedfordshire, and in **1770** he traveled the Wiltshire circuit. There is written evidence that he was held in high esteem by the people he served.

Following the example of John Wesley, **Asbury** began writing his famous journal on shipboard as he came to the colonies. "Whither am I going?" he wrote, "To the New World. What to do? To gain honor? No, if I know my own heart. To get money? No: I am going to live to God, and to bring others so to do." It was a rugged fifty-three

days' voyage across the Atlantic and Asbury preached almost daily to the ship's crew. He landed at Philadelphia on **October 27, 1771**, and on the following day he preached his first sermon in America at St. George's Church, which is still an Methodist congregation today.

The first preachers to come to America, **Joseph Pilmoor** and **Richard Boardman** arrived in **1769**, but were intimidated by the great hinterland of the American Continent. They preferred to settle in such main centers as New York and Philadelphia. Asbury was the visionary who realized this would be the death knell of the young Methodist movement. Asbury had been in the country only three weeks, but perceiving this predicament, he wrote: "My brethren seem unwilling to leave the cities, but I think I will show them the way." He desired a "Circulation of preachers, to prevent partiality and popularity. I am dissatisfied," he declared. "I judge we are to be shut up in the cities this winter....I am in trouble and more trouble is at hand, for I am determined to take a stand....". Consequently, this stubbornness led to his becoming the first of that great army of circuit-riders who evangelized America from the east coast to the west.

"Where are you from, Stranger?" was asked of Asbury. He said, "from Boston, New York, Philadelphia, or almost any place you please."

Asbury began his own "circulation," moving north of New York City to the wilds of Westchester (which today is the Westchester section of the Bronx) on the **23rd of November** to preach at village taverns and homes to which he was invited. He created quite a stir at the John Street congregation in New York City, which is the oldest consistently active congregation in the United States. He confronted **Pilmoor** and **Boardman** about their shortsightedness in not moving Methodism beyond the city. This confrontation created wounds that would last a lifetime. However, **Asbury** not only talked the talk, but lived it, as he mounted a horse and began his traveling and preaching, which would last until his death in **1816**.

It wasn't until December 17th that Asbury's journal entry reads:

"The next day I preached at Mamaroneck, to a company of people who at first took but little notice of the worship of God; but I

ASBURY IN THE COLONIES



Asbury on his journey

A ccording to his journal, Asbury finally preached in current day Westchester County at New Rochelle on December 10th 1771. Passing through Mamaroneck on the Post Road three times to preach at Rye, it wasn't until December

trust some of them felt of truth in their hearts."

Asbury continued to labor in America under the superintendency of **Thomas Rankin**, who had been sent by **John Wesley** and appointed to the conference of preachers in **July of 1773** to sustain and develop the work. In these early years in which **Asbury** and **Rankin** labored in America they were conscious of the unsettled state of the people and rumblings of the war that was soon to break out. John Wesley himself realized that the war with the Colonists was bound to come. All his energies were expended in an attempt to prevent war. He wrote to the preachers in America and urged them to control their tempers, to be moderate in their preaching, and to strive to be the friends of all.

When the Revolutionary war broke out in **1775**, John Wesley deemed it essential to support the cause of the Crown. Wesley wrote a number of dissertations in support of the King and one such pamphlet presented a vindication of the legal right of England to claim the Colonies, and it argued that while America remained under the sovereignty of England, the Colonists must submit to taxation.

It can be imagined that his stance made Methodism very unpopular in the New World. Under these circumstances **Rankin** returned home. It was only **Francis Asbury** who remained to provide a bridge between the Methodism of the New World and the Old. He gave every evidence that his lot was cast with the Americans and that their cause was his own. Asbury inherited the prestige and influence of Wesley in this New World. But, for a time, even he had to tread warily. In **1778**, he was confined within the house of a friendly sympathizer, **Judge Thomas White** in Dover, Delaware. For about twenty months Asbury traveled little. Once he was able to travel again he moved about freely, going far further than most people would go.

The Denomination is Born

The Revolution stimulated the desire of the American Methodists to perform baptism and communion. Previously, the Methodist Societies were faith support groups, while the sacraments were received in the Church of England or other churches. This tension continued for years after the Revolution. Finally, in **1784**, **John Wesley** finally agreed to allow the Methodists in America to become a separate

denomination, and he sent **Thomas Coke** as General Superintendent. The Americans interpreted the commission of Wesley to Coke to mean that he would be Bishop.

Thomas Coke came in time for the Christmas Conference of **1784** at the Lovely Lane Chapel in Baltimore, Maryland, a landmark in the history of American Methodism. It was here with the democratic consent of the preachers in America that Asbury was ordained by Coke. Two days later, with the help of Philip Otterbein, a German minister representing the United Brethren (a denomination that merged with the Methodists in **1968** to create the United Methodist Church,) Coke consecrated Asbury as General Superintendent and Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church of America.