

Founding of the Episcopal Church

A Series of Six Articles Plus an Epilogue
In the Newsletter of

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Founding of the Episcopal Church, Part I

Note from the Editor

This is the first in a series of six articles containing some background information about the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion that affects Episcopalians in the United States today. The topic is the founding of the Episcopal Church, and the time period of the story is the 1770s and the 1780s. The Revolutionary War forced at least a partial cut in ties of the Church of England in the United States with that in England. The process of thereafter creating a unified Episcopal Church in the new country involved surprisingly great differences in values, differences that at times must have seemed unbridgeable. It might be tempting to think that the formation of the church government ran parallel to the formation of the civil government, but it did not. The issues were completely different. In church organization some people wanted top-down management as in Great Britain, while others wanted bottom-up management as in the theory behind the new United States. Some wanted high-church ritual, while others wanted low-church ritual. Some wanted maximum flexibility in the liturgy, while others wanted minimum flexibility. The six articles describe the process of reconciling these values. Knowledge of this process and of its success may contain lessons for bridging the current differences within the Episcopal Church and within the Anglican Communion worldwide. This first article about the founding establishes the setting for the process by describing some of the effects of the Revolutionary War on the Anglican churches in the New World.

The Anglican Church in the American Colonies

The colonists who came from England to the New World brought their religion with them. Records show a celebration of Holy Communion in Jamestown in the year of its founding, 1607, and by 1632, Virginia had established the Church of England as its state religion, supported by local taxes. Maryland passed the Act of Toleration in 1649, providing for religious freedom for all Christians, and Anglican churches began to spring up in 1650. Then in 1692 Maryland established the Church of England as its official church by dividing the colony into 30 Anglican parishes and assessing taxes for the support of Anglican churches and their clergy in each parish.

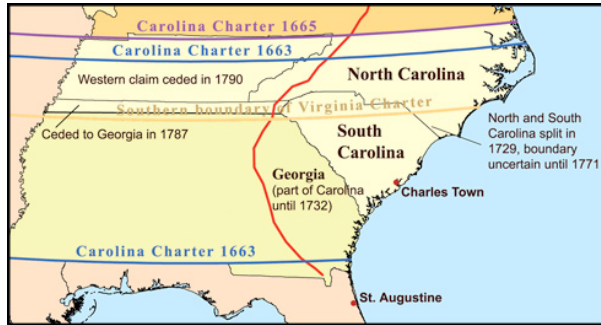
Adherents to the Church of England tended to move to the middle colonies, from Connecticut through Virginia, while those who felt persecuted as Protestants tended to move to the colonies farther north, particularly to Massachusetts. In fact, the Puritans in Massachusetts forbade anything connected with the Anglican church until 1686, and only thereafter were Anglican clergymen appointed in that colony. In 1689, King's Chapel was opened in Boston as an Anglican church. Meanwhile, Trinity Church Wall Street was consecrated in New York in 1689, and Christ Church in Philadelphia was founded in 1695. The Anglican churches founded in the colonies north of Maryland in this period and through the late 1700s were set up individually by law with charters establishing them as (private) corporations; no tax money was provided. Later on, systems were introduced allowing churches and denominations to become corporations through administrative procedures that did not involve individual pieces of legislation.



King's Chapel, Boston

Carolina was founded as a colony in 1663, and two religious principles were in effect from the start: the Church of England was the established church, and religious dissent was permitted. Adherents to the

Church of England were always in the minority but managed to impose universal taxes starting in 1704 for the support of their own churches. The reaction to these taxes led to a split of Carolina into a northern and a southern part by 1729 and to a further split carving out Georgia in 1732. The largest proportion of Anglicans was in South Carolina but was still a minority and still managed to levy its tax. The Anglicans in North Carolina and Georgia were few enough in number that they did not participate in the founding of the Episcopal Church later.



A year or so after its founding in 1701, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG) began to send Anglican missionaries and school teachers to the colonies, especially to the middle colonies and Maryland, and to pay their salaries. In terms of religious governance, the Church of England in all of the colonies was considered as one "province" under the Bishop of London, who never visited the New World. That being so, the requirements of apostolic succession made it difficult to generate new clergy; new clergy had to be ordained by an existing bishop, and new bishops had to be consecrated by three existing bishops. Thus the financial support of the approximately 300 people sent by the SPG during the 1700s played an important role in the viability of the church. There was no thought in England, however, of sending a bishop to the New World. Thus people in the New World seeking ordination for themselves had to make the hazardous expensive round trip to England for that purpose. The absence of bishops affected not just ordination of new priests; it meant that those born in the New World were unlikely to have had Confirmation. Although some people apparently found the lack of Confirmation to be an impediment to receiving Holy Communion, others did not.

Effects of the Revolutionary War



Christ Church, Philadelphia

The Declaration of Independence changed everything for the Church of England in the New World. The tax support in Maryland, Virginia, and South Carolina stopped in short order, and the ownership of church property became a thorny question. Everywhere the salaries of the missionaries began to dry up. There were also problems with the liturgy, and these were by no means trivial. An example will illustrate. The Continental Congress, which served as the legislative body from 1774 to 1789, from the beginning had invited **Jacob Duché** (1738-1798), the rector of Christ Church in Philadelphia, to open its sessions with prayer. Christ Church was located right in the midst of the deliberations concerning independence, and many of the founding fathers were associated with it. The website of the church boasts that those "who worshiped regularly at Christ Church include George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Betsy Ross, Robert Morris, Absalom Jones, Benjamin Rush, John Penn [William Penn's grandson], Francis Hopkinson, and many others." The liturgy of the Church of England stood in conflict with the intent of the Declaration of Independence: The service of Evening Prayer, for instance, asked explicitly concerning "our Sovereign Lord King GEORGE" that God among other things

"strengthen him that he may vanquish and overcome all his enemies." Those enemies, of course, now included the United States of America. Failure to include this prayer in a service could be regarded as treason against Great Britain.

Accordingly, as the online Library of Congress exhibition "Religion and the Founding of the American Republic" describes matters,* Duché called a "special vestry meeting on July 4, 1776, to ask whether it was advisable 'for the peace and welfare of the congregation, to shut up the churches or to continue the service, without using the prayers for the Royal Family.' The vestry decided to keep the church open but replace the prayers for the King with a prayer for Congress." Duché complied. He was regarded as an American hero, and on July 9 he was elected chaplain of the Continental Congress. As the British army approached Philadelphia to occupy it in September 1777, Duché stayed with his church, while his assistant, **William White** (1748-1836), retreated to Maryland.

Duché was arrested by the British but was released later that same year. Duché, like all priests in the Church of England, had had to take an Oath of Allegiance to the British king at the time of his ordination. In his case and in the case of many other priests, he consequently had some sympathy for the loyalist cause; it is just that he wanted some changes in the relationship between Britain and the colonies. He took it upon himself to write a letter to George Washington, who was wintering at Valley Forge, to tell him of the dire situation in Philadelphia and to advise him to stop the revolution. An annoyed Washington forwarded the letter to Congress, and Duché became an outcast in the eyes of the patriots. After the British left Philadelphia in the spring, Duché was



Jacob Duché

"attainted" (convicted legislatively without trial) of high treason by a 1778 Pennsylvania statute; he fled to Britain, implicitly resigning his posts of rector and chaplain. Bills of attainder were forbidden by the 1789 United States Constitution (Article I, Section 10), and Duché returned in 1792 to live out the last six years of his life in Philadelphia. To settle the legal question completely, the governor of Pennsylvania granted him a pardon in March 1793.

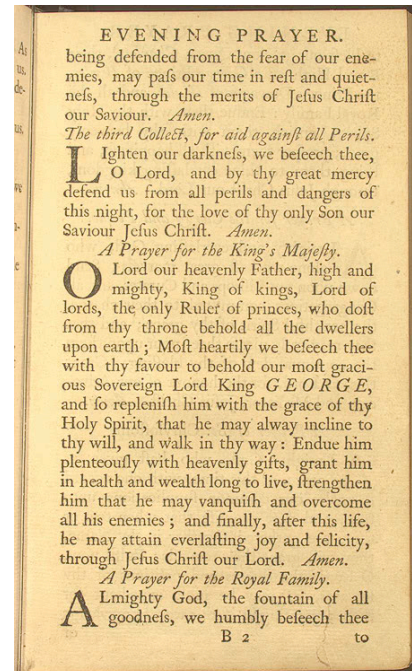
Duché was succeeded as rector of Christ Church by his former assistant, William White, upon White's return from Maryland in the spring of 1778. White was exceptional among priests in being sympathetic to the movement for independence, and in fact he was the only priest of the Church of England remaining on duty in

Pennsylvania as of 1778. The vacant position of chaplain to the Continental Congress was filled by two people serving jointly, one of them being William White and the other being a Presbyterian. White served as one of the chaplains until the Continental Congress disbanded in 1789.

The drop in the number of clergy in Pennsylvania was repeated in other states. Maryland had 53 Anglican ministers in 1776 but only 15 by 1780. In Massachusetts during the war, even King's Chapel closed for a period and only two Anglican churches remained open throughout. By contrast in Virginia, which was not affected by the loss of funds from the SPG and which had produced many patriots who were at least nominally Anglicans (including four of the first five Presidents-to-be), the clergy felt closer to the cause of the patriots; as a consequence, many clergy managed to stay.

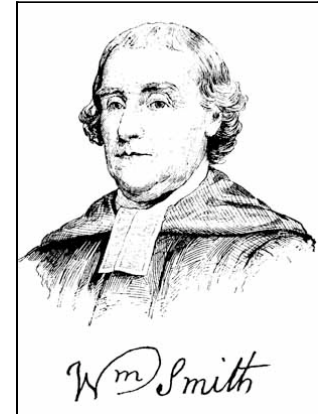
Outlook

As the Revolutionary War drew to a close, it was apparent that cutting ties with England politically was forcing at least a partial cut of ties with the Church of England. At the least, questions of organization and liturgy would have to be addressed, and so would the total absence of bishops. The process got an



**Extract from Prayer Book,
1763**

early start almost by accident. **William Smith** (1727-1803), an educator from Philadelphia, moved in 1780 to Chestertown, Maryland, in order to found a school that would later become Washington College. Since he was an ordained Anglican priest, the vestry of Chester Parish offered him the additional post of parish rector, which he accepted. On November 9 he convened a meeting at Emmanuel Church in Chestertown of three clergy and twenty-four laymen to petition the Maryland General Assembly to provide some degree of public support of religion, in view of the financial strains confronting the Anglican churches. For organizational purposes the group resolved that "the Church formerly known in the Province as the Church of England should now be called the Protestant Episcopal Church." The new name was a natural choice; "Episcopal" referred to the historical system with bishops, and "Protestant" meant that the church was founded in the tradition of the Reformation. It caught on quickly. The name "Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America" came into semiofficial use nationally in 1785 but was not adopted officially until 1814. Creating a name thus took essentially only one meeting. Creating a unified church would take a decade.

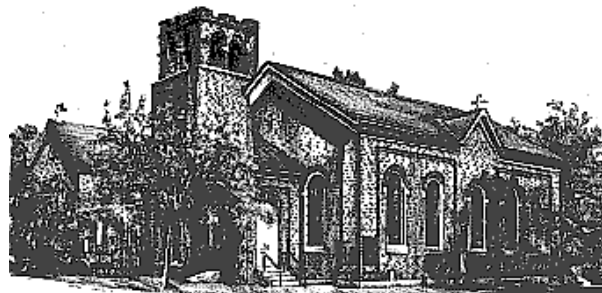


--Tony Knapp

* <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/religion/rel03.html>.

Picture Credits

1. Modern view of King's Chapel, Boston: Wikipedia, "King's_Chapel".
2. Map of Province of Carolina and its subdivision: Wikipedia, "Province_of_Carolina".
3. Christ Church, Philadelphia, from an 1811 painting of the 1727 church: www.oldchristchurch.org/history.
4. Page of Evening Prayer service as in a prayer book dated 1763: www.loc.gov/exhibits/religion/rel03.html.
5. Jacob Duché, University of Pennsylvania archives: www.archives.upenn.edu/histy/features/1700s/people/duche_jacob.html.
6. William Smith: www.famousamericans.net/williamsmith1, image courtesy of www.evisum.com.
7. Emmanuel Church, Chestertown, Chester Parish, Maryland: www.rlk.net/emmanuel.



In This Church Was Held The First Convention Which Proposed
And Adopted The Name Protestant Episcopal Church

9 November 1780



Founding of the Episcopal Church, Part II

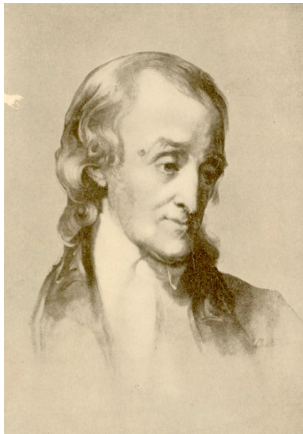
Previously in This Series

The Revolutionary War had serious effects on the Anglican churches in the New World. A meeting of some Maryland clergy and laymen in 1780 tried to cope with some of the local financial consequences, and the name "Protestant Episcopal Church" came out of this meeting. The present article recounts the first steps taken toward creating a unified Episcopal Church nationally. The time period is 1782 to 1785. The people involved had differing points of view on how to unify the churches, points of view greatly dependent on geography. Although great differences in values were involved, the principal characters knowingly or unknowingly set themselves on a course in this time period that would allow them ultimately to come together. There were four principal characters: William White of Pennsylvania and William Smith of Maryland were introduced in the previous article, Samuel Seabury of Connecticut is introduced in the present article, and Samuel Parker of Massachusetts will be introduced in the next article.

Priorities

The official end of the Revolutionary War came with the Treaty of Versailles in 1783, but hostilities had largely ended by the beginning of 1782. Anglican clergy in the United States saw that the relationship between the mother church in England and the daughter church in America would have to change in serious ways. At the least, the clergy would have to address the maintenance of the apostolic succession and the need for changes in liturgy. For the most part they wanted also for the church in America, which they called the Episcopal Church or the Protestant Episcopal Church, to remain united. Their priorities, however, were greatly influenced by geography.

In the New England states, where the Church of England had suffered from minority status, the priority was on ecclesiastical principles, especially that the new church organization should be created and managed by bishops. **Samuel Seabury** (1729-1796) of Connecticut would come to be the leader from these states. In the middle states, which had been well positioned to admire the process of creating a new nation, the priority was on democratic principles, especially the idea expressed in the Declaration of Independence that governments "derive their just powers from the consent of the governed." **William White** (1748-1836) of Philadelphia would come to be the leader from these states. The southern states tended to share the priority of the middle states---just as soon as the consequences of the disestablishment of the Church of England could be dealt with. **William Smith** (1727-1803) of Maryland would come to be the leader from these states for the first few years. The views of high-church vs. low-church in liturgy tended to be highest in the north and lowest in the south. People in South Carolina, for example, were distrustful of everything associated with aristocracy. High-church ritual and bishops suggested aristocracy to them, partly because in this period all bishops in the Church of England were members of the House of Lords.

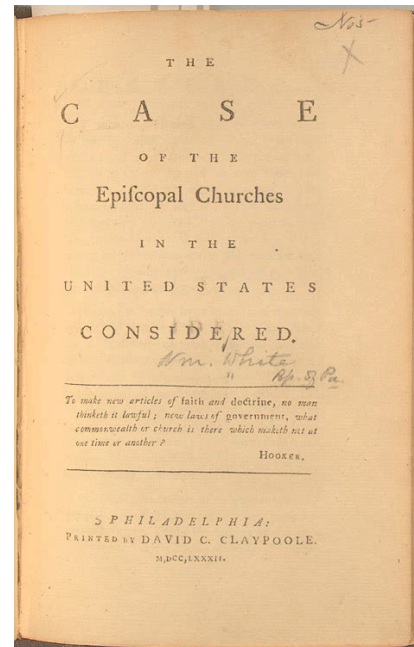


William White

In short, the priorities of the New England states and the middle/southern states were exact opposites. Seabury wanted to have bishops in place first, and then questions of organization could be discussed, led by the bishops in top-down fashion. White and Smith wanted to have an organization in place first, and then questions of bishops and apostolic succession could be addressed in bottom-up fashion. It was far from clear that unity was at all possible without some compromises of principles by one group or the other.

Point of View in the Middle States

An early step was taken by William White, rector of Christ Church in Philadelphia and cochaplain of the Continental Congress. White committed some of his thoughts on all these matters to a pamphlet entitled "The Case of the Episcopal Churches in the United States Considered." This document was published in August 1782 and was widely circulated.* One theme of the pamphlet was to find a way of keeping the church united in the changed circumstances; the other was to deal with apostolic succession. Although the Church of England under some name was still the established church in a few states, White anticipated that the Episcopal churches would ultimately be completely separate from the civil government. In Britain the Church of England proceeded from the monarch and Parliament; the church was regarded as one flock, and the civil government thus appointed bishops and carved out dioceses. As the population grew, the dioceses were then broken into individual parishes. In America with the civil government not in the picture and with individual parishes already in place, it made sense to have a different system that avoided vesting too much power in one individual or group of individuals. As White wrote, "The power of electing a superior order of ministers [bishops] ought to be in the clergy and the laity together, they being both interested in the choice." Government support being lacking, White saw an "impossibility that the churches should provide a support for that superior order of clergy ... ; of consequence, the duty assigned to that order ought not materially to interfere with their employments, in the station of parochial clergy; the superintendence of each will therefore be confined to a small district; a favorite idea with all moderate Episcopalians."



White's 1782 Pamphlet

With these principles in mind, White went on to sketch a three-tiered representative government involving grouping individual Episcopal churches into small districts, the small districts into three large districts, and the three large districts into the whole. Each church in a small district was to get equal representation, independent of its size. Clergy and lay people were to be involved equally. Decisions were to be made at the lowest possible level. The representatives of the large districts were to meet once every three years. And so on.

As to liturgy, White felt that limiting changes to as few as necessary in order to make prayers compatible with the new civil government was the most likely course for producing unity. Finally White turned to the question of apostolic succession. His proposal at this time was for conditional ordinations and consecrations; he cited some precedents and suggested some detailed procedures. He summarized by saying, "The conduct meant to be recommended ... is to include in the proposed frame of government a general approbation of Episcopacy, and a declaration of an intention to procure the succession, as soon as conveniently may be; but in the mean time to carry the plan into effect without waiting for the succession." He argued, "This is founded on the presumption that the worship of God and the instruction and reformation of the people are the principal objects of ecclesiastical discipline: if so, to relinquish them from a scrupulous adherence to Episcopacy, is sacrificing the substance to the ceremony."

Point of View in the New England States

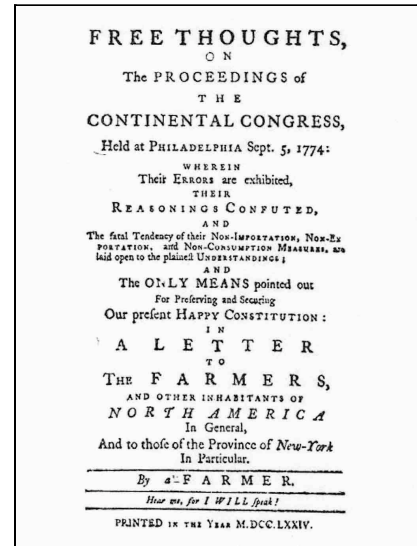
The New England Episcopal clergy had a different idea. Having suffered as a minority under Congregationalists, they tended really to appreciate the system of organization within the Church of England, and many of them still harbored loyalist feelings. The largest concentration of them was in Connecticut, where there were fourteen clergy and forty churches with a total membership of perhaps as

many as 40,000. Ten of the fourteen met in secret on March 25, 1783, at a house in Woodbury, Connecticut. Lay people were not included and written records were not kept of the meeting, since the ten felt that their actions might be misunderstood. It was to be almost a year before actions resulting from the meeting would become widely known. The plan was to elect a bishop, who was to travel to England to seek consecration. If that attempt failed, he was to try in Scotland. After consecration he was to try to return to Connecticut, or to some other state if Connecticut was impossible, or to Nova Scotia if no state was possible. At the least a bishop would then be available in Nova Scotia to ordain new ministers. The ten Connecticut clergy selected two candidates, both of whom were natives of Connecticut living in New York. The first declined because of age and health. The second, Samuel Seabury, was a long-time missionary, then serving on Staten Island, and he agreed to make the trip.



Samuel Seabury

Seabury had impeccable credentials as a loyalist, and it was thought that these credentials might be looked upon with favor by the British: He was almost certainly the author of four pamphlets written in 1774 and 1775 under the pseudonym A. W. Farmer (short for "A Westchester Farmer"), the first one entitled "Free Thoughts on the Proceedings of the Continental Congress"; these were answered by a young Alexander Hamilton. He was a signer of the White Plains protest of 1775 against "all unlawful congresses and committees," he served as a chaplain for a British regiment in 1778, and he continued to receive a pension of half pay for this service.



Seabury's First 1784 Pamphlet



Consecration of Bishop Seabury

Seabury left for England on July 7, 1783, on the flagship of a departing British admiral, armed with persuasive documentation. Despite his credentials, Seabury's stay in Britain was a mixture of small successes and overall failure at getting the rules changed and British clergy's hearts softened so that he could be consecrated. With his money running out in late 1784, he went to Scotland, where the Scottish bishops were only too happy to offer him consecration. The service took place on November 14, 1784, in a private chapel in Aberdeen. Seabury and the Scottish bishops signed a "Concordat" (or "bond of union") the next day containing a number of stipulations, the only unexpected one of which was that Seabury would use his best efforts to persuade the Americans to adopt the communion liturgy used by the Scottish Episcopal Church rather than that used by the Church of England. Seabury left England on March 15, 1785, stopped in Nova Scotia and stayed there a while, made a short stop in Rhode Island, and arrived in New Haven, Connecticut, on June 29, 1785. He became rector of St. James Church in New Haven and was introduced to Episcopalians in Connecticut as their bishop at a meeting beginning August 2, 1785.

Effects of Disestablishment on Church Property Ownership in the South

Before Episcopalians in the southern states could do anything about unity, they had to arrange for their churches in effect to be disestablished without the loss of property. South Carolina was the first to settle matters. Before 1776 all the people had been taxed to support the churches of one quarter of the population, and this had to change. Accordingly Article 38 of the South Carolina Constitution of 1778 provided, among other things, that the state religion would henceforth be enlarged to be Christian

Protestant, that all the existing Anglican churches would be incorporated and would keep their real estate and other property, that a procedure would be in place for other Christian Protestant churches to be recognized and incorporated, and that people would not be compelled by law to pay toward the support and maintenance of religious worship other than their own. The effect of the incorporation was to free the Anglican churches from all state rules except for adherence to a minimal list of religious beliefs, and the Anglicans in the state could thus pursue a united Episcopal Church.

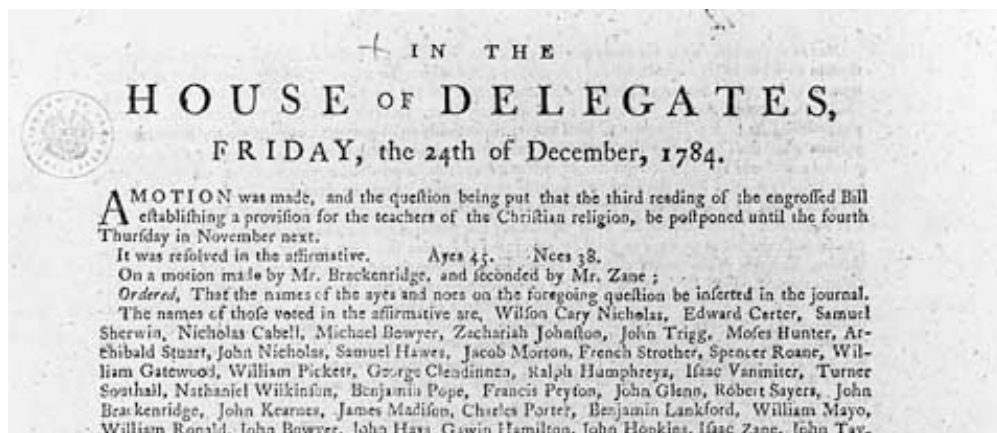
In principle Maryland and Virginia proceeded in the same way, but the details were different and consequential. Maryland would succeed in sorting out its problems by 1783, but Virginia's problems extended well into the 1800s.

--Tony Knapp

* White's pamphlet has been transcribed online at <http://individual.utoronto.ca/haves/anglican/white.htm>. In the transcription the title is given in abbreviated form, and the year is recorded incorrectly as 1787.

Picture Credits

1. William White, University of Pennsylvania archives: www.archives.upenn.edu/histy/features/1700s/people/white_wm.html.
2. Title page of White's 1782 pamphlet: www.loc.gov/exhibits/religion/rel03.html.
3. Samuel Seabury, engraving by Sherman and Smith from an oil painting about 1784 by Thomas Spence Duché (1763-1790), engraving in the collection of the New York Public Library: digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/index.cfm.
4. Title page of Seabury's first 1774 pamphlet: anglicanhistory.org/usa/seabury/farmer/.
5. Depiction of consecration of Samuel Seabury as bishop: www.cathedral.aberdeen.anglican.org/history.htm.
6. Key vote in Virginia: www.loc.gov/exhibits/religion/rel05.html.



Key Vote in Virginia. Opinion was almost evenly divided in Virginia on state support of ministers. In late 1784 Patrick Henry tried to get the state to legislate such support; he was backed to some extent by George Washington, John Marshall (later Chief Justice), and Richard Henry Lee (then beginning a one-year term as president of the Continental Congress). James Madison, backed by Thomas Jefferson, strongly opposed the legislation. Madison's forces won the day with a 45-38 vote to postpone consideration for a year, and Patrick Henry's bill was not brought up again.



Founding of the Episcopal Church, Part III

Previously in This Series

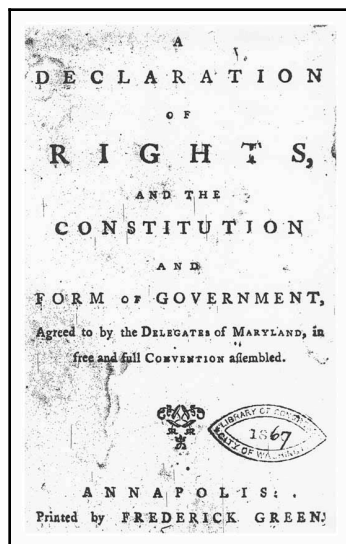
Although most Episcopalians in the 1780s wanted a unified church nationally, their points of view about how to proceed and what to aim for depended on geography.

The New England states tended to want top-down management while the other states wanted bottom-up management. By 1783 people were already taking steps to implement their own points of view. At the same time the southern states were struggling with the consequences of disestablishment of the Church of England. Earlier articles in the series introduced Samuel Seabury (1729-1796), William Smith (1727-1803), and William White (1748-1836), and the present article introduces the last of the four main characters, Samuel Parker (1744-1804).

Disestablishment in Maryland and Virginia

South Carolina already handled questions of ownership of property in Anglican churches in 1778, but the corresponding efforts in Maryland took longer and those in Virginia led to a legal tangle that lasted well into the 1800s.

In Maryland, Article 33 of the 1776 Declaration of Rights settled some but not all of the issues of



Maryland Declaration of Rights, 1776

disestablishment. It took clergy off the state payroll with a few months' notice, and it said that the real estate and other property associated to the Church of England "ought to remain to the church of England for ever." Religious liberty was guaranteed to all Christians, and each person paying the tax for the support of Christian religions could designate what church or minister would receive the money or could insist that the money be used for the support of the poor. Nevertheless, the Church of England remained the established church, and any changes in governance, liturgy, etc., remained subject to state approval. Thus the resolution made by clergy and lay people at Chestertown in 1780 changing the name of the church to the Protestant Episcopal Church was not binding. In 1783 the Episcopal clergy had to petition the General Assembly to make appropriate changes to the liturgy and services. This petition, written by William Smith and another clergyman, was granted, and the Maryland clergy met in Annapolis on August 13, 1783, to adopt the name "Protestant Episcopal Church" officially. The declaration approved by the delegates made it clear that they wanted only minimal changes to the liturgy, only those that "may be found expedient in the change of our situation from a daughter to a sister church." Shortly thereafter the oversight of the church by the General Assembly was dropped, and the churches could do what they wanted.

Virginia was unable to handle these questions as tidily as Maryland. Section 16 of the Virginia Bill of Rights as passed in June 1776 included a clause respecting freedom of religion. Public salaries of ministers were suspended one year at a time until 1779 and then canceled completely. A law of 1785 disestablished the Church of England as far as self-governance was concerned, and then Virginia was ready at least to participate in the formation of a national Episcopal Church. However, further laws concerning vestries, incorporation, real estate, and other property passed in 1780, 1784, 1786, 1788, 1798, and 1801, some intended to cancel parts of previous laws. The situation remained somewhat unsettled, and the details need not be recited here except to say that the legal problems in Virginia were one of the reasons for the official adoption of the church name nationally in 1814. In 1815 the Supreme Court of the United States in *Terrett v. Taylor*,* a case involving Virginia church lands, observed that

some parts of the cited laws could not Constitutionally be repealed by subsequent laws. What effect these matters will have on today's contested real estate of the Episcopal Church in Virginia is unclear.

The Planning Meeting of 1784

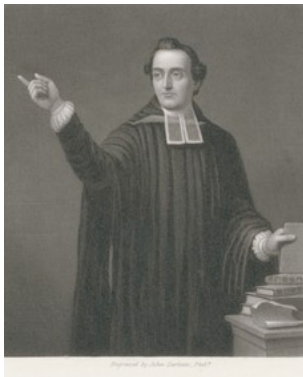
As a result of the secret plans of the Episcopal clergy of Connecticut, which were quietly shared with New York clergy in order to obtain their endorsement, Samuel Seabury (1729-1796) of Connecticut had left for England on July 7, 1783, in order to be consecrated a bishop, and he was waiting there for various obstacles to be removed. Episcopalians in the other states meanwhile made their own plans. At a meeting in New Brunswick, New Jersey, on May 11-12, 1784, to revive an organization known as the "Corporation for the Relief of the Widows and Orphans of Clergymen in Communion of the Church of England in America," some clergy and lay people from Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and New York were discussing the general situation of the church. Those from Pennsylvania broached the subject of unifying the Episcopal Church nationally; but one of the New York clergy drew William White aside to reveal the steps taken by the Connecticut clergy toward getting Samuel Seabury consecrated as bishop, and the endorsement of those steps by the New York clergy.



William White

Although the discussion did not proceed further at this point, those present did agree to issue a call for a national conference of clergy and laity of the

Episcopal Church from all states, to take place in New York on October 6-7, 1784, for the purpose of discussing unification. Preparatory meetings took place beforehand in Philadelphia and Boston, the latter including clergy from Rhode Island.



William Smith about 1770

Fifteen clergy and eleven laymen from Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia attended the October 1784 conference, and William Smith of Maryland presided. For the most part, those in attendance were not official representatives of the churches in their states and could give only their own opinions. The Virginia delegate was constrained by the fact that Virginia had not yet disestablished the Church of England. Connecticut could not really commit itself to anything until Seabury had returned from England and in any event thought it necessary to have a bishop in place before proceeding. Also the Connecticut clergy had invited no lay person; the thinking of the clergy there, according

to a letter from one of them, was that "the laity did not expect or wish to be called in as delegates on such an occasion; but would, with full confidence, trust matters purely ecclesiastical to their clergy."

Samuel Parker (1744-1804), rector of Trinity Church Boston, who was attending to represent Massachusetts and Rhode Island, brought with him a letter from the clergy in those states saying that "[I]t is our unanimous opinion that it is beginning at the wrong end to attempt to organize our church before we have obtained a head."



Samuel Parker



Trinity Church, Boston

Nevertheless, the group listed some principles that it recommended for adoption by the churches in the various states toward forming an "Ecclesiastical Government." These were built around the notion of a General Convention of the Episcopal Church in the United States, a term used to refer both to an organization and to a meeting. The principles were that the church in each state send clergy and laity as delegates to the General Convention, that "associated

congregations, in two or more states, may send deputies jointly," that the church is to maintain the doctrines and liturgy of the Church of England as much as possible consistently with the American Revolution and the state constitutions, that any duly consecrated bishop shall be a delegate ex officio, and that the clergy and laity should deliberate as one body and vote as two (with an affirmative vote by both needed for approval). The group proposed that the first such General Convention occur in Philadelphia starting on September 27, 1785.

Preparations for the First General Convention

William Smith and William White independently both wrote to Samuel Seabury in the summer of 1785, congratulating him on his consecration as bishop and inviting him to the General Convention. After being recognized as bishop at a meeting of the Connecticut clergy beginning August 2, Seabury wrote back to White briefly, criticizing two points in the principles for an ecclesiastical constitution and including a list of the changes in the liturgy that would accommodate it to his own state's constitution.** In reply to the invitation, Seabury made an excuse why he could not attend the General Convention. This letter was dated three days later than a reply to Smith at greater length on the same topics, which was sent via White in such a way that White could see it and forward it to Smith. The letter to Smith in addition listed the obstacles that Seabury had encountered while seeking consecration in England.

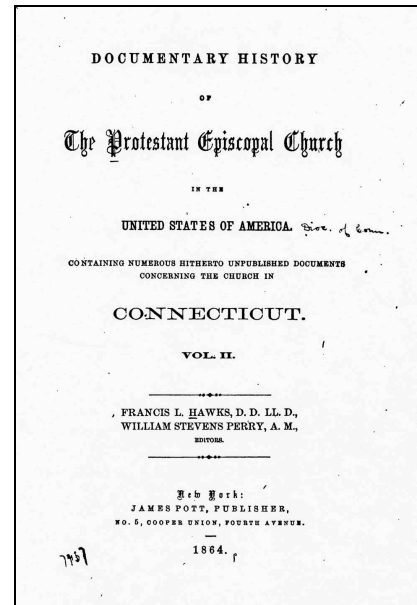
Several state conventions occurred during 1785 in preparation for the General Convention. Notable among these are ones in the spring in South Carolina, which decided that it did not want its own bishop under any circumstances, in May in Virginia, whose church had been recently disestablished and was now free to reorganize itself, in August in Connecticut as mentioned above, in early September in Boston to establish a united position for the churches in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and New Hampshire, and on September 14 in New Haven. The early August meeting in Connecticut was attended also by one clergyman from New York and one from Massachusetts. The latter was Samuel Parker, who would be able to communicate the results of the meeting to the group in Boston in September.

At the August meeting in Connecticut, a committee of four was set up to make "some alterations in the liturgy needful for the present use of the Church"; the committee was chaired by Seabury in his capacity as bishop, and Parker was a member. The Boston meeting in September tinkered with these changes and communicated its results to Seabury in time for the New Haven meeting in September and to Smith just after the beginning of the General Convention on September 27. In the meantime the clergy in Connecticut found that these alterations were not at all to the liking of the laity, so much so that the alterations were not even brought up for consideration on September 14. This fact, however, was not communicated to William Smith in Maryland in time for the General Convention.

First General Convention: The Need for Three Bishops

The First General Convention met for the interval from September 27 to October 7, 1785, with 16 clergy and 26 laymen present, representing seven states---New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, and South Carolina. William White presided. There were three principal items of business---the problem of having at least three bishops, the writing of an ecclesiastical constitution, and the modification of the *Book of Common Prayer*.

For the problem of having at least three bishops, it was decided to write a letter to the bishops and two archbishops in England (Canterbury and York) to express the desire of the new Episcopal Church to



Hawks-Perry Book of Documents, 1864

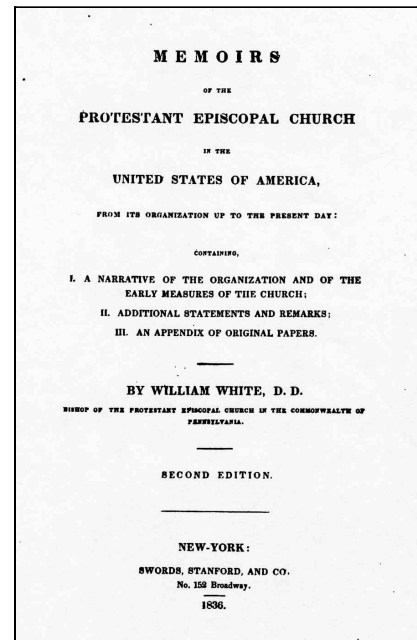
continue the principles of the Church of England insofar as they were consistent with the new civil government, to remain on amicable terms with the Church of England, and to seek their help in setting up an "Episcopacy" in the United States. The convention sought to resolve all problems in advance, so as not to repeat Seabury's experience. White drafted this letter, with advice from some other delegates,** and it was signed by all delegates to the convention on October 5. A committee of correspondence was set up to handle the details of the communication, both then and later, and a Second General Convention was scheduled for June 20, 1786, in the expectation that a reply would have been received by then.

--Tony Knapp

* Terrett v. Taylor, 13 U.S. 43 (1815). See <http://supreme.justia.com/us/13/43/>.

** Many of the letters from this period that concern the Episcopal Church in Connecticut appear in transcribed form in Volume II of *Documentary History of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, edited by F. L. Hawks and W. S. Perry. An illustration here shows the title page. The book is available online; search in www.google.com/books for "perry" and "documentary history of the protestant" simultaneously.

*** The letter is notable for its great tact and is worth comparing in style to the style of the Lord's Prayer. The letter appears in transcribed form in White's memoirs. An illustration here shows the title page of the memoirs. The memoirs are available online; search in www.google.com/books for "william white" and "memoirs of the protestant episcopal church" simultaneously.



White's Memoirs, 1836

Picture Credits

1. Title page of 1776 pamphlet containing the Maryland Declaration of Rights: aomol.net/megafile/msa/speccol/sc2900/sc2908/html/convention1776.html.
2. William White: Wikipedia, "William_White_(Bishop_of_Pennsylvania)".
3. William Smith as Provost of the College of Philadelphia, engraving by John Sartain (1808-1897) from an original oil painting, engraving in the collection of the New York Public Library: digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/index.cfm.
4. Samuel Parker: Picture courtesy of the Diocesan Library & Archives, Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts.
5. Modern view of Trinity Church, Boston: photograph by Mary Ann Sullivan, www.bluffton.edu/~sullivanm/bostonrich/distantm.jpg.
6. Title page of Hawks-Perry, *Documentary History of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, Vol. II, 1864: accessed via www.google.com/books.
7. Title page of William White, *Memoirs of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, second edition, 1836: accessed via www.google.com/books.



Founding of the Episcopal Church, Part IV

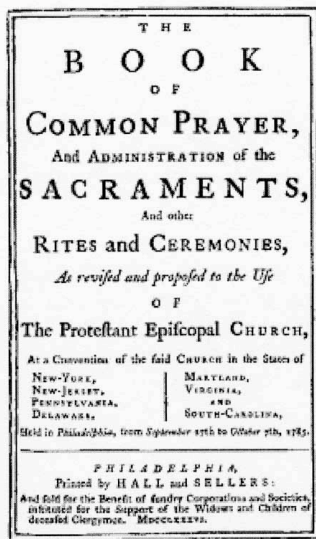
Previously in This Series

Although Episcopalians in all states wanted unity in the early 1780s, there were two opposing points of view on how to proceed. The First General Convention met in 1785 to address three principal issues, but with no representatives from the New England states in attendance. The issues were the problem of obtaining at least three bishops, the writing of an ecclesiastical constitution, and the modification of the *Book of Common Prayer*. The first step toward obtaining three bishops was to prepare a letter to the bishops and two archbishops of the Church of England, enlisting their help. A committee of correspondence was set up to handle details.

First General Convention: Other Business

The delegates to the First General Convention made up their minds that success at having bishops consecrated in England was to be assured in advance, or else the candidates would not make the trip. Mindful of the obstacles that Samuel Seabury had encountered in England, the convention decided that among the seven states represented, the ones in the best position to elect bishops were Maryland, New York, Pennsylvania, and Virginia, that the clergy in each of these states should promptly obtain a document from the "executive authority" of the state government assuring those in England that consecration of a bishop would interfere in no way with the governmental relations between the United States and Great Britain, that these documents should be given to the committee of correspondence for forwarding to England, and that the delegates of each state electing a bishop should assemble documentation of the candidate's election and of his good character, bringing that documentation to the 1786 convention.

As to the other two principal items of business (constitution and prayer book), William White says in his memoirs that there was considerable sentiment against proceeding with them until the bishops were in place, but that the eventual decision was to go ahead anyway. In White's view the putting of bishops in place without rules and without an organization ran the risk that some churches in a proposed diocese would not subscribe to a particular bishop and his prayer book, thus being tempted to form their own diocese with their own prayer book. Indeed, King's Chapel in Boston, which had opened in 1689 as the first Anglican church in Massachusetts, was turning Unitarian and writing its own prayer book in this period; thus it furnished a telling example of what could happen.



Proposed Book, 1786

To handle the details of the constitution and prayer book, a committee was formed with one clergyman and one layman from each state and with William Smith presiding. This committee divided into two subcommittees, one chaired by White to draft the constitution and the other chaired by Smith to deal with the prayer book. The resulting constitution, after an amendment from the floor, was essentially an elaboration of the principles recommended from the New York conference of October 1784. It was made explicit that the liturgy would consist of the *Book of Common Prayer* with certain specific modifications contained in a written instrument approved by the General Convention and that any state could join the Protestant Episcopal Church by agreeing to the constitution.

The outline of the revision of the prayer book was primarily the work of William Smith. The revisions were of two kinds---those that were necessary and were to be adopted by the General Convention and those that were desirable and were merely to be recommended to the state conventions for ratification.

The former consisted of the allusions to the king, to Parliament, and to special days commemorating British history. The latter were of many kinds. For them Smith's starting point was the list of revisions that produced in 1689 a proposed but unapproved revision of the 1662 prayer book. He was influenced greatly by trying to please the absent bishop, Samuel Seabury; to do so, he followed as much as possible the detailed recommendations that had been communicated by Seabury and Samuel Parker just before the convention, not knowing that these detailed recommendations had turned out to be unacceptable to the Connecticut laity. Smith's changes that attracted the greatest notice were recommendations to delete from the Apostles' Creed the words "He descended into hell" and to omit completely the Nicene Creed and a third creed called the Athanasian Creed (whose text appears on pp. 864-865 of the 1979 prayer book). The General Convention established a writing committee to prepare and publish the prayer book after adjournment. This committee consisted of Smith, White, and one other person, but it was given ambiguous instructions concerning how to handle the revisions of the second kind. It perhaps unwisely went ahead and included all the revisions of both kinds, and the result published in 1786 has been known ever since as the *Proposed Book*. Smith was the author of the preface.

Delivery of Mail and the Response

To ensure proper delivery and consideration of the convention's letter to the bishops and archbishops, the American ambassador to Great Britain, John Adams, delivered the letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury personally on January 3, 1786, along with a cover letter dated October 24, 1785, from Richard Henry Lee, who was the president of the Continental Congress, and a cover letter from John Jay, who was the secretary of state. The cover letters gave assurances that consecration of bishops in America was completely proper from the government's point of view. By letter dated January 4, 1786, Adams informed the committee of correspondence of his activities and of the initially favorable reaction from the archbishop. Other material detailing what had happened at the convention was sent by more ordinary means, and it took a long time to be delivered. The writing committee sent pages of the *Proposed Book* also, and those pages also took a long time to be delivered.

In a letter dated February 24, 1786, the bishops and archbishops responded warmly but cautiously to what they had received. Having thus far heard only rumors of particular actions of the First General Convention but not having yet received the acts of the convention or the pages of the *Proposed Book*, they asked to see the detailed changes to the liturgy and said for their part that they would seek "to acquire the legal capacity" to go ahead with the consecration without inclusion of the oath of allegiance to the king.

First Session of the Second General Convention

The Second General Convention met in Philadelphia from June 20 to June 26, 1786, to respond. David



**The Falls Church,
Fairfax Parish***

Griffith (1742-1789), rector of Fairfax Parish in Virginia, presided.* White's memoirs say, "The convention assembled under circumstances, which bore strong appearances of a dissolution of the union, in the early stage of it. The interfering instructions from the churches---the embarrassment that had arisen from the rejection of the [P]roposed [B]ook in some of the states, and the use of it in others---some dissatisfaction on account of the Scottish Episcopacy---and, added to these, the demur expressed in the letter from the English bishops, were what the most sanguine contemplated with apprehension."



**Christ Church, Fairfax
Parish***

White went on to say that the interfering instructions "were all silenced by the motion that stands on the journal, for referring them to the first convention, which should meet fully authorized to determine on a

Book of Common Prayer." The motion had the effect of amending the constitution. There was a lesson for the future here, White said, in that the instructions showed "the futility of taking measures, to be reviewed and authoritatively judged of, in the bodies of which we were the deputies. Such a system appeared so evidently fruitful of discord and disunion, that it was abandoned from this time."

The dissatisfaction with the Scottish Episcopacy surfaced over priests whom Bishop Seabury had ordained in the south. There were two problems, one that some people did not like Seabury because of his record as a loyalist and the other that English bishops and Scottish bishops had taken seemingly incompatible oaths at the time of their consecration. Both these issues were swept aside until 1789 by parliamentary maneuvers.

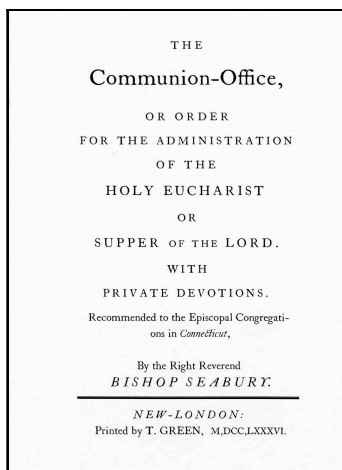


Samuel Provoost

of Virginia. Provoost was the rector of Trinity Church Wall Street. These names were not communicated to the archbishops in the June 26 letter, however.

Activities Between the Sessions

Between the sessions of the Second General Convention, the churches of Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and New Hampshire met in Boston in July 1786 and found themselves agreeing with most of the *Proposed Book* but



Seabury's Communion Office, 1786

The main business of the convention was the letter from the English bishops. In the reply the convention gave its assurances that the Episcopal Church was not departing from the doctrines of the Church of England. It said that the only changes to the prayer book were those calculated to remove objections so as to be "more conducive to union." The letter was signed by all the delegates and was dated June 26, it was accompanied by a copy of the amended constitution and the *Proposed Book*, it repeated the request of the previous letter, and it mentioned that the nominations of candidates from the states were now in hand. The meeting adjourned to a call from the committee of correspondence that a reply had been received.

During the convention it emerged that the people being nominated by the state conventions for bishop were Samuel Provoost (1742-1815) of New York, William White of Pennsylvania, William Smith of Maryland, and David Griffith



Trinity Church Wall Street

discouraged by the fact that the churches in the southern states, which had proposed many of the changes, did not like the book. The church in Connecticut met in September and largely disapproved of changes resulting in the *Proposed Book*. An even more important objection in the Connecticut view was that the book had been set forth without the authority of a bishop. At this time Bishop Seabury floated out a service of Holy Communion based on the Scottish prayer book, recommending it to the clergy of Connecticut, who embraced it wholeheartedly.

Not long after the adjournment of the Philadelphia session, the committee of correspondence received a letter from the Archbishops of Canterbury and York and a subsequent letter dated July 4 from the Archbishop of Canterbury alone. The first of these said in essence that the supplementary mailings had arrived and that the Church of England was prepared to go ahead with the consecrations except for the legal matter and for some concerns over the creeds and a technical detail in the constitution. The second letter said that a suitable act of Parliament had

been passed eliminating the need for an oath to British civil authority, hence that the legal matter had been resolved; with the letter was the text of the act. The first letter objected to the deletion of the line "He descended into hell" in the Apostles' Creed, and it expressed what seemed possibly to be a pro forma objection to the omission of the other two creeds. The letter was striking to the delegates for its moderation. Since the archbishops were not in a position to check on character references, the archbishops asked for particularly stringent care in choosing the candidates for bishop. Two suggested forms of letters were enclosed, one for testimonials from the members of the convention in the state recommending a candidate for consecration and the other from the members of the General Convention. The latter included an assurance that the candidate "hath led his life, for the three years just past, piously, soberly, and honestly."

--Tony Knapp

* A parish, even in 1786, typically had more than one church. Two churches already in existence in Fairfax Parish in 1786 were The Falls Church and Christ Church, the latter now called Christ Church, Alexandria. Both these churches are now many times their original size. Fairfax Parish originally cut into the part of Virginia that was later set aside for Washington, D.C., and it includes part of Mount Vernon.

Picture Credits

1. Title page of 1786 *Proposed Book*: accessed from justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/bcp.htm.
2. Historical view, The Falls Church, Fairfax Parish, Virginia: www.thefallschurch.org/clientimages/29455/images/historicchurchbwphoto.jpg.
3. Historical view, Christ Church, Fairfax Parish, Virginia: www.historicchristchurch.org/images/ccetch.jpg.
4. Samuel Provoost, oil painting by Thomas Spence Duché, 1787, New York Historical Society: www.episcopalchurch.org/78716_ENG_HTM.htm.
5. Trinity Church Wall Street, about 1846: www.trinitywallstreet.org/history.
6. Title page of Seabury's Communion Office of 1786: justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/Seabury.htm.



Founding of the Episcopal Church, Part V

Previously in This Series

Activities at the 1785 First General Convention and the first session of the 1786 Second General Convention aimed toward unification of the Protestant Episcopal Church. Both conventions represented only the middle and southern states, and the New England preference for top-down organization was therefore underrepresented. A committee of correspondence had engaged in two rounds of correspondence with the bishops and two archbishops of England, inquiring about the possibility of getting three American bishops consecrated in England. Now it was time to decide what to do.

Second Session of the Second General Convention

The committee of correspondence called the adjourned meeting of the Second General Convention into session on October 10, 1786, in Wilmington to react to the two letters from the archbishops. David Griffith being ill, Samuel Provoost presided. The only business was to respond to the two letters and to endorse a suitable complement of American bishops elect. There was unanimous agreement that the Nicene Creed should be restored and widespread agreement that the Athanasian Creed should continue to be omitted. Opinion was divided concerning restoring the line "He descended into hell" to the Apostles' Creed. The archbishops had attempted to make it look like a small thing to include the line, saying that the line had been added to the original creed in order to address an ancient heresy, now largely forgotten. But the same argument could be made that it was not so important if the convention left the line out. What may have carried the day was that the bishops elect would not have been prepared to make the trip without assent to the archbishops' wishes on this point; thus the line was restored.

The elections of Samuel Provoost, William White, and David Griffith as bishops were ratified by the convention, with the testimonials signed. The official records are silent about action on William Smith.



William Smith and His Grandson

Possibly the explanation comes from a drinking problem that Smith was widely said to have had. The delegates could hardly vouch for Smith's having lived the past three years "soberly," as the form of the testimonials required, and the convention may have quietly arranged that Smith's nomination should not be pressed. This outcome was doubtless a disappointment for Smith, who had been one of White's teachers in Pennsylvania and had been bishop elect from Maryland since 1783. But Smith continued an active leadership role in the church, getting elected as president of the House of Deputies at the next four General Conventions (1789, 1792, 1795, and 1799).

A committee of nine that included Smith was formed and met on the evening of the 10th. White's memoirs say, "We sat up the whole of the succeeding night, digesting the determinations in the form in which they appear on the journal." In other words, they framed a resolution whose text they could send to the archbishops. This provided for the restoration of the line "He descended into hell" to the Apostles' Creed, it provided for the restoration of the Nicene Creed, it took note of the constitutional change from the first session that captured the way the approval of a prayer book was eventually to be handled, and it mentioned small changes to the preface consistent with these changes to the creeds. The resolution was approved on the 11th. A cover letter was prepared, signed, and sent that day, and the convention's work was complete. The Third General Convention was scheduled to start July 28, 1789.

Consecrations

Provoost and White sailed for England on November 2, 1786, and arrived in London on November 29. Griffith was unable to go with them because he had not been able to raise sufficient funds for the trip. Provoost and White were consecrated as bishops on February 4, 1787, they left London on February 5, and they arrived in New York on April 7. White's memoirs describe this trip in detail.

Activities Before the Third General Convention

Samuel Seabury, Bishop of Connecticut, wrote to each of Provoost and White on May 1, 1787, after their return from England, offering his congratulations and proposing that the three of them get together alone to hammer out the outline of a united church. It was his first priority that such an arrangement succeed, but he also had a backup plan. Toward the end of 1785, discouraged over reports from the First General Convention, Seabury had written to Samuel Parker of Massachusetts, suggesting that it might be a good idea to have one or two more New England bishops consecrated in Scotland. Seabury was telling Parker his backup plan: if unity of the churches in all the states was not possible, then New England could arrange to have its own complete set of three bishops. The unstated but clear suggestion was that one of these ought to be Parker. Seabury had not acted further on this plan until February 27, 1787, when his discouragement with reports from the Second General Convention led him to convene the Connecticut clergy, who elected one of their number as a coadjutor (assistant) bishop. This person had not immediately departed for Scotland; Seabury's letter of May 1 was one more try at unity with Provoost and White.



Samuel Seabury

White responded to Seabury on May 21, 1787. He said that having the Episcopal churches united in one system of ecclesiastical government was a hope dear to his heart. But he thought it would first be good to tell each other the views of the churches in their own areas. Extrapolating from what he had heard, he cautioned, "If our brethren in Connecticut should be of the opinion that the giving of any share of the Legislative power of the Church to others than those of the Episcopal order is inconsistent with Episcopal Government, and that the requiring of the consent of the Laity to ecclesiastical laws is an invasion of Clerical rights, in this case I see no prospect of doing good in any other way than contributing all in my power to promote a spirit of love and peace between us; although I shall continue to cultivate the hope of our being brought, at some future day, to an happy agreement." On the other hand, he said that he was quite flexible about the liturgy and that if it was felt that the best way to obtain an agreement among the three of them was to meet alone, then he would use his best endeavors to bring about such a meeting. Seabury immediately forwarded White's letter to Parker in Boston, asking for his comments. The implicit message was that if a unified church was not possible, then perhaps Massachusetts could nominate Parker to be bishop of a new diocese and send him to Scotland.



Samuel Parker

White had his own backup plan. At about the same time, White wrote to Parker in an undated letter, saying in part, "I wish most sincerely that Massachusetts would unite with us, and choose a person for consecration; not merely as it would tend to cement the Church throughout the whole continent, but because I think it would add to the wisdom of our determinations, whenever a General Convention shall be had for the final settlement of our ecclesiastical system.

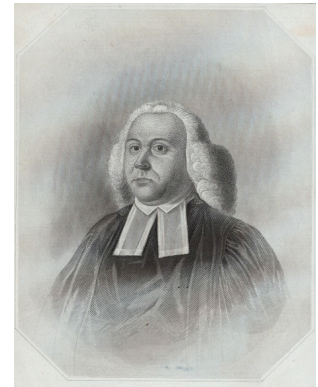
Parker was squarely in the middle but behaved like a skilled diplomat. He replied to White on July 19, 1787, first offering his belated congratulations for White's consecration and telling what was happening with the *Proposed*

Book in Massachusetts. He continued, "Nothing will be determined in this state respecting a Bishop till we see how matters are settled between you and the Bishop of Connecticut. We are but six Clergymen in the whole state ... and are divided in our sentiments respecting the expediency of obtaining a Bishop. Two seem to adhere to Connecticut, two to your states, and the other two will join either party that will bid fairest to cement the whole. Should the case happen, that a person should be chosen for this state, will it be necessary for him to go to England to obtain it, or can two Bishops confer it authentically; or is Dr. Griffith on his way to England, or will the Southern Bishops unite with Bishop Seabury in this act? If the last question is premature or impertinent, I beg pardon, and request not an answer to it. The reason of my proposing these questions is, that the answers may operate very considerably in the determinations of the Clergy here."

Parker, Seabury, and White continued to exchange letters on this subject well into 1789, occasionally involving Smith and others in the exchange. It remained true that fundamentally Seabury wanted a top-down system of organization while White wanted a bottom-up system. But the two began to understand each other's views better and to acknowledge that some elements of each kind of organization were required. Historically the power to act in the name of Jesus went first to the apostles and then down to others; on the other hand, the individual churches in the United States depended on the voluntary contributions of the laity to function, and it was only right to give the laity some say in things that affected them. Seabury was able to limit his main objections concerning the role of laity in the organization to two: he objected to having laymen sit in judgment of clergy in trials when laymen played no comparable role in ordinations, and he objected to the insistence that every state include lay representatives because Connecticut laymen were not sure they were willing to offer such representation.

Seabury and White were in agreement that any discussion of the liturgy should start afresh, ignoring the *Proposed Book*, and make only minimal changes. Seabury's reasons were philosophical and White's reasons were pragmatic, but that distinction did not matter.

For his part Parker decided on a course of action. He organized a meeting of the six clergy of Massachusetts and New Hampshire to carry out a plan to push the church toward unity. He himself did not want to be bishop, and he arranged for one of his colleagues to be willing to be elected. On June 4, 1789, the group accordingly elected one of their number, Edward Bass (1726-1803), as bishop. They passed two resolutions. One attested to the fine qualities that Bass had, and it asked the three bishops in the United States to join in his consecration. The other empowered Parker to be their agent at the Third General Convention, to lay their resolution about Bass before that convention, and to support any measures that might promote unity. This resolution he communicated to White a few days before the start of the convention.



Edward Bass

First Session of the Third General Convention, Overview

The Third General Convention met in Philadelphia in two sessions. The first session went from July 28, 1789, to approximately August 16. The second session began September 29 and ended October 17. William White was the only bishop in attendance at the first session, Provoost being ill, and White therefore presided at it. The main business of the first session was to deal with the related issues of uniting the church and arranging for a full complement of bishops. Everyone agreed that both these ends were desirable. The plan was to agree tentatively on a number of proposals that together would create an organization that the church in Connecticut should be willing to join, to invite Seabury and other delegates from Connecticut officially to the second session, to modify details in the proposals if necessary at the beginning of the second session to ensure agreement, to have the Connecticut church officially join with the churches in the other states, and to have the united group approve all the proposals. Under the overall plan, the organization was thus being set up officially in top-down fashion

but was being set up unofficially in bottom-up fashion. The blend of top-down decisions and bottom-up decisions would occur in the details also.

--Tony Knapp

Picture Credits

1. William Smith and His Grandson, oil painting by Charles Wilson Peale, 1788, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts: www.vmfa.state.va.us/collections/75_11.html.
2. Samuel Seabury: anglicanhistory.org/usa/seabury.
3. Samuel Parker: Picture courtesy of the Diocesan Library & Archives, The Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts.
4. Edward Bass, engraving in the collection of the New York Public Library: digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/index.cfm.



Founding of the Episcopal Church, Part VI

Previously in This Series

The Third General Convention met in two sessions in 1789 in July-August and September-October, with the main goal of uniting the Protestant Episcopal Church in all the states. Samuel Parker had forced the convention's hand with a proposal that required the cooperation of all three American bishops. To handle this proposal, the plan was for the middle and southern states to create a church organization unofficially in bottom-up fashion at the first session, then to invite the delegates from the New England states to attend the second session, at which they could suggest changes and sign onto a process that involved a House of Bishops, and finally for everyone to approve the whole package. In this way the New England states could be comfortable that the whole process had been handled in top-down fashion, starting from the bishops.

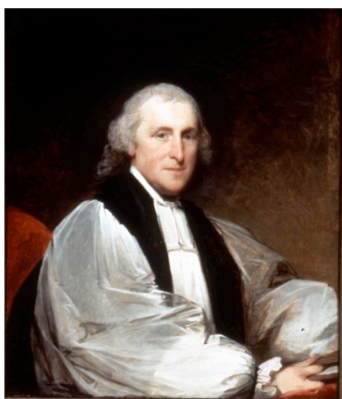
First Session of the Third General Convention, Details

Carrying out the plan involved negotiating some bumps along the way, which in turn required a number of inspired ideas. Two parliamentary devices were used to make it possible to proceed tentatively at the first session and officially at the second. One was to have most actions at the first session occur in a committee of the whole, which then reported its recommendations to the General Convention at the start of the second session. The other was to treat the ecclesiastical constitution as a new document that was being created, rather than an amended one. For stability, it was to include an amendment procedure that would require amendments to be held over to the next General Convention before becoming final. The parliamentary device was not to finalize this new constitution until the second session, so that any needed adjustments could be made in the second session without holding them over for three years.



Samuel Parker

William White presided, Samuel Provoost being absent because of illness. Parker's document was laid before the convention early in the first session, and Parker managed to deflect criticisms that the recommendation of Edward Bass as Bishop of Massachusetts and New Hampshire had not been endorsed by any laymen.



William White

Two letters from Samuel Seabury were read to the convention, and it was apparent that Seabury had misunderstood something from reading the journal of the 1786 convention. Seabury's status had been questioned briefly at the 1786 convention, and the discussion had been cut off quickly and laid to rest. Behind this questioning was a distinction between the English apostolic succession and the Scottish one, a distinction that was of interest only to the British. Specifically the Scottish succession descended from the English one, but the two groups got involved at some point in a political argument over the "correct" line of succession to the British throne; the English bishops swore allegiance to one line (the "juring" bishops), and the Scottish bishops swore allegiance to the other (the "nonjuring" bishops). The distinction between juring and nonjuring was not of concern to the United States.

The delegates disposed of this issue emphatically. The journal says, "Resolved unanimously, That it is the opinion of this Convention, that the consecration of the right Rev. Dr. Seabury to the Episcopal office is valid."

The question of Bass's nomination as bishop was referred to the committee of the whole. All speakers

spoke warmly of proceeding with the consecration once Connecticut had joined with the other states. White as president was not permitted to speak, but he had a hesitation that he communicated to others during breaks. It seems that some oral agreements were made with the Archbishop of Canterbury at the time of the consecration of Provoost and White. One of those agreements was certainly that the number of such consecrations in England would be at most three. Provoost and White felt that the agreements obliged them to have at least three done in England before proceeding with any consecrations in the United States. White's memoirs delicately refer to a standoff, saying that a number of speeches implied "that the result of the deliberation must involve the acquiescence of the two bishops of the English line; while it was thought by the only one of them present, that no determination of theirs would warrant the breach of his faith implicitly pledged, as he apprehended, in consequence of measures taken by a preceding convention."

After lengthy discussion William Smith offered the committee a resolution with five resolves: one saying that a complete order of bishops is in place, a second saying that the three bishops are fully competent to carry out all duties of bishops in the United States, a third saying that the churches in the convention should do their utmost toward granting "every just and reasonable request of their sister Churches in these States," a fourth asking the three bishops to consecrate Bass, and a fifth providing for addressing the archbishops and bishops in England to find out whether Provoost and White are under any further obligation and whether any such an obligation can be removed. This matter was then set aside for the second session.



William Smith

The other matter needing attention in the first session was the constitution, which was to be rewritten to respond to Seabury's objections. One inspired idea in the rewrite gave more prominence to the position of bishops in the General Convention while leaving the laity sufficiently involved. This outcome was accomplished by recognizing two separate houses in the constitution, a House of Bishops and a House of (Clerical and Lay) Deputies. It is not clear where this notion came from. The arrangement superficially resembles the division of Congress into the House of Representatives and the Senate, but on closer inspection it more closely resembles the division of the British Parliament into the House of Commons and the House of Lords. In any event the division of the governing body of the Episcopal Church into two houses was to take effect as soon as there were three bishops in states adhering to the ecclesiastical constitution.

A second inspired idea in the rewrite was to allow states to be represented only by clergy without penalty. This outcome resulted from using language in the constitution saying that states are "entitled to a representation" by both clergy and laymen and then by introducing a formula for counting votes that did not penalize a state that by choice, illness, or accident had all its representatives of one kind (clergy or laity) at a particular convention.

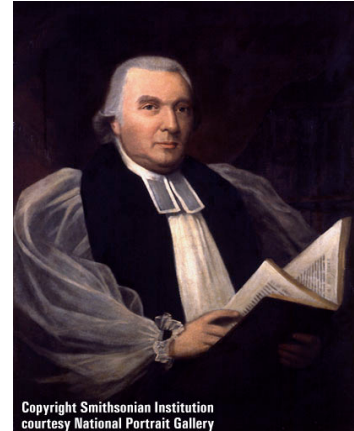
On August 11 White wrote a brief but warm letter to Seabury concerning the requested consecration of Bass and telling of the unanimous invitation that would be coming shortly. The letter of inquiry from the convention to the archbishops and bishops of England and an accompanying letter from White are dated August 14. William Smith sent Seabury a lengthy personal invitation to the second session, detailing what had been done and why. That letter and the official invitation from the committee of the whole to Seabury and the Connecticut clergy are dated August 16. Seabury responded positively to White on August 27, asking him to thank Smith for his letter and saying that he hoped to see Smith in person soon.

Second Session of the Third General Convention

Acting on the invitation, Seabury attended the second session of the convention on September 30, as did two other clergy from Connecticut and also Parker, who continued to represent Massachusetts and New

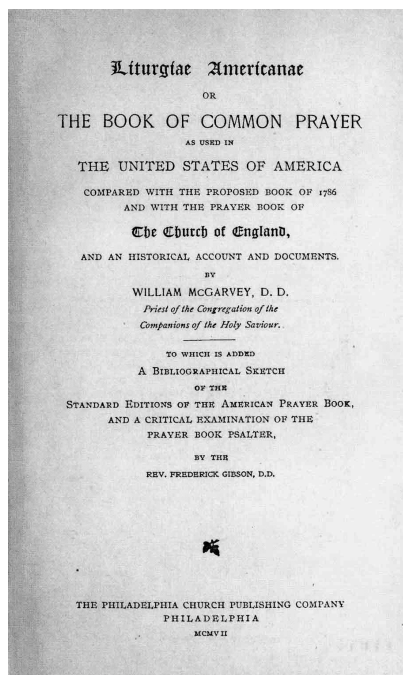
Hampshire. All these people produced credentials as deputies, and Seabury produced his Letters of Consecration, which were read and ordered to be recorded. The convention then resolved that it would go into a committee of the whole the next day "on the subject of the proposed union with the Churches in the States of New Hampshire, Massachusetts and Connecticut, as now represented in Convention." The next day a subcommittee of five with William Smith as chairman conferred with the deputies from the New England states, and it reported on October 2.

The result from the subcommittee was a clarification of the voting powers of the House of Bishops---that the two houses were to function as equals. Seabury wanted it to be explicit that the House of Bishops could propose legislation to the House of Deputies and could also disapprove proposals from the House of Deputies. The constitution was amended to allow the first but not all of the second: to address a concern expressed from Virginia, the amended constitution provided that legislation could be passed over a veto of the House of Bishops by a four-fifths vote of the House of Deputies. This was not quite satisfactory from the point of view of top-down organization, and Seabury made his view clear on the point. The outcome was that this side condition would be included for the time being but would be taken up at a later General Convention after delegates had had a chance to confer with their states. With the amendment in place, Seabury and the others from New England signed a document assenting to the constitution on behalf of their states' churches, and the union was complete.



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Samuel Seabury



Liturgiae Americanae

use. In conference the House of Deputies was adamant about omitting this creed, and Seabury reluctantly agreed to its omission. Seabury was successful, on the other hand, in replacing the core of the service of Holy Communion by the Scottish version. The resulting 1789 *Book of Common Prayer* includes some elements of the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer* and some elements of the Proposed Book of 1786. Comparing the three texts in detail is a book-length project and was carried out in W. McGarvey's 1907 classic *Liturgiae Americanae*.

When the convention reconvened on Monday, October 5, there were now three bishops, one of them still absent because of illness. Accordingly the two bishops at the meeting withdrew and formed the House of Bishops. They agreed that the presidency of the House of Bishops would be determined by seniority for the time being, and Seabury was therefore the president. William Smith was elected president of the House of Deputies. A Standing Committee was created to handle recommendations of people to be consecrated bishop when those recommendations could not be acted upon in timely fashion by a General Convention; it was given instructions to be inclusive rather than exclusive. Also some canons were passed that fleshed out the constitution. Other than those items, the main remaining business of the convention was the preparation of a *Book of Common Prayer*.

About this topic White's memoirs summarize, "The journal shows, that some parts of it were drawn up by the House of Clerical and Lay Deputies, and other parts of it, by the House of Bishops. In the latter, owing to the smallness of the number and a disposition in both of them to accommodate, business was despatched with great celerity; as must be seen by any one who attends to the progress of the subjects on the journal." Seabury wanted the Athanasian Creed included in morning and evening prayer, and the House of Bishops proposed an amendment introducing it with a rubric that permitted its

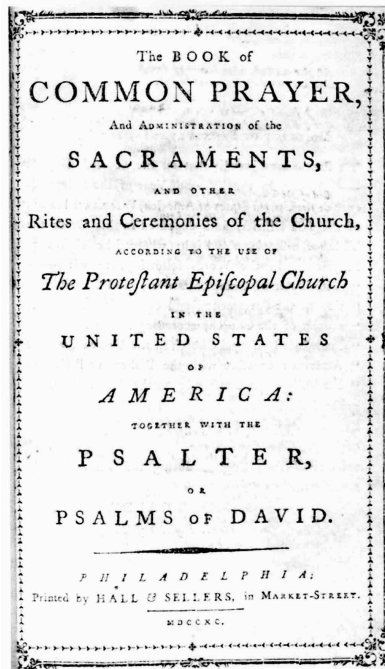
The preface of the 1789 *Book of Common Prayer* was based on Smith's preface to the *Proposed Book*. About half of that version was omitted, since there were fewer alterations than before, and a few sentences were modified. Most sentences in the new preface, however, come directly from the 1786 original. That preface remains in place today. It is dated October 1789 and contains the following principle that guided its writers, namely that "this Church is far from intending to depart from the Church of England in any essential point of doctrine, discipline, or worship; or further than local circumstances require."

On the last day of the convention, October 17, 1789, a committee was appointed to edit and publish the book, and the new *Book of Common Prayer* went into use on October 1, 1790.

--Tony Knapp

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1. Samuel Parker: Picture courtesy of the Diocesan Library & Archives, The Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts.
2. William White, oil painting by Gilbert Stuart, 1795, Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts: www.episcopalchurch.org/78716_ENG_HTML.htm.
3. William Smith, from a copy of an oil painting originally by Gilbert Stuart about 1802, University of Pennsylvania archives: www.archives.upenn.edu/img/smithwmimg.html.
4. Samuel Seabury, oil painting by Raalph Earl, 1785, Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery: www.episcopalchurch.org/78716_ENG_HTML.htm.
5. Title page of W. McGarvey, *Liturgiae Americanae*, 1907: justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/Liturgiae_Americanae.htm.
6. Title page of 1789 *Book of Common Prayer*, first edition, 1790: accessed from justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/bcp.htm.



Book of Common Prayer, First Edition



Founding of the Episcopal Church, Epilogue

The matter that Samuel Parker had raised for the Third General Convention in 1789 concerning the consecration of further bishops was resolved in a different way from what was proposed. It was announced at the beginning of the first session of the convention that David Griffith, bishop elect of Virginia, had resigned his position.

Thus in principle Virginia might nominate a new candidate for bishop who in fact could afford to go to England. This Virginia did. It selected James Madison (1749-1812), a second cousin of the fourth President, as bishop elect. Madison was approved by the Standing Committee, sailed to England, and was consecrated there in 1790. Edward Bass meanwhile resigned his post as bishop elect of Massachusetts and New Hampshire, having allowed his name to be used only to facilitate the unification of the Protestant Episcopal Church.

Griffith for his part had come to Philadelphia in July 1789 as a delegate but became ill and could not attend the first session. White's memoirs say that Griffith died in White's own house during the session rather unexpectedly from "inflammatory rheumatism, which passed to his head during sleep." The date of death was August 3, and William Smith delivered the sermon at the funeral in Philadelphia's Christ Church on August 4.

The Archbishop of Canterbury used Madison's visit as an occasion to respond orally to the letter from the Third General Convention about mixing juring and nonjuring bishops. Madison reported to White in a letter in December 1790, "A few days before I left London, the archbishop requested a particular interview with me. He said, he wished to express his hopes, and also to recommend it to our Church, that in such consecrations as might take place in America, the persons who had received their powers from the Church of England should be alone concerned. He spoke with great delicacy of Dr. Seabury; but thought it most advisable, that the line of bishops should be handed down from those who had received their commissions from the same source."

At about this time one of the lines of succession to the British throne died out, and the question of juring vs. nonjuring subsided as an issue. White's memoirs say, "It was afterwards supposed, that the sense of the archbishop was fully accomplished by the presence and the assistance of the canonical number of the English line; and the matter was so understood by Bishop Madison. Besides, the question had changed its ground, by the repeal of the laws against Scottish bishops; and by their reception in their proper character, in England. This happened after Bishop Madison's visit to that country."

The first consecration of a bishop in America was of Thomas John Claggett of Maryland, done in 1792. All four American bishops were in attendance---Madison, Provoost, Seabury, and White---and the sense of the archbishop in the previous paragraph was thereby carried out. The formal records of apostolic succession, however, had to name three bishops for the consecration, and the ones named were Provoost, Seabury, and White. Seabury died in 1796 without being involved in the consecration of any further bishops. However, he had ordained many ministers and had confirmed a countless number of people.

South Carolina eventually changed its collective mind about bishops and elected someone to the position; this person was consecrated at the 1795 General Convention. Vermont, which then had but one clergyman, sought to have its person consecrated as bishop at the 1795 convention. That request was declined on the grounds that Vermont had not yet acceded to the ecclesiastical constitution. The General Convention forthwith instituted a rule that a state could not have a bishop until it had at least six clergymen.

William Smith's move to Maryland from Pennsylvania in 1780 was only one of several dramatic moves in an extraordinary career. Smith had first come to public attention in 1753 by publishing a pamphlet "A General Idea of the College of Mirania" in response to a call for ideas for the curriculum of what was to

become Columbia University. Benjamin Franklin was intrigued by Smith's ideas, and in 1755 he invited Smith to serve as the first Provost of the newly chartered College of Philadelphia. Smith's move to Maryland in 1780 was occasioned by the suspension of the college charter. In 1789 the charter was restored, and Smith returned to his position as Provost. In 1791 the college merged with the University of the State of Pennsylvania to become the University of Pennsylvania, and Smith's position was a casualty of the merger. Smith's reputation as a writer and speaker was so great that every delegate to the Third General Convention in 1789 signed a statement urging Smith to prepare a book of his sermons; each signer agreed to buy the book if he should write it. Benjamin Franklin died in 1790, and despite an earlier falling out between Franklin and Smith over political differences, Smith was chosen to prepare the official American eulogy to Franklin, which was delivered in Philadelphia in 1791 before an assembly of President George Washington, both houses of the Congress, the Pennsylvania legislature, and assorted dignitaries. In his last years Smith took an interest in city planning and philanthropy, developing the borough of Huntingdon in south central Pennsylvania. He had bought 400 acres there in 1767 and had named the borough in honor of a countess who had earlier given money to the College of Philadelphia. At the time of the purchase, he merely leased out the land in question, but in the 1790s he sold lots and made gifts of land to churches of various Christian denominations. He died in 1803 without ever becoming a bishop. Toward the end of his life, he completed the draft of his book of sermons and other writings, and it was published months after his death under the title *The Works of William Smith, D.D.* It includes his 1753 pamphlet and his eulogy of Benjamin Franklin. The book is available online through www.google.com/books.

Edward Bass, having resigned his nomination as Bishop of Massachusetts and New Hampshire, was later nominated again, and he was consecrated in 1797. He died in 1803 and was succeeded in 1804 as bishop by Samuel Parker, who died later that same year.

Samuel Provoost took ill in 1800 and resigned his position as rector of Trinity Church Wall Street. He attempted to resign as Bishop of New York, but that request was refused in 1801 by the House of Bishops, which made up a new rule that bishops cannot resign. Instead, an assistant bishop was appointed, who then succeeded Provoost upon Provoost's death in 1815.

The tradition established by Seabury and White that the senior bishop is the Presiding Bishop lasted into the twentieth century, with the one exception that a special rule was used at the 1792 General Convention to allow Provoost to be Presiding Bishop. Depending on interpretations, the records thus show that the first few Presiding Bishops were White from July 28, 1789, to October 3, 1789, Seabury from October 5, 1789, to September 13, 1792, Provoost from September 13, 1792, to September 8, 1795, and White from September 8, 1795, until his death on July 17, 1836.

The church constitution of 1789 provided that the General Convention would meet in September every three years. However, this rule had to be changed because of recurring epidemics of yellow fever in Philadelphia each summer and fall starting in 1793 and continuing for a number of years thereafter. The General Convention scheduled for 1798 had to be postponed to 1799, and the delegates from New England were unable to attend the one for 1801 because travel between New York and Philadelphia was forbidden. Accordingly it was proposed in 1801 and affirmed in 1804 that the General Convention would thereafter occur in May of every third year, starting in 1808.

It was at the convention of 1808 that the rule was repealed that previously had allowed the House of Deputies with a four-fifths majority to pass legislation over the objection of the House of Bishops.

The expression "Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America" was adopted as the official name of the church in 1814, partly to help the Diocese of Virginia with its real-estate problems. In 1967 the church constitution was amended to allow "The Episcopal Church" as an alternative name.

New editions of the *Book of Common Prayer* for the United States appeared in 1892, 1928, and 1979, always with the same preface. The one in 1892 involved only small changes, and the one in 1928 eliminated the vow of obedience for the wife in the marriage ceremony. Extensive changes did not

occur until the 1979 edition. For the first time in the 1979 edition, the church is identified as "The Episcopal Church."

--Tony Knapp