

The Presbyterians

~ Chronology, before 1900 ~

- 1684 Although disputed by some, the Rehoboth church in Maryland claims to be the first of American Presbyterian churches. Many Scotch-Irish refugees found sanctuary in East New Jersey.
- 1690 By this date, there were five Presbyterian churches in Maryland, two in Virginia, two in Delaware, one in Pennsylvania, one in New Jersey, and one in South Carolina.
- 1706 The first presbytery of the Presbyterian Church in the United States was organized, largely through the efforts of Francis Makemie, a Presbyterian missionary based out of Virginia's Eastern Shore.
- 1716 A synod of four presbyteries was organized.
- 1720 Between 1700 and 1720, Presbyterians established 37 additional churches -- in Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania, New Hampshire, New York, South Carolina, and New Jersey.
- 1736 A colony of Presbyterians came into North Carolina from Ulster, Ireland, settling in Bladen and Duplin counties. At about the same time a group of Scotch-Highlanders began to settle in Cumberland County.
- 1769 Beginning at about this time, southwestern Pennsylvania was rapidly settled by immigrants from east of the Allegheny Mountains who were mostly Scotch-Irish Presbyterians.
- 1789 The first General Assembly, made up of four synods, was organized.
- 1801 In New England, a plan of union and mutual assistance was entered into by the Congregational and Presbyterian churches. Under this plan, Congregationalists going West or South usually went into Presbyterian churches.
- 1861 The Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America was formed by 47 Southern presbyteries of "Old School" Presbyterians.
- 1869 The Colored Cumberland Presbyterian Church was organized by 20,000 black members of the pre-Civil War Cumberland Presbyterian Church.

~ Records, Resources ~

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) was organized June 10, 1983, when the Presbyterian Church in the United States and the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America united in Atlanta.

Presbyterians often recorded vital records in their Session Minutes. Sometimes genealogical information was entered into a separate register kept by the clerk of the session.

Under the governmental system of the Presbyterian church, each congregation has a local session made up of elders, with the pastor serving as moderator. The session governs the local church. Presbyteries are made up of congregations in a local district; they examine, ordain, and install ministers, and they review reports from sessions. Synods review the presbytery records, organize new presbyteries, and are involved in the administration of denominational matters.

Not until late in the twentieth century have the Presbyterians made uniform provisions to preserve local records. Consequently, local church records are generally quite scattered.

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