

# Church History One Of Struggle In S.C.

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South Carolina was a royal colony before the American Revolution.

By law, all royal colonies supported the Episcopal, or Anglican, Church from the public treasury. It has been calculated that from 1765 until 1775, South Carolina paid 164,027 pounds in taxes to the king's church.

At the outbreak of the American Revolution there were 20 established Episcopal churches served by 17 ministers. Other denominations supported their own churches while also paying taxes to the state church. It is estimated that the dissenters paid at least one-half of the total support of the state church.

The dissenters felt oppressed by the established religion. Many of the early colonists had left Europe because of religious oppression there.

The first non-Anglicans to arrive were the French Huguenots, who built a church of their own in 1681, 11 years after the first English settlement. The Huguenots soon had four churches in the Charles Town area.

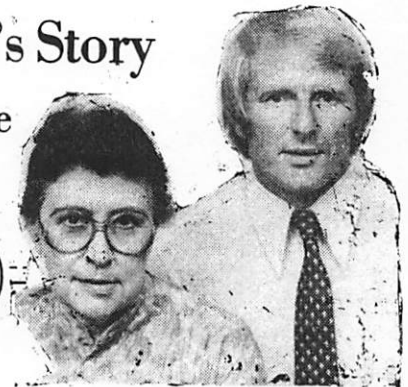
New England Puritans colonized Dorchester and held the first communion of any church outside of Charles Town. Acadians from Canada came. The Baptists were in Charles Town by 1683. Other Baptists, called General Baptists and Particular Baptists, were compelled by law to share the same church property.

Scottish Presbyterians, who like the Huguenots were followers of John Calvin, came into the colony. Swiss Calvinists and German Lutherans sought religious freedom in the Carolina sandhills. The French and Indian Wars, which ended in 1763, sent large numbers of Scotch-Irish Presbyterians into the upcountry.

Altogether there were nine different denominations in the colony before the revolution.

## South Carolina's Story

The making of a state



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Almost all of South Carolina's mainline religious groups were in the state before the Revolutionary War. The exception was the Methodist Church. It was 1785 before the Methodist Church arrived in the person of Bishop Francis Asbury. At the end of the year the Methodists had a small congregation of 35 whites and 23 blacks.

A.M. Chreitzberg, in his book "Early Methodism in the Carolinas," has an interesting description of the trials of the first group. For a while they used the old Baptist meeting house. Then, "...one Sunday they found their seats flung out into the streets, and doors and windows barred against them. This they regarded as a mild intimation that they were not wanted there any longer."

After worshipping in several houses, the Methodists built their first church on Cumberland Street in Charleston. The first session of the South Carolina Conference met on March 22, 1787, probably in the Cumberland Street church. The presiding officers were Dr. Thomas Coke and Bishop Asbury.

Coke and Asbury made 20 appointments of ministers who would

serve congregations spread over the two Carolinas. It was the beginning of the circuit riders — ministers who lived in horseback carrying, in many cases, all they owned in their saddlebags. Paid little in coin, they lived on the hospitality of their flocks. Asbury covered many thousands of miles and wore out numerous horses in his journeys over the frontier.

The early Carolina Methodists contained a large number of colorful characters such as the energetic and keen-witted Jesse Lee, James "Thundering Jimmy" Jenkins, and the eccentric Lorenzo Dow. Chreitzberg said of Dow that he was "a free lance in gospel warfare, the forerunner of latter-day evangelists."

Within 15 years Methodism was well-established but very controversial. At the annual conference in 1800, the church recorded its opposition to slavery and called for the freeing of all slaves in the state. As a consequence, Methodist preachers often faced mob action.

James Jenkins faced a mob at Manchester, near Sumter. "The bread for the sacrament was stolen, and the negro worshipers were ordered out of the house: but he stood like a lion at bay."

From 1800 until the Civil War, the Methodist Church was identified with the abolitionists. That the church survived the climate of its day remains a wonder.