

CONCURRENT SESSIONS: 11:00

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Pioneer Episcopalians and Their Clergy

The Rev. Roderic B. Dibbert

During the 17th century the first settlements in Connecticut were Windsor (1633) and New Haven (1638) united as a separate colony by the Royal Charter of 1662. The settlements were, ecclesiastically, an extension of the Massachusetts established Congregational Church, which had become independently puritan since its arrival from England. This denomination was the exclusive religious body in Connecticut until the General Assembly passed an Act of Toleration in 1708. By that time the first Anglican parish had been established.

The "Yale Converts" of 1722 began the spread of Anglicanism in Connecticut. Those Congregationalist ministers who received episcopal ordination from the Church of England in 1723 assumed the role of leadership in developing Anglican parishes throughout Connecticut.

The colonial Church of England (Anglican) remained a small entity throughout the years before the Revolution due to several factors: ordination by a bishop necessitated the candidate to make a hazardous voyage to England, and that ordination, prefaced by a thorough classical education, included an oath of loyalty to the English Crown, because of the establishment of the Church of England.

Most of the pioneer settlers of Connecticut's "Western Reserve" lands were members of the Congregational Churches of New England, if they were religiously affiliated at all. But there were exceptions to this rule in the several Episcopalian families who migrated to the Reserve before 1830. The early settlers of Cleveland, Ashtabula, Peninsula, Stow and the Boardman-Carfield areas are among those with which we are presently concerned.

The first services according to the Episcopal Book of Common Prayer were held by the settlers themselves, since the clergy of that denomination did not arrive until 1817, several years after the earliest migrations of Churchfolk. Thus 1817 marks the real beginning of the Episcopal Church in the Western Reserve, with the founding of parishes, some of which continue to exist in our own time.