

Devotion, Week of June 25, 2023

Rev. Jeanne Simpson

We are getting close to celebrating Independence Day in this country. This is the day on which our patriot forefathers declared independence from Great Britain in 1776. But the war really started in April 1775, when British troops and colonial militiamen in Lexington and Concord, Massachusetts kicked off the armed conflict, a year before. You may think the war ended when Cornwallis surrendered in 1781 at Yorktown. Surprisingly, that didn't end the war. The Treaty of Paris was signed on September 3, 1783, in which Great Britain formally recognized the independence of the United States. This conflict lasted 8 long years.

Twelve of fifty-six signers of the Declaration of Independence were Presbyterian, including the only clergyman, John Witherspoon. George Duffield of Philadelphia's Third Presbyterian Church (today's Old Pine Church) served as chaplain to the Continental Congress. John Witherspoon remained in the nation he helped create, leading efforts to formalize the Articles of Confederation and the U.S. Constitution after war was over.

Presbyterians had a lot to do with the American Revolution. As "Dissenters" from the established Church of England, many Presbyterians mistrusted British colonial power—and were not afraid to assert a right to religious freedom when it was threatened. Presbyterian influence in the colonies grew markedly in the middle decades of the 1700s, shaped by the Great Awakening and an influx of Scottish and Scots Irish immigrants, most of whom were Presbyterian. With words and actions—and sometimes with violence—these religious dissenters challenged colonial rule, and many felt moved to defy the status quo in the name of God.

Three of my ancestors fought in the Revolution: John Swink, who shod horses for the Patriot Army in Salisbury, NC; John Duckworth, who fought in the battles of Sullivan's Island, Ramsour's Mill, and King's Mountain; and Samuel Hoffman, who fought at the battle of King's Mountain. Jim's ancestor, Neil MacLeod, had come to America in 1774 and was persuaded by the royal governor to fight for the Loyalists, in exchange for free land grants in eastern N.C. and relief from taxes. As a tacksman (property manager/rental agent) from the Isle of Skye, this was too good a deal to pass up, so he joined up for the British. However, his unit was quickly defeated by the Patriots at the Battle of Moores Creek, and he lost all that land as a result. He and his Scots Presbyterian family and neighbors fled to "Sanctuary Land" in upper S.C. until after the war, when they signed an oath to the new United States of America and received new land grants.

Jeanne