CHAPTER TWO

The Brick Church on Beekman Street (1766-1856)

Part One: Before the Revolution (1766-1776)

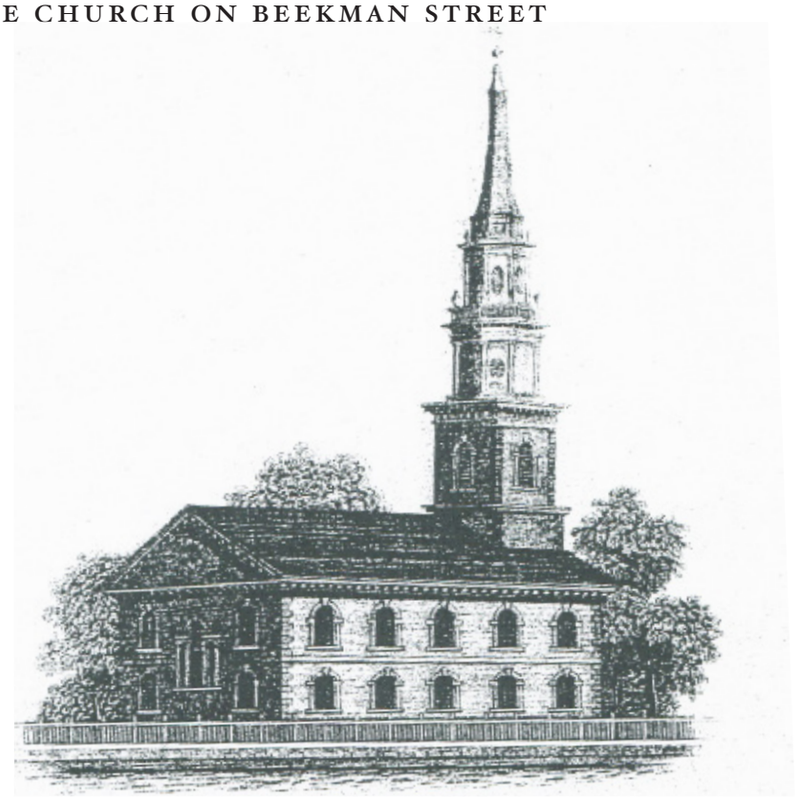
The New Church

With the arrival of John Rodgers the growing Wall Street Church with more than 300 communicants began to look seriously into means of accommodating the expanding congregation. This involved three major concerns: where to put a second meeting house, how to get a charter for the combined enterprise and how to finance the new site and building. The second was probably a non-starter from day one. But that didn't stop anyone from trying. Under date of March 18, 1766 the ministers, elders, deacons and trustees of the Church, in a further attempt to secure a charter, directed a petition to the King. The King's Privy Council turned it over to the Board of Trade, which managed the Crown's colonial affairs, and the request was denied on August 26, 1767 after objection by the Bishop of London.

The matter of a site proved easier to resolve. A petition dated February 19, 1766 was addressed to the City's Common Council asking for a grant of land for a church and burying ground. Consideration was given to two vacant parcels of which one, adjoining the Common (later City Hall Park) and facing south along Beekman Street was preferred as it adjoined one developed area and another soon to become the civic center of the City. The civic center area was to become the site of the new City Hall and had already provided a location adjoining the north side of the Common for three buildings in a row: the plain Georgian brick Bridewell criminal prison built in 1775, the poor house completed by 1736 and a debtor's prison built in 1760 that was regarded as "the finest public edifice of its day." Trinity Church had built its St. George's Chapel further to the east on Beekman Street in 1752 and St. Paul's Chapel somewhat further south at Broadway and Ann Streets in 1764-1766. A short-lived theatre had been built at the corner opposite the site of the new church at Nassau and Beekman in 1753.

The location of the new church originally bordered on suburbia although developed residential areas clustered northeast along the Bowery almost as far north as the new church was from the foot of Broadway. To the northwest, however, habitation was almost non-existent except for a few blocks west of Broadway. With the amazing growth of the City the perspicacity of the church leadership in selecting this soon-to-be central site became apparent. On February 25, 1766 the property was deeded to the ministers, elders, deacons and trustees of the Church (for want of a single corporate lessee) under a perpetual ground lease reserving to the City a ground rent of £40 a year with the further stipulations that a "Church for the worship of Almighty God" be built on the lot and that the lot should not be put to "private secular uses."

It was not a particularly auspicious time to embark on such a venture in many ways. Although wartime prosperity had overcome the massive recession of the 1730's and 40's and the subsequent



Engraving of the "Brick Meeting – Beekman Street" as it later appeared. Looking from the northwest before the addition of the Old White Lecture Room. Drawn by A.J. Davis, engraved by W.D. Smith for the New-York Mirror.

slump that followed the end of King George's War in 1748, the City's economy had fallen again into deep depression accompanied by business failures, inflation and unemployment following the British success in capturing Montreal in 1760 and expelling the French from Canada. Even the thriving local sugar and molasses smuggling business was in the doldrums after crackdowns by the authorities. To cap the climax business came to a virtual standstill for months after massive protests began over the new taxes imposed by the British Parliament in the Stamp Act. It became effective in November 1765 and the national Stamp Act Congress (which had begun a few weeks earlier just a few paces from the Wall Street Church in the City Hall) gave impetus to a national boycott of British made goods. The Stamp Act was repealed shortly after the deed for the new church's site was signed only to be replaced by the still more onerous measures of the new British Chancellor of the Exchequer Charles Townshend.

In this unpromising environment, the cash to build the new brick edifice, called at first "the New Church," was solicited door to door by John Rodgers and other officers for several months. Apparently the shortfall of this effort was covered initially by borrowings on the credit of leading members. The foundation of the building was begun in the fall of 1766, the cornerstone laid by Rev. Rodgers and Peter van Brugh Livingston in 1767 and the completed structure dedicated on the first day of January 1768. In its January 4, 1768 issue the *New York Mercury* reported:

> On Friday last, being the first day of this year, the Presbyterians of the city, in communion with the established Church of Scotland, opened their Brick Church, lately erected on the green. The Reverend Mr. Rodgers conducted the worship and preached from these words of the Prophet Haggai: 'I will fill this House with my Glory, saith the Lord of Hosts.' There was a very crowded audience and by the solemnity of the occasion and the address of the Preacher, the whole assembly seemed to be impressed with a mixture of Seriousness, Gratitude and Joy, more easily conceived than expressed, and highly becoming the dedication of a House to the worship of Almighty God.

Prospective members of the congregation of the New Church were directed to Peter van Brugh Livingston to arrange for the completion of purchase of their pews, a process apparently fairly fully subscribed at the time. The architect of the new edifice has not been conclusively identified but the senior John McComb, whose family had something of a specialty in designing churches, seems the most likely. It seems fairly clear that his son John who was a member, Trustee and long serving Deacon of the Church was the Church's architect later on.

The building of the New Church did not lead to the establishment of a new and separate religious

association. Instead, the two congregations on Wall Street and Beekman Street remained a single undivided ecclesiastical organization with a single Session, Board of Deacons and Board of Trustees. The two collegiate ministers belonged equally to both, each alternating between the Churches on Sunday morning; only one Sunday afternoon service was held, alternating between the two churches. Administratively, however, some degree of separation occurred at an early stage. For example in 1773 John Broome was appointed Treasurer of the "New Church" to collect pew rents in place of Peter Van Brugh Livingston; Jeremiah Platt was appointed Treasurer of the "Old Church"; and in 1774 the Clerk of the "New Church" was refused a raise in salary. The composition of the two congregations varied to a degree. Indications are that the Wall Street Church continued to attract an older, wealthier, somewhat more conservative group, more of Scotch-Irish extraction, and the Beekman Street Church, a younger crowd of predominantly New England ancestry living more in the newer northern areas of the city.

The year 1768 was, to say the least, not a particularly good one for New York City. The government had run out of cash, counterfeiting had become rife and customs duties had to be paid in specie beginning in the summer. By the fall the City faced a severe economic crisis. This made things tough for the New Church. On the bright side, however, the triumph of Rodgers and his devoted band in building the attractive new place of worship was crowned in December of 1768 when at the age of 41 he received from the ancient University of Edinburgh the degree of Doctor of Divinity. A signal honor for an American, it was the result of the initiative of George Whitefield who returned to New York City in 1763-65 and again in 1767-70) and a commendatory letter from the American representative in London, Benjamin Franklin. In 1768 just after it was built, the Brick Church was one of only fifteen Christian churches in New York City: 3 Presbyterian, 3 Anglican, 3 Dutch Reformed, 1 Methodist, 1 Baptist, 1 Lutheran, 1 Moravian, 1 Quaker, 1 French.

It is not clear exactly how much the "New Church" cost all told. Moreover, before Dr. Rodgers arrived a proposal was made in 1765 for the Wall Street Church to add three adjoining lots to be used for burial purposes. The Congregation agreed and directed the Trustees to borrow the £430 required to do it. Then, as noted above, in order to finance the construction of the New Church on Beekman Street it was necessary to supplement Dr. Rodgers' door-to-door efforts by borrowings. Thereafter additional borrowings were also made on the credit of several substantial members whose bonds were outstanding for some time after the New Church was built. (The two churches, not being incorporated, could not obligate themselves legally and technically speaking had no property to mortgage.)

This presented a serious financial problem. It was estimated in June 1769 that after finishing the construction of the New Church (except the steeple) the joint congregation's debt would be at least £3,703:5:10. With interest, salaries and annual contingency the running costs of the two churches would exceed revenues for a deficit of £53:15:1 per year. This led to a cost cutting effort to keep things going. A major part of the solution proposed by the Trustees was to charge Rev. Treat £50 for the rent of the manse he had occupied rent-free after Rev. Bostwick's death. This would have put quite a dent in his £200 a year salary. After a full dress congregational debate in which his offer of £20 was accepted he graciously concluded the meeting by agreeing to pay £40 to settle things amicably after being assured that the church really wanted to keep him.

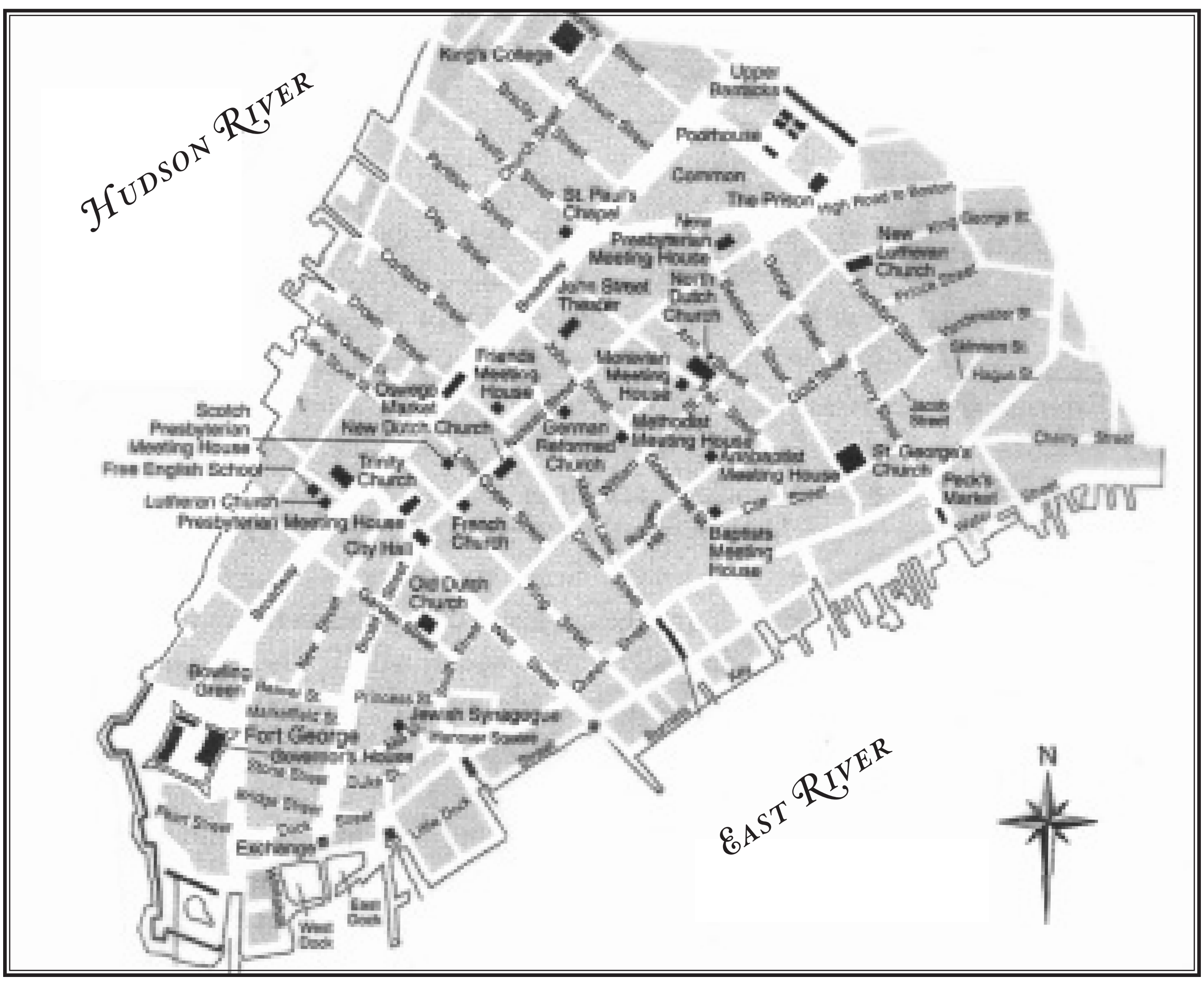
Finally, in August 1771 the Church fathers concluded that the best way of getting rid of the debt was to resort to a lottery – using the neighboring colonies to help out. And so it was that in January 1773 Alexander McDougal was able to render an accounting of the New Castle lottery that had been

conducted for the purpose with a gross value of £20,000 and a profit for the two New York Churches of £3,030:11:8-3/4 before deductions of £435:14:11/2 including £41 and change for Dr. Rodgers' trip to New Castle, Delaware and £160 to The United Churches of New Castle. The balance appears to have been enough to pay off the outstanding bonds and no doubt in the unsettled political climate of the day all concerned breathed a hearty sigh of relief along with their fervent prayers of thanks.

Prelude to Revolution

THE LIFE of both the Wall Street and Beekman Street Churches prior to the Revolution was necessarily colored by the momentous political trends and upheavals that occurred during that period with important roles played by officers and members of the two Churches. The "Presbyterian" faction became the Whig political party that contended with the loyalist DeLancey group friendly to the colonial administration and the established Anglican Church.

It would be difficult, even if one were so inclined, to disentangle the history of the Wall Street Church and the Brick Church on Beekman Street from the history of pre-Revolutionary politics in New York. Many of the more important political leaders opposed to the colonial government and its state-sponsored Anglican Church were Presbyterians. Moreover, the defense of the interests, vital to the two Churches, of Protestant dissenters usually involved the defense of self-governing local insti-



Map locating principal churches in Manhattan before the Revolution.

John Morin Scott (1730-1784). Member of "The Triumvirate" or "Presbyterian Junto" of prominent New York lawyers opposing the Stamp Act and other British policies before the Revolution. Later served in the War, invalided out and served in several high State offices. A draftsman of the first New York State Constitution.

William Livingston (1723-1790). Member of the "Triumvirate" of Presbyterian lawyers active in opposing the policies of the Crown before the Revolution. Member of the national Constitutional Convention 1787. First Governor of the State of New Jersey, serving until 1790.

tutions such as the colonial Assembly from control by elements friendly to the policies of the British monarchy. In the struggle to avoid troublesome interference by Crown and Parliament and their colonial representatives there was little interest at first in achieving absolute independence from Britain. This was certainly the case prior to the Treaty of Paris of 1763 ceding Canada and most of France's other claims to North America to Britain, which eliminated the most serious potential external threats to the province and the consequent need for imperial protection from foreign aggression.

Shortly after John Rodgers' installation the Stamp Act Congress met in New York City in October of 1765. Its purpose was to protest and consider action to counter the Stamp Act, passed by the British Parliament, which was to take effect by the first of November. Officers and members of the Wall Street Church were key players in the ranks of local opposition to the stamp tax measure and to the Quartering Act of the same year whereby the colonies were required to pay the cost of maintaining the troops Britain stationed there to protect and maintain its government. Three of these were the most prominent. Called the "Presbyterian Junto" or the "Triumvirate," William Livingston, John Morin Scott and William Smith, Jr. were all leading members of the local bar.

Livingston was a member of the Wall Street Church, the other two were Trustees. They were all graduates of Yale, which was a dirty word in some quarters. Judge Thomas Jones, the Loyalist Anglican historian, refers to Yale as being at the time "a nursery of sedition, of faction, and of republicanism." William Livingston's brother the wealthy Philip Livingston was one of the most prominent members of the Wall Street Church and, as noted above, had organized the Whig party in 1758, which between 1760 and 1768 controlled the provincial Assembly. He was a delegate, with his cousin, Robert R. Livingston, to the Stamp Act Congress. He was also active in establishing the New York Chamber of Commerce in 1768 as a response to the depressed economic conditions following colonial efforts at non-importation and non-consumption of British goods to counter enforcement of the further restrictive British legislation passed after the 1766 repeal of the short-lived stamp taxes.

Another prominent third-generation Presbyterian, Alexander McDougal, self-made merchant, privateer and later banker, was a founder with his co-religionist John Morin Scott of the Sons of Liberty in 1765. This was a radical organization largely of artisan and lower class membership which played a vital role in offsetting through mass meetings and coercion of a less savory variety the political influence of the Loyalist DeLancey faction. In another effort to counter the Anglican political influence William Livingston, John Morin Scott and McDougal spearheaded the organization in co-

operation with other Protestant groups of the short-lived Society of Dissenters active from 1769 to 1770. Although it was ineffective in its objectives including abolition of the tax to support the Anglican Church, the movement (which was also led by William's brother, Peter van Brugh Livingston and his nephew Peter R. Livingston) was a significant harbinger of the growing secularization of politics through nondenominational organization.

As a result of his energetic organizing and propagandizing in opposition to British policies, McDougal was at the center of one of the greatest of colonial tempests in a teapot. Charged with criminal libel for authorship of an anti-government publication in February of 1770, he became a martyr and was besieged, while in jail awaiting trial, by well-wishers who brought their hero copious quantities of food, drink and other necessaries, including 45 pounds of candles from the ministers of the Brick Church. Providentially, the printer of the offending tirade died and the embarrassed authorities were happy to have the case dismissed for lack of evidence of McDougal's complicity. At one point, in show of solidarity, the Trustees of the Church held two of their monthly meetings in the New Jail, where their Clerk, McDougal, was being held again after refusing to answer charges before the Assembly.

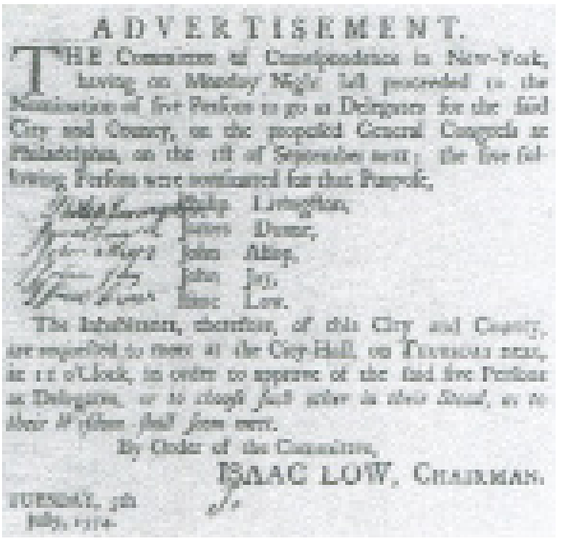
SPELL-CHECK

It would appear that General McDougal was a member of the Wall Street and not the Brick congregation. His name has been variously spelled in the church records and elsewhere. Thus "MacDougal Street" was named for him "McDougald" appears in Trustee minutes and "McDougall" is preferred by many historians. The usage here is that of Rev. Knapp based on the list of church members in 1770 which shows "Reinold McDougal, Alexander McDougal, his son and John McDougal, his grandson. A later acknowledgement to his signature on a legal document in 1809 or so in the Church's possession is signed, possibly in his handwriting, "Alexander McDougall." Take your pick.

In 1770 Parliament repealed most of the hated taxes that had generated so much colonial opposition. The local economy improved and when Governor Dunmore showed up in October, and again the next year when his replacement, Governor Tryon, appeared, the officers of the Church (which had a large pew reserved for the royal representative) presented respectful addresses of welcome expressing unequivocal loyalty to the Crown. The second new Governor replied with assurance that "the numerous Presbyterian Churches in this colony and particularly those in this City shall constantly meet with my countenance and protection" – a very far cry from the earliest days.

By the summer of 1772 the two churches experienced a "great non-payment of [pew] rent" which was in due course met by a decision to sell off the pews of the delinquent parishioners in February of the next year. By mid-1773 events took an even more somber turn. By then the British East India Company was broke. Atrociously managed, it was sitting on 17 million pounds of unsold tea and owed staggering amounts, mostly to the government on loans the Bank of England had refused to renew. This would ordinarily have meant little to the Colonies but the hard truth for the British government was that the Company was "too big to fail." Its bankruptcy would torpedo the credit markets. So Parliament approved a stimulus package of loan aid and government regulation and, to offload all that tea, passed the Tea Act. That measure gave the Company the right to sell directly to America free of British import duties but subject to the existing American import duty of three pence per pound. The resulting cost of tea to American consumers was far less than they had previously been paying for Dutch tea that had been obligingly smuggled in duty-free by the well-established local bootlegging industry. Nevertheless, to some it was not the money, it was the principle of the thing.

The Tea Act was widely interpreted by patriots as an effort to sustain the unwelcome principle of



ADVERTISEMENT.

THE Committee of Correspondence in New-York, having on Monday Night last proceeded to the Nomination of five Persons to go as Delegates for the said City and County, on the proposed General Congress at Philadelphia, on the 1st of September next; the five following Persons were nominated for that Purpose,

Philip Livingston,
James Duane,
John Alsop,
John Jay,
Isaac Low.

The Inhabitants, therefore, of this City and County, are requested to meet at the City-Hall, on TUESDAY next, at 12 o'Clock, in order to approve of the said five Persons as Delegates, or to chuse such other in their Stead, as to their Wisdom shall seem meet.

By Order of the Committee,

ISAAC LOW, CHAIRMAN.

TUESDAY, 5th July, 1774.

Nomination of New York delegates to the Continental Congress, 1774.

taxation without local consent. The Sons of Liberty, with McDougal and ultra-radicals such as Isaac Sears in the lead, proceeded to destroy one shipload of tea and procured the return of another. More importantly, the Livingstons with more moderate forces began to organize local cooperation with the other colonies in opposition to the measure. At first, moderates together with the DeLancey group obtained control of a 51-man Committee whose five nominees (including Philip Livingston and John Jay, an Anglican lawyer who was William Livingston's son-in-law) went to the First Continental Congress in Philadelphia in July 1774. The stage for national independence was set.

By February of 1775 the provincial Assembly had for all practical purposes evaporated as a governmental force when it refused to name delegates to the Second Continental Congress. At the direction of a mass meeting a provincial convention was convened on April 20. The Governor then dissolved the Assembly. After news of the Battle of Lexington and Concord arrived a mass meeting of about 8000 was held in front of the old City Hall at the head of Broad Street. Under its sanction a Committee of 100, of which Peter van Brugh Livingston was President, is shortly put in place to govern the City. By May 23 the First Provincial Congress begins to govern the province, with Peter van Brugh Livingston as its President. In that Congress Presbyterians were influential but not dominant. Five of the twenty-two delegates from New York City were Presbyterians as were three of the eight-man Committee on Safety chosen to act on its behalf. However, the Committee of Safety of the Second Provincial Congress was dominated by John Morin Scott and Alexander McDougal.

While all this was going on, the Synod, meeting in Philadelphia close by the Second Continental Congress, issued a rather moderate (some might say wishy-washy) pastoral letter dated May 22, 1775 composed by President John Witherspoon of the College of New Jersey, Dr. Rodgers and a minister from North Carolina, David Caldwell. It piously urged Presbyterians on the one hand to be loyal to King George and on the other to support the Continental Congress and, thirdly, to conduct war if it came in a "spirit of humanity and mercy." The Churches were also primly exhorted, while they were at it, "to discourage luxury in living, public diversions and gamming of all kinds, which have so fatal an influence on the morals of the people." Wary of revolution, this was perhaps the last gasp of conciliation by the professional, mercantile and elite classes whose cautious instincts avoided disloyalty until it became clear that separation from Britain was inevitable: in short that common cause with the more radical artisans and farmers was essential to save the country from the disastrous colonial policies of the British government.

From another point of view, the moderation of the General Assembly's action must have come as a surprise for, in the opinion of the Tory historian Judge Jones, Rodgers for one was "a person of rigid Republican principle, a rebellious, seditious preacher, a man who had given more encouragement to rebellion than any other republican preacher, perhaps, on the continent." It was evidently in any event the most "encouragement to rebellion" that Witherspoon, who a year later signed the Declaration of Independence, and "rigid Republican" Rodgers could get from their colleagues of the cloth. Presbyte-

rians were of course not the only religionists to take a view on the politics of the time. In England the subject of taxation of the colonies was also controversial. John Wesley, father of Methodism, weighed in with a blast in 1775 against American republicanism: "A Calm Address to Our American Colonies." According to Wesley, "Our sins will never be removed until we fear God and honour the King." This advice was widely condemned even in England and, by then, had little impact on events.

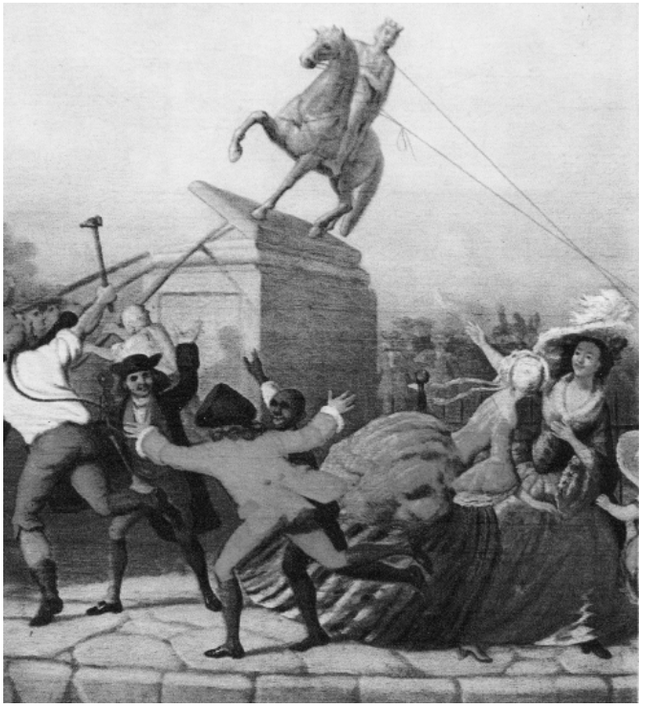
By the end of 1775 citizens of both persuasions – loyalist and patriot - have departed the city in such numbers that church services can no longer be held. The Presbytery calls for a "day of fasting and prayer" on November 24, 1775 "on account of the melancholy situation of our public affairs." A sermon is preached at the Wall Street church in the morning and at the Beekman Street church in the afternoon. As a brave concession to normalcy, the annual collection for the poor is also taken at the same time. The last Session meeting before hostilities reached New York is held December 11, 1775 and the last Trustee's meeting on January 4, 1776.

Part Two: Revolution, Reconstruction and Regeneration (1776-1800)

Revolution

In July of 1776 in Philadelphia the Continental Congress, to which Philip Livingston was a delegate, adopted the Declaration of Independence. It was also adopted by the new Provincial Congress now, in effect, the New York State Legislature on July 7th. The elderly Peter van Brugh Livingston, elected the first State Treasurer, began the heroic effort to provide the finances and currency of the State. His nephew Peter R. Livingston, a Trustee of the Church who like his uncle had been President (1776-1777) of New York's Provincial Congress, succeeded him in 1778. News of the signing of the Declaration of Independence on July 4th reached the City the next day and on July 9th a mob destroyed the great bronze statue of King George III erected at the foot of Broadway in the rapprochement following repeal of the Stamp Act.

By the end of July 1776 New York was a fortified armed camp. The "Tories" that were left met with physical violence and Trinity Church shut up, its prayer books burned and ministers "scattered abroad." Civilian control was nebulous. A British fleet of something like 100 ships had arrived in New York harbor in June with thousands of troops. All but a fraction of the loyalist element had left and the patriot civilians would be told to leave by General Washington on August 17th. The life of the Presbyterian Churches in Wall Street and Beekman Street was in a state of suspense for the duration of the war. On July 14th we find Dr. Rodgers preaching one of his last sermons before the City fell to the British, admonishing his hearers to put their trust in God in the battles to come. The war put paid



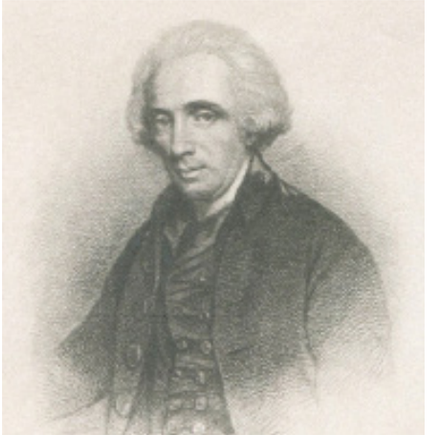
Patriots in 1776 tear down the statue of King George III in the Bowling Green. Detail from an oil painting by William Walcott 1854; collection of Gilbert Darlington.

to the final effort to obtain a royal charter for the Presbyterian Church. The necessary approvals in London had been obtained but the Crown's attorney in New York dithered over implementation until hostilities broke out. By then it was too late.

Meanwhile, William Livingston had removed to his estate near Elizabethtown, New Jersey in 1772 from which he was elected a delegate to the Continental Congress. He was chosen as the first Governor of the new State of New Jersey in August 1776 by the legislature elected under its new republican Constitution. He was re-elected steadily until his death in 1790. A delegate to the federal Constitutional Convention in 1782, he was instrumental in its ratification by New Jersey.

For all its central location and political importance as a powder keg for the Revolution, New York City and province were not then pre-eminent in size or commerce compared to other major settlements along the Atlantic seaboard. New York City's volume of trade was smaller than Boston, Philadelphia and Charleston. New York and New Jersey had half the population of New England and a third that of Virginia and Maryland. Moreover, although the "Presbyterian Junto" was one of the most potent forces asserting the rights of the colonials before the Revolution broke out, the elements which united to oppose Parliamentary measures were by no means a monolithic unit when it came to actually breaking with Britain and asserting independence. That was a risky business both politically and economically. Thus, for example, we find such distinguished figures as Philip Livingston, not keen on independence and even less favorable to many of the populist, rabble rousing, radical patriots who were not exactly "the right sort." Although at the forefront of the Colonies' opposition to the policies of the King's ministries, it was only with reluctance that he signed the Declaration of Independence.

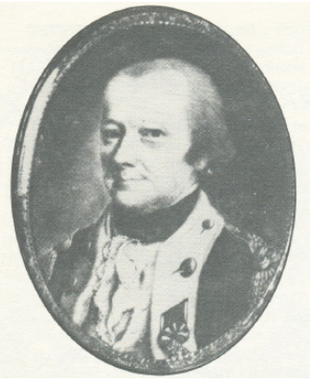
On the other side was a minority of Tories such as William Smith, Jr., lawyer, historian, polemicist and one of the most prominent and influential members of the Wall Street congregation – his grandfather a founder and his distinguished jurist father a staunch supporter. Indeed William Smith, Sr. a member of the Governor's Council from 1753 to 1767, had presided over the congregational meeting which called John Rodgers in 1765. After herculean efforts to counter the Anglican influence and the colonial measures of the British Parliament, the younger William Smith attempted without success to moderate the separatist movement and broker peace between the increasingly irreconcilable colonial factions and the Crown. Thus, he advised John Morin Scott in the drafting of the new state constitution but continued to attend meetings of the Governor's Council. Finally, after unsuccessfully attempting to retire to his country estate for the duration of the war, he was confined for a time in Livingston Manor for refusal to break his oath of allegiance to the monarchy. After 1778 he was in New York City. There, beginning in 1780, being appointed Chief Justice and a member of the Governor's Council, he vainly tried to restore civil government with a loyalist flavor. Departing with the British at the end of the war, he was ultimately Chief Justice in Canada from 1786-1793.



William Smith, Jr. (1728-1793). Prominent lawyer who opposed Crown policies before the Revolution. A loyalist, he later became Chief Justice in Lower Canada.

During the Revolution the congregation and ministers of the Wall Street and Beekman Street Churches were dispersed and many of the men took on military or governmental responsibilities. Around fifty served as officers or in the ranks of the Continental Army. Dr. Rodgers, after several months in 1776 as chaplain to General Heath's brigade, at least before the British drove the Continentals from Manhattan, served for a time as chap-

lain to the New York State Constitutional Convention (April 1777) and to the first State Legislature. He also served as chaplain to the latter's Council of Safety. Like many others whose livelihoods in New York City vanished with hostilities, he spent most of the war in occasional quarters and employments. Spending his time in "such temporary pastoral work as offered itself," a not entirely uncontentious experience, Rodgers ministered to the Church in Amenia, New York for two years after a brief spell in Sharon, Connecticut. "Very courteous and winning in his manners," according to one Amenia observer, the good doctor spent the last years of the war in Danbury, Connecticut and Lamington, New Jersey. Rev. Treat also spent time during the war as a military chaplain.



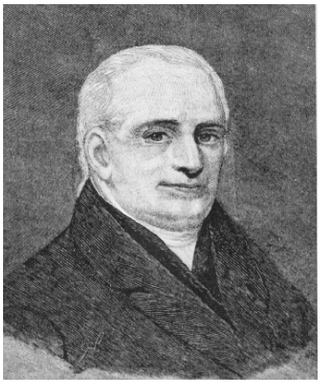
Alexander McDougal (1731-1786). Merchant, energetic opponent of the Crown; Major General in the Revolution and later first Chairman of the Bank of the New York. A trustee of the Presbyterian Church.

Perhaps the "most valuable player" award would go to Major General Alexander McDougal, who had been colonel of the first troops raised in New York. He took an important part in the battles of Long island, White Plains and Germantown and in the New Jersey campaign. McDougal's successful generalship in the evacuation of the American army from Long Island, after its catastrophic defeat there by the British in the early days of the war, helped to preserve it from total destruction at one of the most critical moments in American history. Washington later commended him as a "brave soldier and disinterested patriot." John Morin Scott, invalided out of the army as a Brigadier General in 1776, was prominent as a draftsman of the new State Constitution (assisted by the fence-sitting William Smith, Jr.). He became a state Senator, member of the Council of Safety, Secretary of State and delegate to the Continental Congress.

Surprisingly, given Dr. Rodgers' well-known strong views on the righteousness of the revolutionary cause, there appears to have been a concept among loyalist Presbyterians in the City during the British Army occupation to invite him to come back. In addition to William Smith, Jr. they included Andrew Elliot, Collector of the Port and later Superintendent of Police, Samuel Bayard, Deputy Secretary of the Province and Joseph Hallet, a merchant. According to Judge Jones, Elliot, then Lieutenant Governor and Smith, who had been appointed Chief Justice, proposed with the approval of Governor Robertson that Dr. Rodgers be invited to return and conduct worship at the Brick Church which would be restored to the extent required for this. The plan, it is said, came to naught when Dr. Booth, Superintendent of Hospitals, declined to vacate the Church until its equivalent had been provided elsewhere. Rodger's reaction to such an overture to join Benedict Arnold can only be imagined.

Entry of General Washington into New York City on Evacuation Day, November 25, 1783. The address of welcome was delivered by Daniel Phoenix, Elder, Treasurer and Trustee of the Presbyterian Church.

With the surrender of General Cornwallis at Yorktown the lengthy process of making peace and returning life to normal began. Following the Treaty of Peace, the British evacuated New York City on No-



Daniel Phoenix (1742-1812). Elder, Treasurer and Trustee of the Church after the Revolution, he was City Chamberlain from 1784 to 1809.

vember 25, 1783. General Alexander McDougal and numerous other Sons of Liberty helped to escort General Washington when he came into the City to view the British departure and shortly thereafter to bid farewell to his officers at Fraunces Tavern. McDougal was soon to become first President of Alexander Hamilton's brain child: The Bank of New York. Meanwhile, on the day after "Evacuation Day" the Address of Welcome to General Washington was delivered by the prominent merchant Daniel Phoenix, Elder, Treasurer and Trustee of the bifurcated Presbyterian Church who was also the City's first City Treasurer following the war and for twenty years City Chamberlain.

Reconstruction and Incorporation

THE WAR had left in a shambles the two Churches, along with large portions of the City, much of which had been destroyed in two massive conflagrations of unknown origin one of which had destroyed their manse. The Brick Church had been turned into a hospital and the Wall Street Church into a riding school and later a barracks. Nonetheless, preparation for the return to post-war normalcy began even before the British evacuated the City. On November 13, 1783 a meeting was held at "the new Brick Church on the call of some of the Trustees to provide means for putting their Church in order for Public Worship."

Pending the necessary restoration work on their sanctuaries (the interiors were virtually destroyed), the congregation of both Presbyterian Churches met on alternate Sundays at St. George's and St. Paul's Chapels on the invitation of the Vestry of the still devastated Trinity Church. So it was that Dr. Rodger's famous sermon, for which he received a gracious note of thanks from General Washington himself, was preached on the national Day of Thanksgiving and Prayer held December 11, 1783 at the Episcopalian St. George's Chapel. The sermon in recounting God's blessings during the war calls to mind in places a succession of episodes on the Weather Channel memorializing great events in history that have been controlled by the forces of nature. It was a mad success and was widely distributed.

In January of 1784 in one of its first actions the first New York State Legislature, dominated by anti-Anglican elements, created the University of the State of New York (of which Dr. Rodgers became the long-time Vice Chancellor) and placed the control of King's College (re-named Columbia) under the Regents of the University, a group largely drawn from areas outside New York City. The Regents proposed a highly controversial slate of candidates for the presidency of the College, a step nullified when Alexander Hamilton's more conservative party won the Legislature and allowed the College to have its own board of governors free of Regents control. In a related development, Hamilton's law office had by 1786 discovered evidence leading to the dismissal of litigation brought by the New York Attorney General on the instructions of the first post-war Legislature seeking possession of the King's Farm area claimed by Trinity Church to whom it had been given by the egregious Lord Cornbury.

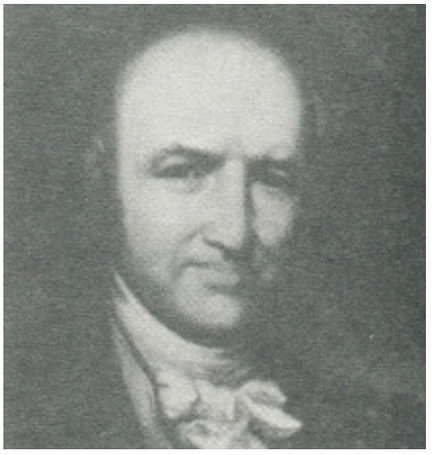
The first Legislature of the State of New York also lost little time in repealing the colonial legislation that had established the Anglican Church and in providing self-incorporation under a gen-

A LETTER TO DR. JOHN RODGERS

Philadelpa 5th May 1784
Dear Sir
The Thanksgiving Sermon which you did me the favor to send me I read with much pleasure, & pray you to accept my thanks for it, & the favorable mention you have been pleased to make of me therein.
My compliments await Mrs. Rogers – With great esteem and respect
I remain dr Sir –
Yr most obedt & affect Ser
Go Washington
The Rev Docr Rogers

eral enabling act for religious bodies of that and other faiths. Accordingly, after sixty years of frustration the three collegiate congregations filed their Certificate of Incorporation as a single corporate entity early in 1784 under the name "The Corporation of the First Presbyterian Church in the City of New York." Once this was done it was necessary to elect Trustees to serve as directors of the enterprise. This was done on May 3, 1784 at a meeting of the male members at the Brick Church. Nine Trustees were elected, most of whom had served as trustees in their individual capacities before incorporation. The President was Peter van Brugh Livingston, who had been a member of the first unincorporated Board of Trustees established in 1746. Another early Trustee was Robert Lenox, one of the wealthiest men in town. Lenox was first President of the Mutual Insurance, first fire insurance company in the City and President (1798-1814) of the Saint Andrew's Society.

The Clerk of the new board was Henry Brockholst Livingston, a well-connected fledgling lawyer who was a son of William Livingston, the first Governor of New Jersey. Henry had spent the first part of the war as secretary to his brother-in-law John Jay on his mission as U. S. plenipotentiary to France and Spain. On his return he was captured and spent the rest of the conflict as a paroled prisoner of war. His rise in his profession was phenomenal. A judge of New York Supreme Court in 1802, he became an Associate Justice of the United States Supreme Court from 1807 to 1823 serving in the shadow of the great Chief Justice John Marshall. (As noted above, John Jay, who was a prominent Anglican patriot and Federalist Governor of New York, and with whom Henry was not on good terms until late in life, had been the first Chief Justice.) He became a Trustee of the Wall Street Church after the separation of the three collegiate Churches in 1809 until 1818 and was President of its Board of Trustees from 1813 to 1818.



Robert Lenox (1759-1839). One of the wealthiest men in the City, was the first President of the Mutual Insurance (its first fire insurance company) and the Saint Andrews Society (1798-1814).

The Treasurer of the new Board of Trustees, later its President, was the prosperous merchant John Broome. He was an Elder whose brother Samuel was a Trustee and like most of the members a merchant as well. John Broome had been a Lieutenant Colonel during the war and had outfitted privateers. He became Lieutenant Governor of the state for three terms, President of the New York Insurance Company and a founder of Tammany Hall.

John Broome (1738-1810). First Treasurer of the collegial Church Corporation's Board of Trustees. A prosperous merchant, Revolutionary War officer, Lieutenant Governor of the new State of New York and President of the New York Insurance Company.

Sufficient repair had been completed to permit services to be held at the "New Church" beginning June 27, 1784. The first sermon was a heartfelt exegesis on the Biblical text "I was glad when they said unto me, let us go into the house of the Lord" (Psalm 122). The repair work, with the inflated cost of materials at the time, cost £1,300, raised by the energetic solicitation of Dr. Rodgers. The demand to purchase pews was greater than the supply pending restoration of the more heavily dilapidated Wall Street Church. However, a year later it too had been repaired and refurbished at a cost of £2,500 and some adjoining land sought to enlarge the burial ground. The first post-war worship service there was held June 19, 1785. The problem of re-adjusting the rights of the pew holders in the light of the high costs of restoration was dealt with differently in the two churches. In the

Brick Church all of the pews were to be auctioned off; pew holders were to be credited with the residue of the value of their pews after deducting their share of the costs of repair. In the old Wall Street Church a pew holder could keep his old pew by paying the arrears in rent plus $300 toward the cost of repair in the case of "single pews" and $500 for double ones.

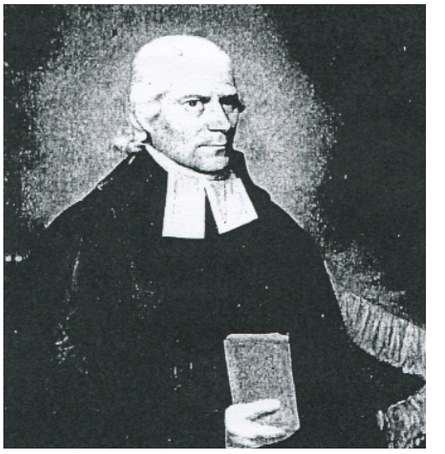
Recognizing the difficulties faced by their neighbors in recovering from the British occupation during the war, the Trinity Church in a handsome gesture of accommodation in April 1786 resolved to convey to the Beekman Street Church a nearby lot (in Robinson Street later 3-5 Park Place) for a parsonage. The property so received in June 1787 was sold by the Church in 1803 on terms providing for an annuity or ground rent of $250.00 to be paid to the senior pastor in perpetuity. At that point Rev. Rodgers refused the supplement in view of the "encumbered situation of the congregation," asking that the income be used to pay off the church debt. Ultimately, the Church's interest in the property was sold pursuant to contract dated September 24, 1924 with the proceeds to Brick of $5,000 to be held in trust by its Corporation for the use of its senior pastor for the time being forever.

The Brick Church on Beekman Street (1800). Rear view before the addition in 1810 of the Old White Lecture Room. (St. Paul's Chapel right rear.) Engraving by Montbaron & Gautshi © Collection of the New-York Historical Society.

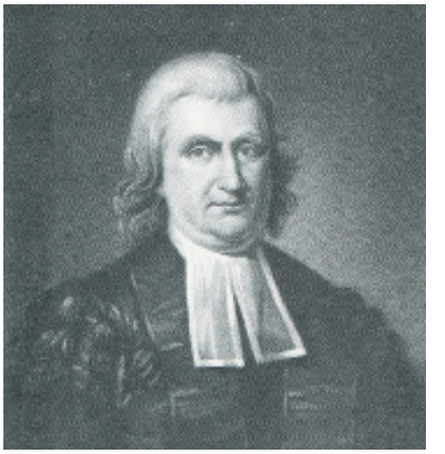
Dr. Rodgers' Church

Dr. Rodgers labored after the Revolution without pastoral assistance prior to renovation of the Wall Street edifice. Rev. Treat, who had served as a military chaplain for some time, was desired not to return on the stated ground that the congregation could support but one minister. That was not the whole story. For one thing he had confessedly in the past fallen victim to intemperance. In any event, on July 1, 1784 the congregation authorized representations to the Presbytery the upshot of which was that on October 20, 1784 Presbytery dissolved his pastoral relation with the Church. He was dismissed to another Presbytery but not admitted. He died not too long afterward.

With the reopening of the Wall Street Church more help was indeed needed for the aging Dr. Rodgers. Soon after, on August 10, 1785, the very Scottish Rev. James Wilson was installed as a colleague. Unhappily, the spirit was willing but, as his lungs were not, he was obliged to move south two and a half years later. Wilson's preaching was faintly praised by one critic as "methodical," although like many of his contemporaries in the City he used no notes. After some debate about a suitable successor (neither of the two original contestants having, in the end, been called) the congregation was moved by the Holy Spirit to call Mr. (later Dr. – Yale 1791) John McKnight to join Dr. Rodgers as a colleague "to the entire and high satisfaction of all parties." Dr. McKnight, duly installed on December 2, 1789, appears to have been dignified without being unduly refined and was comfortable with all sorts, an essential to his calling. His preaching, worthy but apparently not exactly exciting, is described as lucid, logical and dispassionate with a biblical rather than philosophical orientation.



Rev. John McKnight, D.D. Collegial pastor of the three united churches with Dr. Rodgers from 1790 to 1809. He was elected Moderator of the General Assembly in 1795.



Rev. John Witherspoon D.D. (1722-1794). Only clergyman or college president to sign the Declaration of Independence. Prominent patriot, President of the College of New Jersey at Princeton and a principal founder of the national Presbyterian denomination after the Revolution.

It was an appropriate time, in view of the rapid growth of the Presbyterian denomination to establish a broader system of government. Accordingly, in May of 1786, a committee was appointed with Dr. Rodgers as Chairman to prepare a new plan of organization headed by a General Assembly with subordinate judicatories as at present: synods governing presbyteries in their respective areas. A second committee chaired by Dr. John Witherspoon was to revise the theological doctrines. In due course the Synod (then the denomination's highest governing body) in May 1787 adopted a slightly revised version of the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. On May 21, 1789 the new denomination's General Assembly met in Philadelphia for the first time under the new Constitution adopted in 1788 and Dr. Rodgers was elected Moderator. At that time there were over 400 churches, 177 ministers and 16 Presbyteries.

In Dr. Rodgers' first years there were two worship services at the Brick church, one on Sunday morning and on alternate Sundays another in the afternoon. Dr. Rodgers and his colleague preached alternately in the Wall Street and Brick Churches on Sunday mornings. Later at some time it appears that there may have been three services, including one in the evening which was later discontinued by Dr. Spring's day. Dr. Rodgers had begun the custom of a weekly class for the instruction of children in the Shorter Catechism and a popular public lecture on the catechism on Thursday evenings. Some of these week-day meetings may well have been held at the Brick Church but the extent to which they were held at Brick is not known. There were also private associations for prayer established in different localities. Dr. Rodgers conducted the mid-week lecture himself until 1799. By the end of his ministry a "social prayer-meeting" had begun to be held in seven Churches in rotation on the second Wednesday every month "at candle lighting."

Outreach continued to be important. In 1789 the two Presbyterian churches began their "Charity School" in rented space for the education of their poor children. Two legacies and a subscription

DR. WITHERSPOON

As in more recent times some of the great men of the Presbyterian Church in America came to speak at the Brick Church when it was on Beekman Street. In July of 1787 Dr. Manasseh Cutler attended an evening lecture there to a full house by Dr. John Witherspoon, pre-eminent theologian of the Presbyterian denomination, sole clergyman to sign the Declaration of Independence and first President of the College of New Jersey now Princeton. An unawed diarist, Dr. Cutler wrote that "He is an intolerably homely old Scotchman, and speaks the true dialect of his country, except that his brogue borders on Irish. He is a bad speaker, has no oratory and had no notes before him. . .yet the correctness of his style, the arrangement of his matter, and the many new ideas he suggested, rendered his sermon very entertaining." Dr. Witherspoon's entertaining subject was "Hypocrisy," of which he had doubtless plentiful experience. The Centennial History, pp. 79-80.

that collectively amounted to something over $2,000 financed the purchase of a lot during the next year between Cedar and Liberty Streets on Nassau Street and construction of a "decent two story brick building" big enough to house both the school and the instructor. A further legacy of $500 together with annual public collections supported the school for some time.

In other mission areas the ministers of the Presbyterian churches joined with others in supporting broader based organizations. As early as 1744, for example, the Scots Society of New York had been formed to give charitable assistance to their poorer countrymen; it was a precursor to the St. Andrew's Society established in 1756 to succor those of Scottish origin. Later on Dr. Rodgers was a founder and President from 1787 to 1809 of the Society for the Relief of Distressed Debtors (later called the Humane Society). Before expanding its horizons it provided imprisoned debtors with the necessities of life, legal assistance and in some cases financial relief while keeping an eye on the dreadful conditions in the jails. Rodgers was also an initiator and President of the Board of Trustees of the New York City Dispensary opened in 1791 at the corner of Beekman and Nassau Streets to serve the needs of the poor. In 1796 he became the first President of the New York Missionary Society, an effort of the Presbyterian, Baptist and Reformed Dutch Churches to assist Native Americans.

In a little while it developed that Dr. McKnight's strength was not equal to the increasing pastoral load involving not only three sermons on Sunday but also the care of a growing congregation. Accordingly, a third pastor was called by a "numerous and respectable" meeting of the Brethren of the Congregation. He arrived on January 3 and was ordained and installed on June 5, 1793. The choice had fallen upon Mr. (later Dr., Pennsylvania 1804) Samuel Miller. In contrast to Dr. McKnight he appears to have been something of a wunderkind. The son of a minister he had graduated with "first honors" after a year at the University of Pennsylvania which he had entered in 1788 and studied theology with his father. He had then been licensed to preach by the Presbytery of Lewes despite concern over his doubts about the portion of the Westminster Confession as then in force concerning marriage to a close relative of a deceased wife.

Called at 23 years of age, Miller was also uncommonly good looking. His manners we are told were "cultivated and graceful in a high degree, uniting the polish of Chesterfield with the dignity and sincerity of a Christian minister." Later he wrote a book on "Clerical Manners" which Dr. Sprague, an authoritative commentator of the day, considered "could never have been written by one who was less considerate and exact than himself." His preaching, said Sprague, was accomplished, done from memory and characterized by "an air of literary refinement that excited general admiration." By 1803 Rev. Miller had established his reputation not only as an eloquent preacher but as a brilliant historian with the publication of his monumental two volume survey entitled "A Brief Retrospective of the Eighteenth Century."

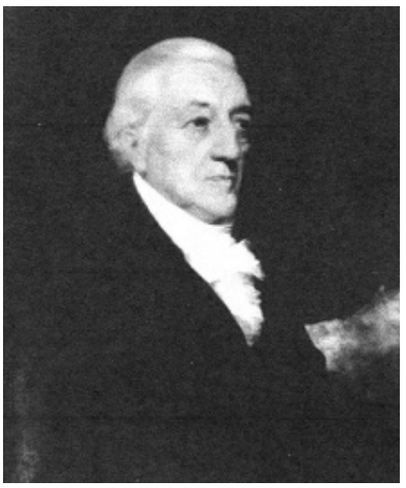
The seat of national government next door to the Wall Street Church: George Washington takes the oath of office at Federal Hall (1789).

Twilight of the Rodgers Ministry

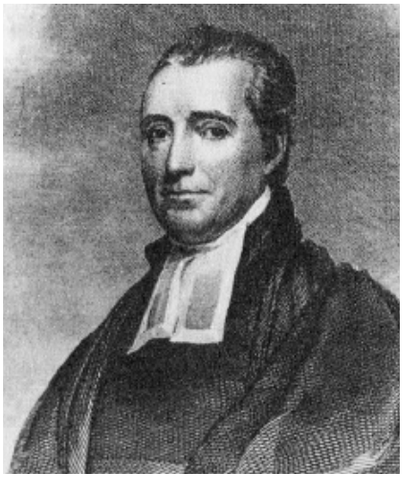
The two collegial Churches continued to thrive as events at home and abroad brought major changes to New York City, its churches and their congregations. In 1785 the City became the seat of the new national government. On April 30, 1789 George Washington took the oath of office as its first President a few steps from the Wall Street Church on the balcony of Federal Hall, the newly remodeled successor to the City Hall in which its congregation had worshipped seventy years before. Later that year the French Revolution had broken out. The Federal government soon departed to Philadelphia, and New York City, with its magnificent harbor the nation's principal import/export hub, began its rise to become the country's financial capital. After the Panic of 1792 the infant New York Stock Exchange moved into the Tontine Coffee House, which had just been built two blocks down the street from the Wall Street Church.

The departure of the national government may have been a relief in some ways to Dr. Rodgers, who had apparently at times been pressed into duty as a lobbyist in the interest of his Federalist protégé Alexander Hamilton. It is reported that the day after the great debate began in Congress over Hamilton's controversial "Report on Public Credit" Dr. Rodgers (who was a close friend also to Hamilton's philanthropic wife Elizabeth) expounded Hamilton's proposals to Senator William Maclay "as if he were in the pulpit." Rodgers' role in influencing New York State legislators (who moved the state government to Albany in 1797) is apparently unknown to his biographers, although he continued until he died as Vice Chancellor of the State University.

Apparently the Brick Church did not originally have a steeple, and if it once did it may or may not have survived the Revolution. Noah Webster described the Church in 1788 as "a genteel brick building. . .with a steeple not finished." In any event in 1793 the Church eventually decided to build, replace or enlarge it. The venerable Treasurer, Daniel Phoenix, was authorized in 1793 to borrow



Benefactor of the Rutgers Street Church and Rutgers College, Col. Henry Rutgers (1745-1830) was an Elder of the Church for many years. Portrait by Henry Inman, Rutgers University Library.



Rev. Philip Milledoler, D.D. (1775-1852). First Pastor of the Rutgers Street Church.

£2,400 to purchase a steeple. This apparently led to the installation or replacement of the original church bell. (It seems unlikely that, if a bell existed before the Revolution, it survived the depredations of the war.) An observer recorded that in January 11, 1794 a false fire alarm sounded throughout the City which was believed to have come "from trying the new bell in the Brick Meeting, which gave an alarm to the other bells." As will appear, what became of this bell is also now a mystery.

During the next several years the needs of the Presbyterian population in the developing northeastern part of the City led to the construction of a third church in that area on land donated for the purpose by Col. Henry Rutgers, a wealthy brewer prominent in the Dutch Church who became a Trustee and Elder in the combined churches shortly after it was built. In the winter of 1799-1800 the Trustees authorized borrowings of £4,595.13.3 to cover the costs of the Rutgers Street Church. An accounting in May of 1800 showed the total cost at £4,753.11. The congregation sought to raise the money for the new Rutgers Street Church by subscription and sales of pews; when it opened on May 13, 1798 all the pews were taken.

In 1805 Dr. Philip Milledoler, pastor of the Third Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, was called as a part of the collegial ministry of the three Churches at a salary of £1800 to minister to the Rutgers congregation. He was elected Moderator of General Assembly in 1808 succeeding Dr. McKnight and Dr. Miller who had served in 1795 and 1806 respectively. He served the Rutgers Street Church until 1813. Later he became President of Rutgers College (named for Col. Rutgers). Dr. McKnight had not been idle in other directions. From 1795 to 1799 he graced the chair in Moral Philosophy at Columbia. In 1805 he was given a leave of absence to work with the "Tuscarora Indians" under the sponsorship of the New York Missionary Society (a Protestant inter-religious group formed in 1796 of which Dr. Rodgers was first President). As will appear, he resigned to accept a call to Philadelphia in 1809.

A snapshot of Dr. Rodgers' Brick Church in the first years of the nineteenth century would see the great man ascending the high pulpit crowned with a sounding board in back. At the request of the Session and Trustees in 1765 he is in academic gown, curled wig, white clerical tabs and black kid gloves. He carries his sermon written in a miniscule hand within a small flame-stitch crewel pocket book. Dr. Rodgers had after arriving at the Wall Street Church abandoned the old custom, later resurrected but then thought unduly Anglican, of reading the scripture from the desk and delivering the sermon from the pulpit.

The afternoon service is being held today at Brick (last week the afternoon service was at the Wall Street Church) but the candles have not yet been lit. The walls are whitewashed and the only decoration is the great carved shield now in the Old Parish House with the inscription "Holiness to the Lord." The clerk, as the chorister or song leader was called, is seated at his elevated desk in center front, giving voice, meter and tune to the psalms to be sung, accompanied at times by a violin cello or orchestra and a very small paid choir. The service of worship is a combination of prayer, scripture, song,

sermon and offering but features a much longer discourse than we have now. Dr. Rodgers, a pulpit performer of great capacity, had remarkable abilities to stir the emotions as well as to improve the mind. It was common before he had concluded his lengthy work that both preacher and congregation were moved to tears. Collections, taken by the church officers, were limited. In early days each worshiper put only a single copper coin on the large pewter platter during the offering at the end of the service following the sermon and last prayer and song. The only other collections were for the work of the Deacons among the parish poor taken at the quarterly Communion services and after the annual "Charity Sermon" in December. The cost of operation of the Church was sustained principally by its pew rents.

Aside from the Charity School supported by the Church for the secular education of the poor children of the parish begun in 1789, the outreach of the Church consisted entirely of the work of the Deacons among the poor parishioners. Participation by the laity was confined to paying their pew rent, attending divine service, teaching the catechism to their children in the home and trying to live a Godly life. In 1791 the annual pew rents varied somewhat between the Wall Street and Brick Churches with the most expensive "below stairs" at Wall Street (£6) almost twice most of those at Brick (£3.12) and over five times the lesser ones (£1.15). Gallery seats were about the same (Wall mostly £1, Beekman between £1.4 and £2.4). The cost of trying to lead a Godly life was presumably about the same in both locations.

A principal work of the Session was the oversight of the morals of the congregation and extensive investigation of any perceived backsliding in the matter of regular church and communion attendance, temperance, marital fidelity, Sabbath observance and the like. Other offenses included keeping bad company, profanity, unchastity, card playing, theatre-going and occasionally heresy. The unrepentant offender, after counseling by a committee and ultimately trial before the Session, was either ex-communicated entirely or excluded from the Lord's Supper pending evidence of reform.

The role of the ministers in the Rodgers period was in many basic ways like that today – the preparation for and conduct of worship and other religious services, the administration of the sacraments, visitation of the flock and participation in the work of the Session. The number and length of worship and prayer services was, however, much greater than now and communion served far less

ARDEN V. ARDEN

One of the more notable expeditions of the Session into the toils of marital infelicity was incited by a submission from one of the collegial churches' more prominent members, former Trustee Thomas Arden in January of 1807. He announced that his wife Charlotte had left him without cause not to return. He asked the Session to investigate and suspend her Christian privileges. The Session having heard them both found that Mr. Arden's "unkind, indelicate and unjustifiable conduct" was "calculated exceedingly to mortify and provoke a woman of sensibility; and which must have rendered her living with him very uncomfortable." On the other hand it found that Mrs. Arden "on several occasions used irritable and unbecoming language to her husband and has not behaved with that patience, meekness and prudence which became her; but has often indulged in an acrimonious and provoking deportment, which had a tendency to increase instead of terminating the animosity between them." So it suspended them both "until they manifest a suitable sense of the impropriety of their temper and conduct." This did not inspire patience or meekness in Mrs. Arden who successfully appealed the Session's ruling a few months later. The Session in turn prepared an elaborate brief to appeal the Presbytery's decision to the Synod. Apparently counsels of moderation prevailed for at the end of the year Mrs. Arden upon examination was readmitted. Mr. Arden having repented was also restored to the joys of the sacrament and the town gossips were left to find some other hot topic to fuss about.

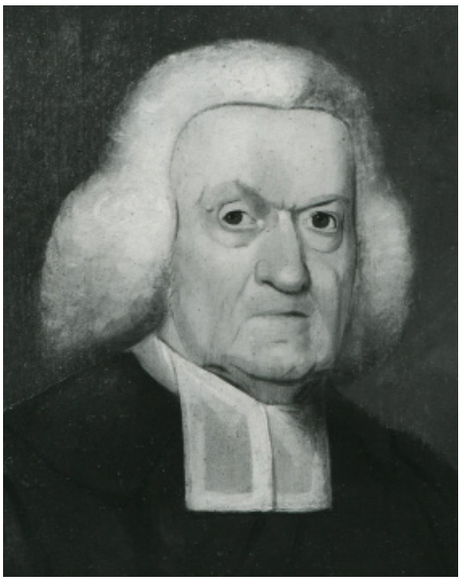
often. Dr. Rodgers, for one, devoted massive amounts of time to visitation, a function he "thoroughly and persistently" performed, often catechizing the entire family, as well as to soliciting new members. In addition, like many clergymen today, he was a prime mover in the higher elements of the denomination and in countless charitable and educational institutions outside of the church.

At the turn of the century, with the nation established and the City growing, external events were not a serious concern to the Church. The only exception was the impact of the massive epidemics originating in the dreadful sanitary conditions of the period which swept the City killing great numbers in 1791, 1795, 1798, 1803 and 1804. In 1798 alone yellow fever carried off 186 members of the Church. Then as now some men of the cloth like Dr. Miller, who had remained in town throughout the dreary days of 1798, were not slow to detect the blessing of God in the deliverance of those remaining after the calamity and the peril of His future vengeance for the manifold sins of the community: "the lewdness, the blasphemy, the gaming, the unprincipled speculation, the contempt of Christian duties, and the violation of the Christian Sabbath." A modern day list of cardinal sins would doubtless be somewhat different but for all of that Providence was to bring much better – and worse – to pass for Church and community to enjoy and survive in the coming century.

Part Three: Independence of the Brick Church: Gardiner Spring's Ministry on Beekman Street (1800-1856)

The Great Separation

To have three churches under common governance was hardly an unknown contrivance. It had been the custom in London for years to create "chapels of ease" to permit parishioners living at a distance from the mother church to walk to worship at a nearby sanctuary within the same parish. Trinity Church had adopted this strategy in building St. George's Chapel and St. Paul's Chapel, each a part of the Trinity Parish. Rev. Rodgers and his colleagues at the Wall Street, Brick and Rutgers Churches had successfully managed the pastoral duties at all three locations for many years. When it came time for the enterprise to seek incorporation the idea of separating the Churches was not adopted either before or after the Revolution and as late as 1793 it was rejected by the Trustees despite the statutory limitation on the capital and income of a single incorporated church. Instead the Church fathers appealed to the New York State Legislature for relaxation of the restriction which was duly granted (on March 6, 1793 and again on March 27, 1801).



Rev. John Rodgers, D.D. in his old age. Oil portrait in the possession of the Church.

Evidently the associate pastors, on whom with Dr. Rodgers' increasing years fell the growing burden of attending to the pastoral needs of more than one expanding church, were in favor of a separation, especially the vocal Reverend Samuel Miller. Dr. Rodgers, who continued to do his full share of pastoral work until his late seventies, was not so inclined. He didn't hesitate to put the case for unity with great force and no group wanted to part with him. In January of 1802 the Trustees voted in favor of a separation of the Rutgers Street Church from the other two "United Presbyterian Churches" but a congregational meeting rejected the idea.