



New Castle Presbytery History The First 100 Years

Presbyterianism was a part of the fabric of our nation 136 years before the 1776 birth-of-this-nation.

The first Presbyterian meeting houses were erected on Eastern Long Island beginning in **1640**. As early as **1672** homes of Presbyterians in the present Maryland counties of Somerset, Wicomico and Worcester were meeting places for church services.

In **1683** the Reverend Mr. Francis Makemie began planning for the beginning of the first Presbytery in the United States. In late **1705** or early **1706** the first Presbytery was formed. Makemie, together with six other ministers, met in Philadelphia and bound themselves together in a new governing body known simply as "The Presbytery." Of these seven men, five were then laboring within the bounds of what is now New Castle Presbytery.

The Presbytery was pleased with the rapid growth of Presbyterian membership but did occasionally have a bit of trouble regarding attendance at meetings of The Presbytery. In **1709** The Presbytery ordered, That no members of this Presbytery, upon any whatever pretense, do depart or leave the Presbytery, without the meeting be broken up, or at least leave be asked and had from the Presbytery.

By **1716** there were four Presbyteries New Castle, New York, Philadelphia and Snow Hill (the former Snow Hill Presbytery, which never held a meeting, is now within the bounds of New Castle Presbytery) and in **1717** those four Presbyteries united to form a Synod - the Synod of Philadelphia.

New Castle Presbytery held its first meeting on March 13, **1717** in New Castle, Delaware. Within the bounds of New Castle Presbytery congregations began to be organized as early as the one in **New Castle, Delaware, in 1654**. The English were settling there and John Wilson was called as the first pastor. It is the oldest church in Delaware and was a member of the first Presbytery which was organized there.

As the Presbyterian Church in New Castle grew in strength some of its neighbors from other denominations did not always celebrate their success. In **1708**, Colonel Robert Quarry, an Episcopalian, complained that A Makemie...by his subscriptions from persons in England and those he hath influenced here, has built an Extraordinary good Meeting House in this Town, with a considerable allowance to their Minister.

In **1671**, a wooden building was home for the first Presbyterian church at Old Drawyers near Odessa, Delaware, although the Old Drawyers Church was not formally organized until **1683**. The present building was built in **1861** and the congregation was dissolved in **1953**.

The Rev. Mr. Francis Makemie played a major role in the early years of Presbyterianism in the American colonies, not merely by organizing and moderating the first presbytery meeting in this nation, but especially by working to establish and strengthen Presbyterian congregations in Maryland, Virginia and Delaware. The inscription on the Makemie monument, located near Temperanceville, Virginia, mentions that Francis Makemie was born in Ramelton, County Donegal, Ireland, **1658(?)**, was educated at Glasgow University, Scotland, and came as an ordained Evangelist to the American Colonies in **1683** at the request of Col. William Stevens of Rehobeth, Maryland. For more than three centuries pastors who served congregations founded by Makemie met frequently to support each other

in their work. These lively meetings continue today and there are other special gatherings of laypersons and pastors of those congregations who meet to celebrate and strengthen their Makemie heritage.

Rehoboth Presbyterian Church in Rehoboth, Maryland, was established in **1683** and the Rev. Mr. William Traile was the first full-time pastor there in **1702**. In **1706** a meeting house, a small log structure, located along the edge of the Pocomoke River, was built by Francis Makemie on his own land, land given to him by Colonel Stevens. That building, undergoing a number of significant changes and alternations, has been in continuous use since that time.

Colonel Stevens also owned land at the newly formed settlement of Snow Hill, Maryland. The church there got underway in **1683** and was organized in **1684**. Samuel Davis was the first pastor. A meeting house was built in **1690**. The fourth meeting house and current place of worship for the Makemie Memorial Presbyterian Church was erected in **1889**. Manokin Church in Princess Anne, Maryland, can trace its history back to **1672** when a pastor was called to preach in a home at Manokin. As early as **1680** Presbyterians had a meeting house in Princess Anne on the same site as the present church building. In **1683** Francis Makemie founded a congregation at the head of the Manokin River and those persons became the nucleus of the **Manokin** Church. Some historical sources give the date of the official organization of the church as **1683** while other sources cite the date of **1686** when Thomas Wilson began his service as Manokin's first pastor. In **1765** the brick building which currently houses the congregation was erected.

The **Wicomico** Church in Salisbury, Maryland, has been a continuous congregation since **1683** and permission for Presbyterians to worship was granted in **1672** by the Somerset Court. Wicomico had a "settled" pastor by **1706**. It was a member of the first Presbytery having George McNish as minister. The present building was erected in **1854** on its fifth site. During this same era **Buckingham** Presbyterian Church in Berlin, Maryland, was taking root. Makemie preached to the residents in that area and a meeting house was built on the Buckingham Plantation.

Two other **Makemie** congregations, now yoked in **Pocomoke City**, Maryland, are **Beaver Dam** Presbyterian Church and **Pitts Creek** Presbyterian Church. The fore bearers of the current congregations made an effort to build a meeting house out of logs near a ferry site on the Pocomoke River. Some local residents not friendly to Presbyterians threw the logs from their first building effort into the river. These determined Presbyterians persisted, retrieved the logs from the river, and rebuilt the meeting house. In 1735 the Presbyterians moved five miles south to the head of **Pitts Creek**, a short distance from Virginia which recognized only the Church of England. **Beaver Dam** Presbyterian Church gave nearby persons in Virginia an opportunity to exercise their freedom in choosing a religion. The Pitts Creek Presbyterian Church was a missionary outgrowth of the Beaver Dam church and its current sanctuary was built in 1845.

It is believed that Presbyterian worship services were first held in **Lewes**, Delaware in **1692**.

A meeting house was built in **1707** and that building was replaced in **1727**. The present building, which has undergone several renovations, was built in **1832**. In the early days copper tokens were used in the Lewes church to indicate that members were eligible to participate in communion

Head of Christiana in Newark, Delaware, was chartered in **1708** as a congregation of New Castle Presbytery. Head of Christiana was a strong Scotch-Irish congregation. A log structure built in 1708 was replaced by a brick meeting house in **1750**, the second brick church building in the Presbytery. The **Pencader** Welsh Tract, of Welsh origin about **1710**, was a church that was used as a hospital for British soldiers after the battle of Cooches Bridge. The first President of Princeton College, Rev. Samuel Davies, came from this church. Welsh was spoken during worship in this congregation until 1776. **St. Georges** Presbyterian Church in St. Georges, Delaware was formed between **1710** and **1715**. It was a Scots/Irish settlement. The congregation was dissolved in 1984 and building is now owned and operated by the town.

By 1711, the greatest number of people in **Dover**, Delaware were Presbyterian but the Church of England opposed the establishment of a Presbyterian Church. In spite of that opposition, the Presbyterian Church in Dover came into being in **1714**. In 1740, its first meeting house, built of logs, was erected. **Lower Brandywine Church**, established in **1720**, was formed from the Birmingham Meeting of Friends for the benefit of their Presbyterian friends. The site that the congregation now occupies in Centerville, Delaware, was selected in 1774. It was here, for the first time in the history of The Presbytery and New Castle Presbytery, that the Presbytery was entertained without the use of alcoholic spirits. **Rock** Presbyterian Church in Fair Hill, Maryland, had its beginnings in the Spring of **1720**. The church was located near the Octarora River and the original name of the congregation was Mouth of Octarora. A group of Irish people petitioned New Castle Presbytery to send a minister to them. By **1724** they had a full time minister. The present church building was erected in **1761**.

Red Clay Creek Presbyterian Church in Wilmington, Delaware, was organized in **1722** and its first building was constructed in 1761. Minister William McKennan was the pastor there and shared his ministry with First Presbyterian Church of Wilmington, Delaware. The **White Clay Creek** Presbyterian Church of Newark, Delaware had a meeting house as early as **1723**. In that year Presbytery met at the White Clay Creek Church and suspended the pastor for profaning the Lord's Day by washing himself in a creek. In 1739 George Whitefield preached to over 8,000 persons at this church's site.

Coolspring in Harbeson, Delaware, built its building in 1789, but started meeting for worship in **1728**. The church in Elkton, Maryland, was organized in **1733**. **First** Presbyterian Church, Wilmington, Delaware was organized in **1737**. The original church building was constructed in 1740. This building was used as a hospital during the Revolutionary War. The building was moved by the Colonial Dames to its current site along the Brandywine River. First Church merged in 1920 with **Central Church** to form First and Central Presbyterian Church on Rodney Square, in Wilmington, Delaware.

When Presbyterians began to worship in the village at Christiana Bridge in **1732**, a river port there was just coming into being. **Christiana** Presbyterian Church in Christiana, Delaware, built its first meeting house in **1738** on land donated by Colonel John Read, the father of George Reed, a Delaware signer of the Declaration of Independence. The Synod of Philadelphia agreed to establish a school for those planning to go into the ministry and Newark Academy in New London, Pennsylvania, was started in **1741** by the Rev. Mr. Francis Allison. In 1745 the school moved to Elkton, Maryland, and then, in 1769, to Newark, Delaware. This was the beginning of the **University of Delaware**. Dr. John McKinly, the first President of the University of Delaware and a member of the First Presbyterian Church in Wilmington, paid the salaries of the teachers in the school and sponsored many students in their education there. Worship services were held at **West Nottingham** Church in Colora, Maryland, as early as **1724** and in 1774 that congregation became a part of New Castle Presbytery.

At a meeting of the Synod of Philadelphia in 1735 an overture was presented by four ministers of New Castle Presbytery desiring that they might be set off from New Castle Presbytery and erected into a Presbytery of themselves. The Synod voted that they become a Presbytery under the name of the Presbytery of Lewistown, and do order them to meet and constitute the 19th day of November next, at Lewis-Town. Lewis-Town Presbytery was not strong enough to survive and rejoined New Castle Presbytery in 1742. But a very serious division was on the immediate horizon, a division emanating from a disagreement about the required education for Ministers of the Word and Sacrament, a disagreement which would divide the Synod and a disagreement which would lead to the creation of two presbyteries named New Castle.

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