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The Great Awakening

Revival in the American Colonies: 1727 - 1770

Perhaps the classic piece of devotional literature to come out of the Great Awakening was *The Life of David Brainerd* which was put together from Brainerd's journals by none other than Jonathan Edwards.

Brainerd spent the great part of his ministry among Native Americans.

Prayer, the prelude to revival

“My soul was very solemn in reading God’s word, especially the ninth chapter of Daniel. I saw how God had called out his servants to prayer and made them wrestle with him, when he designed to bestow any great mercy on his church.”

(Brainerd’s *Journal*, June 30, 1744)

*“My life, my blood, I here present,
If for Thy cause they may be spent,
Fulfill Thy sovereign counsel, Lord,
Thy will be done, Thy name adored.
Give me Thy strength, O God of Power;
Then let winds blow, or thunders roar,
Thy faithful witness will I be;
‘Tis fixed: I can do all for Thee! Amen
(George Whitefield)*

Diversity in the Founding of the Colonies

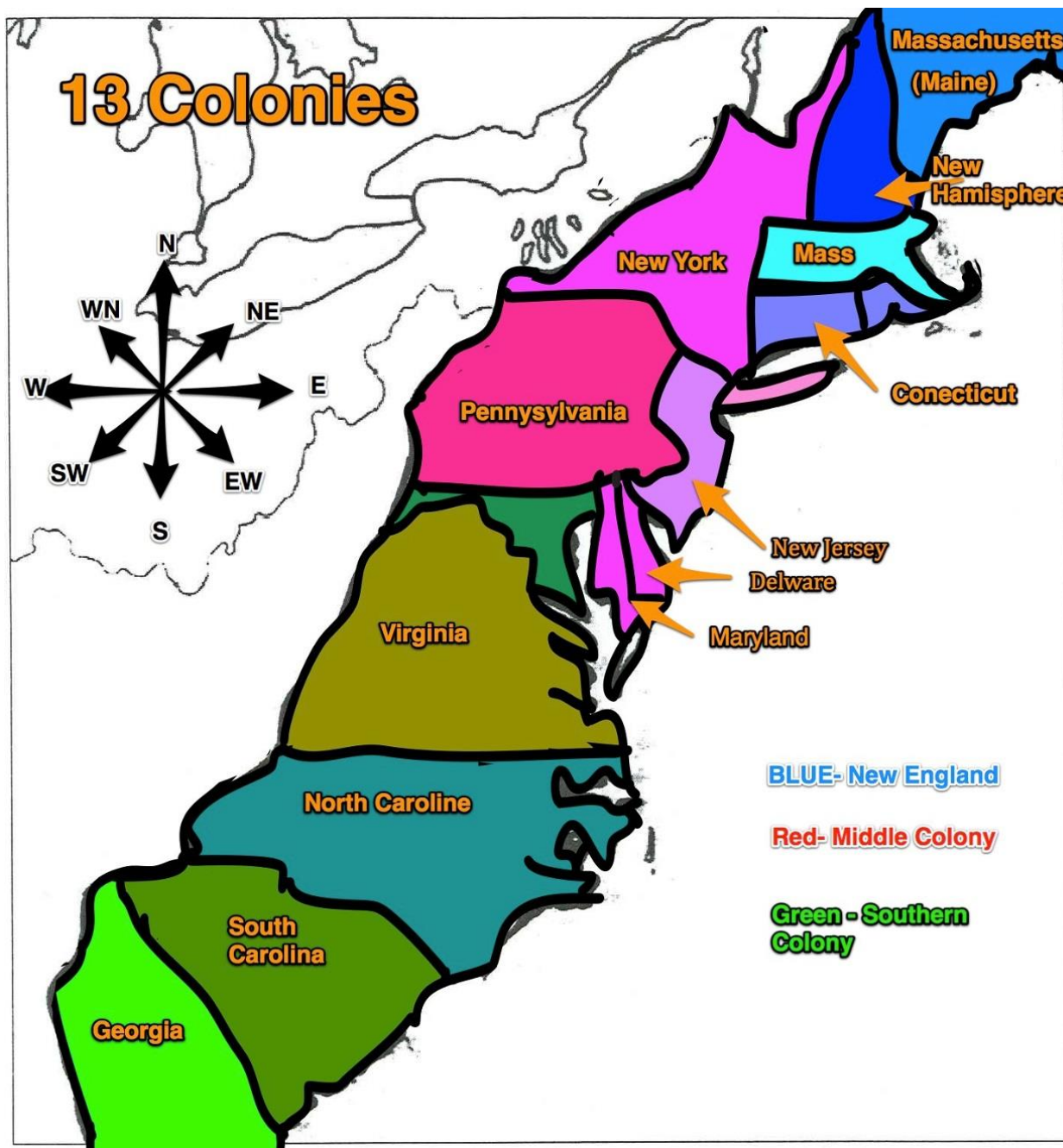
Middle Colonies

Many of the colonies were founded for religious reasons, but by a wide variety of religious groups.

What these groups share is that most are "Dissenters"

Presbyterians and Reformed groups are numerous and more influential.

Economy is farming and with rise of cities such as Philadelphia and New York, industry and trade.



New England Colonies

Founded for religious purposes by "Dissenters" of Puritan convictions.

Congregational Church
Government w. Established
Congregational churches

Economy based on small farms, trades and eventually industry and professions in growing cities

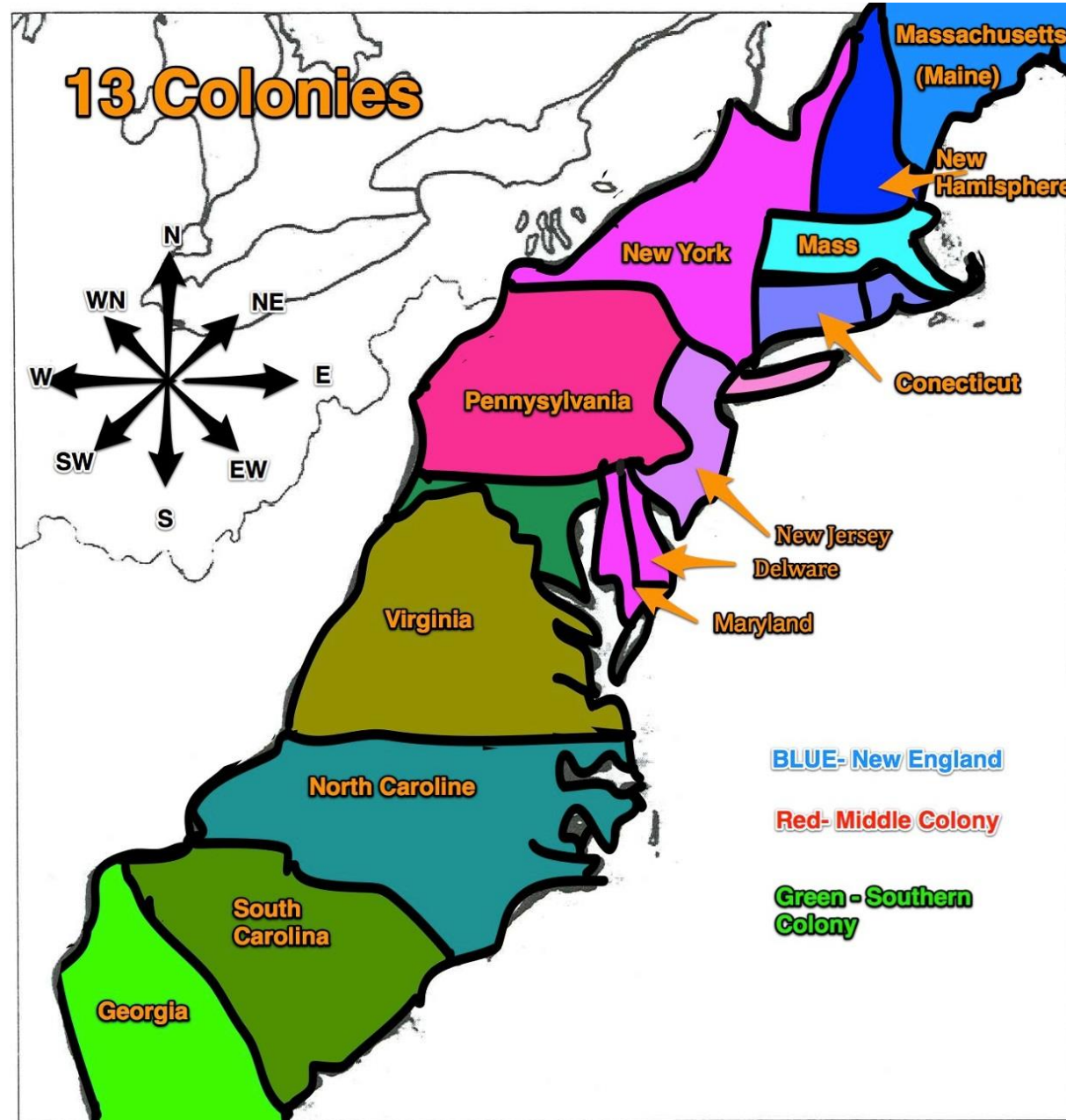
Southern Colonies

Founded largely for commercial purposes and not for religious purposes. Primary crop for export is tobacco.

Anglican Church Established and is the only church allowed. Dissenters have no freedom.

Church and Clergy Supported by profit from lands and taxes.

The State of Religion in the Colonies - 1720



Middle Colonies

There was decline here as well as the original visions passed with the generations.

The wide variety of religious groups each developed in their own way.

As Dissenters in smaller groups they maintained more contact with spiritual leaders back in England and Scotland.

New England

The zealous spiritual life of the early colonies had waned.

Wealth and ease brought worldliness.

Steps such as the “half-way covenant” (1662) allowed children to be baptized whose parents had made no spiritual commitment.

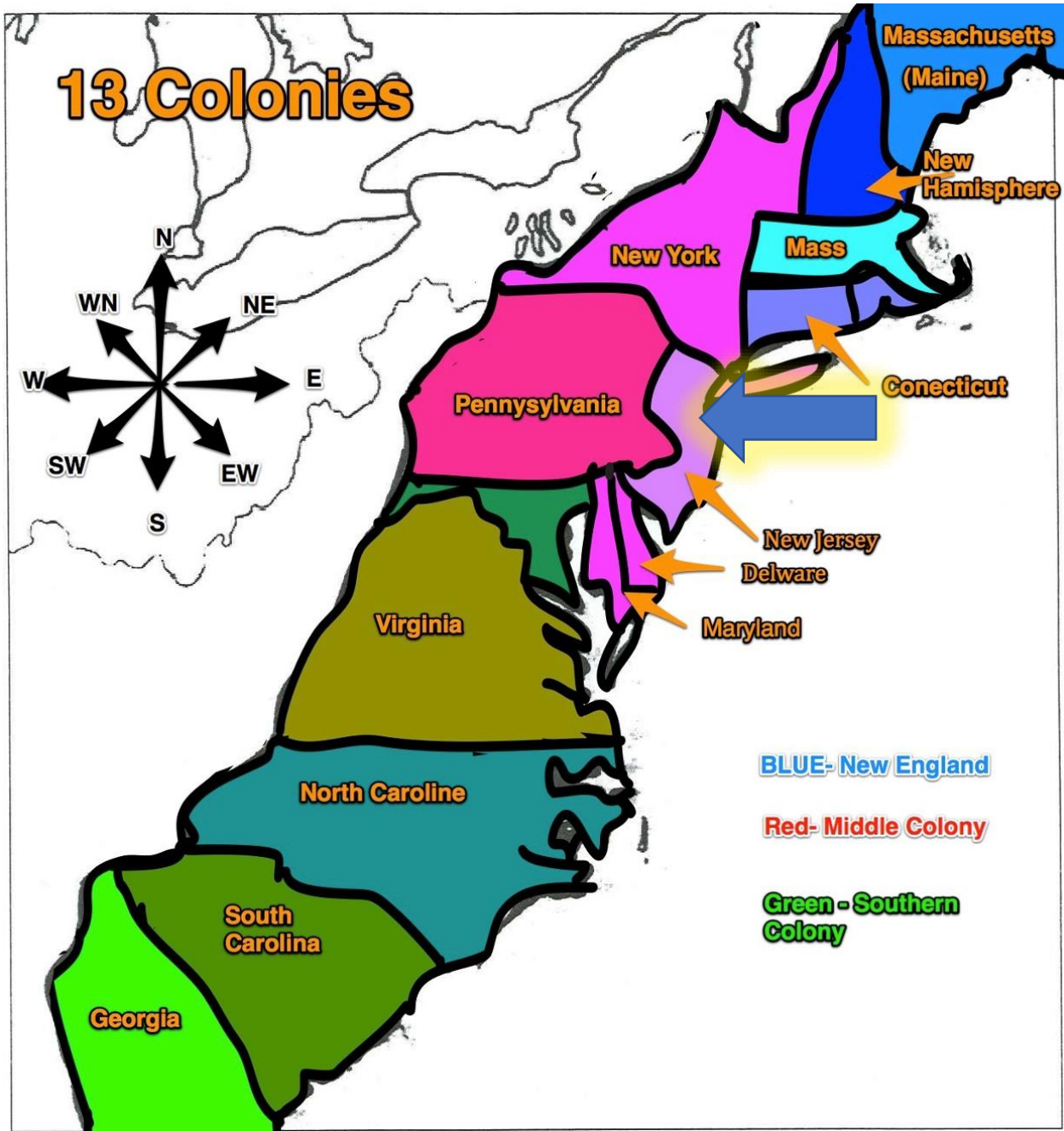
Spiritual leaders declared “Ichabod” over it – “The glory had departed.” The “Jeremiad” calls for repentance.

South

Spiritual life had never been a big issue in the South.

The Anglican State Churches were formal and proper, but little else.

Some clergy were sincere, but many did little beyond taking care of formal duties and collecting their tax-funded salaries.



1727

First Stirrings of Revival

Among Dutch Reformed, Theodorus Jacobus Frelinghuysen in the Raritan Valley of New Jersey.

Frelinghuysen began teaching the need for personal conversion, organized his congregation into small groups for study and prayer, and reserved communion for those who could make a convincing profession of saving faith.

During 1727, Frelinghuysen's congregations began to experience a new surge of spiritual life. Following this significant numbers are added.

Presbyterians Gilbert Tennent and his brother William in nearby New Brunswick and Freehold learn from Frelinghuysen and experience similar results.

“But this shower of Divine blessing has been yet more extensive. There was no small degree of it in some parts of the Jerseys, as I was informed when I was in New York (in a long journey I took at that time of the year for my health) by some people of the Jerseys who I saw, especially the Rev. Mr. William Tennent, a minister who seemed to have such things much at heart, told me of a very great awakening of many in a place called the Mountain (sic.), under the ministry of one Mr. Cross and of a very considerable revival of religion in another place under the ministry of his brother, the Rev. Mr. Gilbert Tennent; and also at another place under the ministry of a very pious young gentleman, a Dutch minister, whose name as I remember was Freelinghousen (sic).”

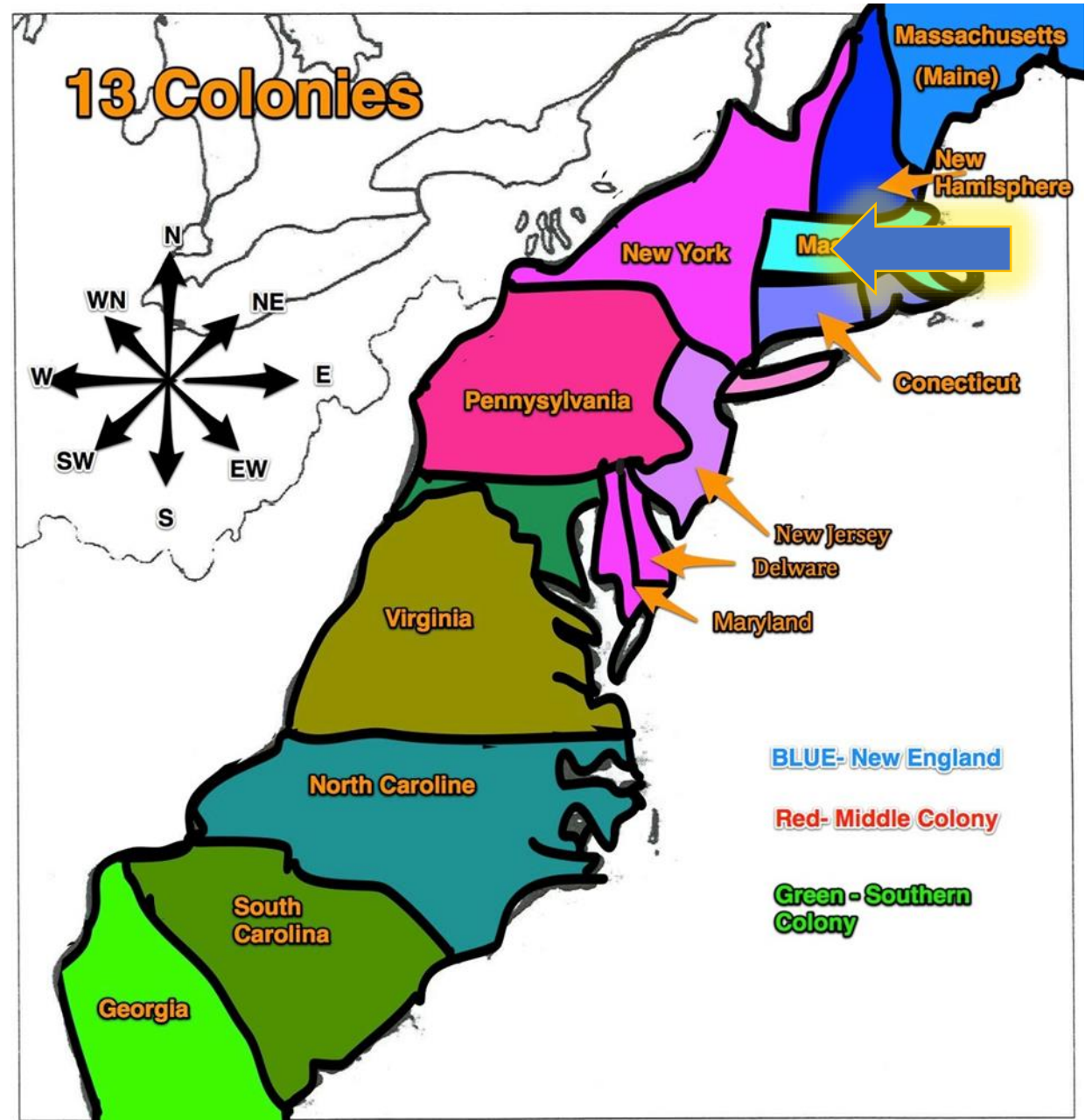
(Jonathan Edwards, *A Faithful Narrative*)

1734 -1735

Revival Comes to New England

Northampton, Massachusetts

The instrument God raised up was to be one of the great instruments of the Awakening, Jonathan Edwards.



Jonathan Edwards

1703-1758

Edwards had begun ministry at Northampton assisting his grandfather, Solomon Stoddard and upon Stoddard's death in February of 1729, Edwards assumed the Northampton pulpit.

His gifts and burdens first came to be known beyond Northampton when he was invited to deliver the commencement sermon at Harvard in July of 1731 at the invitation of Benjamin Colman. His sermon was entitled, "God Glorified in Man's Dependence".

That sermon sounded a theme which would be central in Edward's life and ministry: to defend historic, orthodox Calvinism against the inroads of Arminian teaching as well as newer enlightenment views.

He was not only a proponent of revival, but became, as well, its most careful and sometimes critical student which was the subject of his masterpiece, *The Religious Affections* first published in 1746

This portrait hangs in Nassau Hall at Princeton University – Edwards was the third president of the College of New Jersey which in 1893 was re-named Princeton University.



The Progress of Revival at Northampton, MA 1734, 1735

The Need for Revival: *“Licentiousness for some years prevailed among the youth of the town; they were many of them very much addicted to night-walking, and frequenting the tavern, and lewd practices, wherein some, by their example, exceedingly corrupted others. It was their manner very frequently to get together in conventions of both sexes for mirth and jollity which they called frolics; and they would often spend the greater part of the night in them, without regard to any order in the families they belonged to; and indeed family government did too much fail in the town.”* (Jonathan Edwards, *A Faithful Narrative...*, pub. In England 1737)

The first stirrings of Revival:

“At the end of the year 1733, there appeared a very unusual flexibleness, and yielding to advice, in our young people.”

“Presently after this, there began to appear a remarkable religious concern at a little village belonging to our congregation called Pascammuck... At this place, a number of persons seemed to be savingly wrought upon.”

In April of 1734, the death of a prominent young man seemed to ignite a flame. Edwards preached the funeral sermon from Psalm 90:5, 6 with great effect.

Through that spring and summer, Northampton was awakened: *“The only thing in their view was to get the kingdom of heaven, and everyone appeared pressing into it. The engagedness of their hearts in this great concern could not be hid, it appeared in their very countenances.”* (Edwards, *A Faithful Narrative...*)

Many made open profession: *“Our sacraments are eight weeks asunder, and I received into our communion about a hundred before one sacrament, fourscore of them at one time whose appearance, when they presented themselves together to make an open profession of Christianity, was very affecting to the congregation.”*

By the Spring of 1735, there were awakenings in many surrounding towns and villages.

A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God in the Conversion of Many Hundred Souls in Northampton, and the Neighbouring Towns and Villages of New-Hampshire (sic) in New-England.

In 1736 Edward's friend **Benjamin Colman**, pastor of the influential Brattle Street Church in Boston, asked Edwards to write up an account of the revival work in Northampton and the surrounding area.

Edwards responded with the above title – he never gifted with brevity!

Colman in turn sent it to his friends and correspondents in England, **Isaac Watts** and **John Guyse**.

Watts and Guyse did a little editing (including the mistaken location) and got it to the press and it appeared in London in 1737.

By this account, the revival movement in England and America was much stirred and encouraged.

The Evangelicals of England became aware of it – especially **George Whitefield** who was just beginning his evangelical ministry and was encouraged by it to return to America.

The Greatest Flowering of the Great Awakening – 1739-1740

The great Instrument of this work was
George Whitefield (1714-1770)

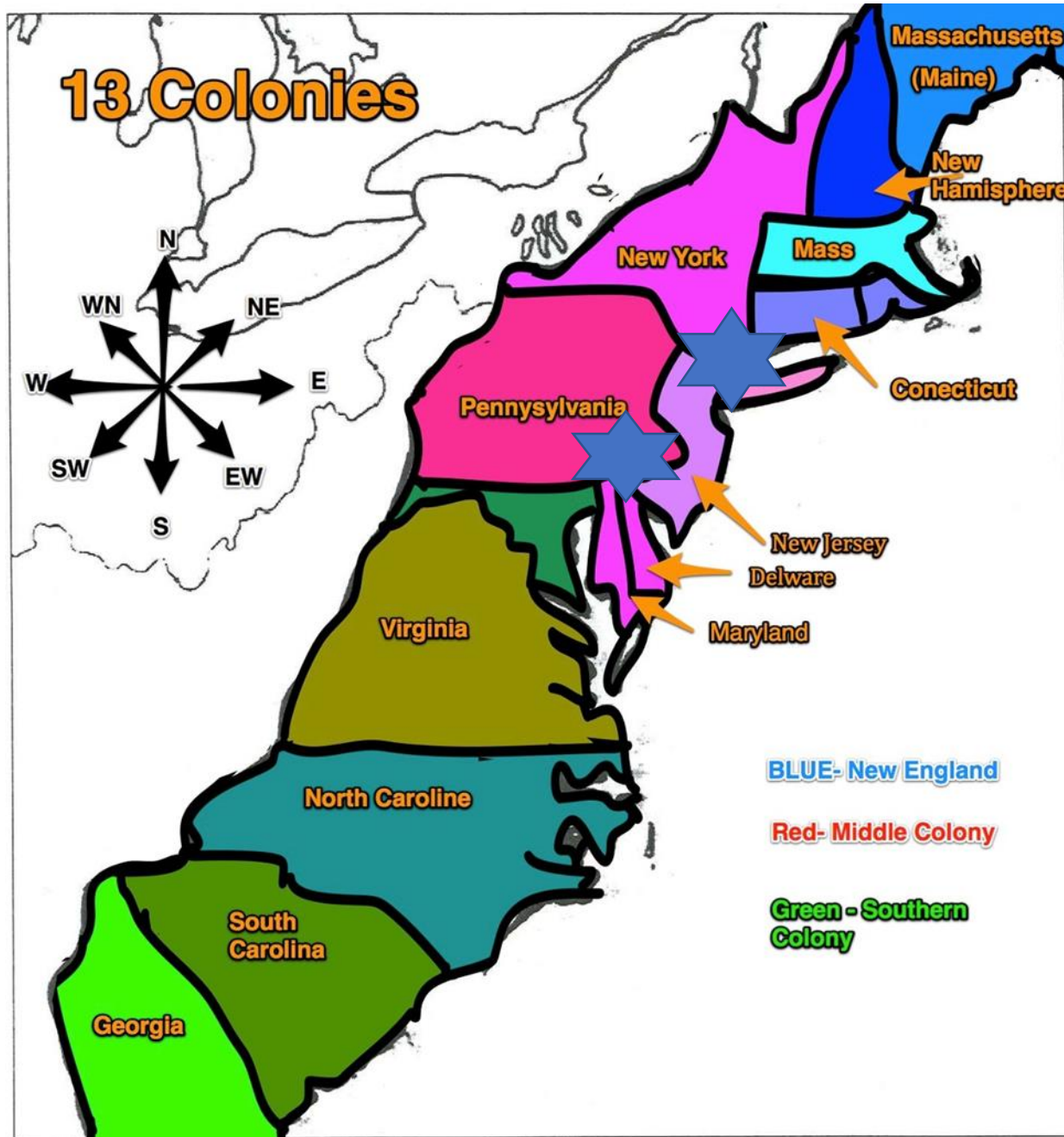
“The awakening was not particularly centered around any leaders, not even the Log College men or Edwards. It almost seemed that the local ministries in every village were developing tide pools of spiritual interest, reinforced and augmented by news of spiritual activity elsewhere.

What Whitefield did was dig a trench between the pools, unifying these isolated stirrings into a coherent evangelical party in the American church.”

(Richard F. Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, p. 39)



Whitefield landed in Philadelphia in late October of 1739 and immediately attracted crowds of 8,000 people (2/3 of the population of Philadelphia at that time).



From Philadelphia, he travelled to New York.

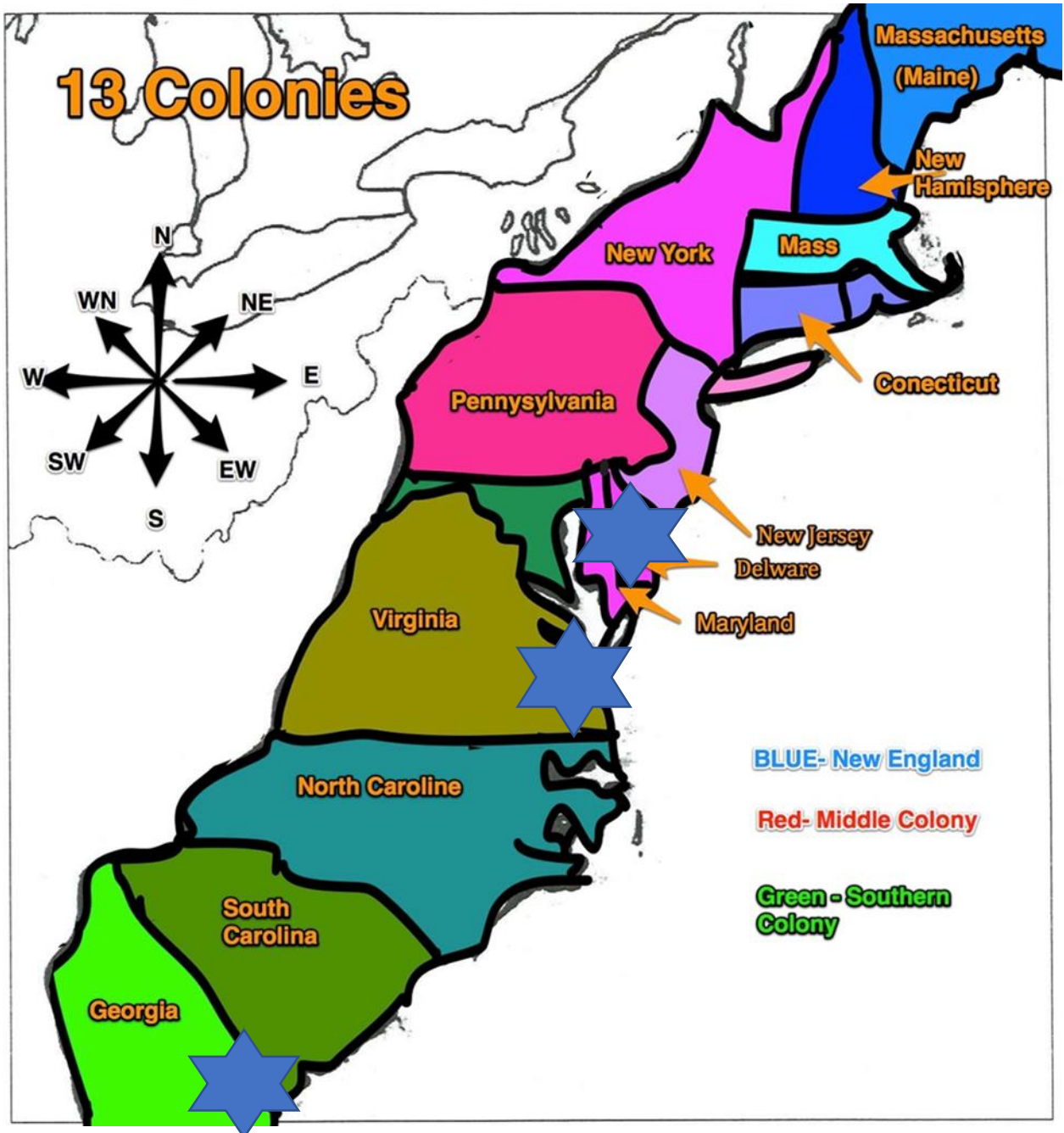
November 12, 1739 he visits the Tennents at Neshaminy, PA where he preached to some 3000 souls.

Preaching the Means of Revival

“I began to speak as the Lord gave me utterance. At first the people seem’d unaffected, but in the midst of my discourse, the power of the Lord Jesus came upon me, and I felt such a struggling within myself for the people, as I scarce ever felt before. The hearers began to be melted down immediately and cry much and we had good reason to hope the Lord intended good for many.”

(Whitefield’s Journal)

In late 1739, He moves through Delaware, Virginia (preaching in Williamsburg), and the Carolinas...



...arriving in Savannah, GA by January 1740.

During the winter of 1740 Whitefield oversees the construction of a new building for the orphanage.

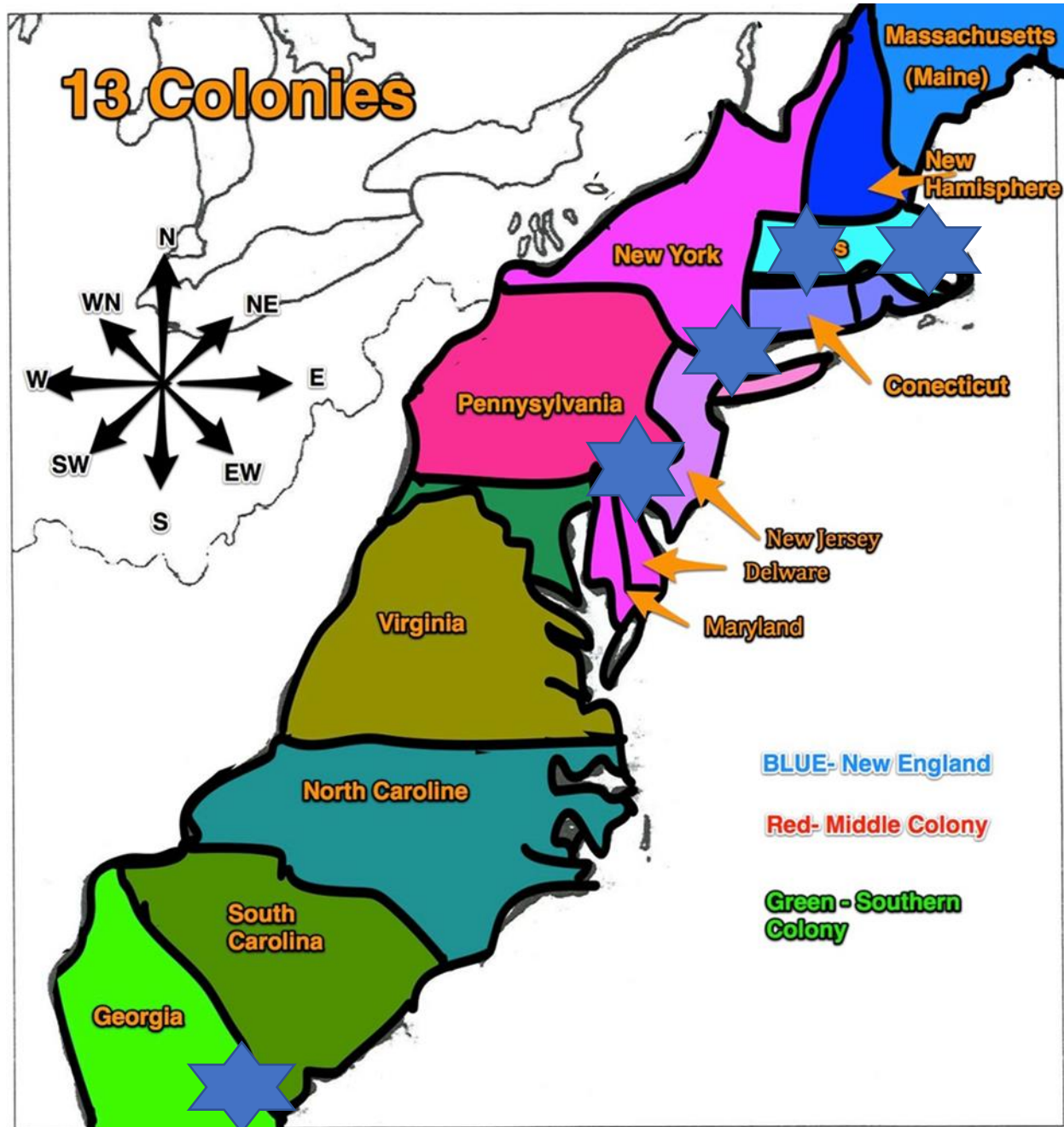
While not welcome in most Anglican pulpits, he still managed to find places to speak.

1. By April he is back in Philadelphia and New York preaching to crowds of up to 15,000.

2. In the summer of 1740 he returns to Savannah for rest.

3. August of 1740 finds him moving through New England.

4. Boston in September



5. Northampton with Edwards in October and then down the Connecticut River Valley to Hartford and New Haven.

6. Then back through New York and Philadelphia.

7. Back to Savannah by mid-November.

Whitefield often preached 2-3 times per day. During one 10 week period he preached some 200 formal sermons

The Impact of Whitefield's Labors in the Awakening.

“My one design is to bring poor souls to Jesus Christ.”

1. The sheer volume of his labors.
 - a. Seven Visits to America from 1738 – 1770.
 - b. Criss-Crossing the Colonies from New England to Georgia
 - c. Preaching often 2-3 times per day – thousands of sermons.

2. The numbers of people who heard him and were awakened.
 - a. Crowd at Farewell sermon in Boston in 1740 was estimated at 23,000 (more than the population of the city).
 - b. Crowds in Philadelphia and New York 8,000 to 15,000
 - c. 3,000 in the Meeting House yard at the Log College.

3. The lasting spiritual impact is more difficult to assess.
 - a. Edwards clearly understood that there were many who seemed much affected in the revival who did not remain faithful, but in time fell away.
 - b. Many were affected emotionally, but were not really regenerated by the Spirit of God.
 - c. Still, the impact upon the colonies was remarkable.
 - d. Spiritually as well as socially, this was the first single event which united all of the colonies.

Testimonies to the Impact of Whitefield's Labors

Nathan Cole (1711-) heard Whitefield in Middletown, Connecticut in October of, 1740.

“And my hearing him preach gave me a heart wound. By God’s blessing my old foundation was broken up and I saw that my righteousness would not save me, then I was convinced of the doctrine of election; and went right to quarreling with God about it; because that all I could do would not save me; and he had decreed from Eternity who should be saved and who not.”
(Available in Alan Heimert and Perry Miller, *The Great Awakening*, Bobbs Merrill, 1967, p. 186)

His wrestling was concluded as he records that he was “born again Octo’ 1741.”

“Cole’s testimony records accurately both Whitefield’s consistently Calvinistic emphases and his stirring oratorical force.”

(Mark A. Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism*, pub. IVP, p. 107)

Testimonies to the Impact of Whitefield's Labors

Jonathan Edwards

“And thus it continued until Mr. Whitefield came to town, which was about the middle of October following: he preached here four sermons in the meeting house (besides a private lecture at my house), one on Friday, another on Saturday, and two upon the sabbath. The congregation was extraordinarily melted by every sermon; almost the whole assembly being in tears for a great part of sermon time.”

(Jonathan Edwards, “An Account of the Revival of Religion in Northampton in 1740 -1741”)

Sarah Pierpont Edwards

“He makes less of doctrines than our American preachers generally do, and aims more at affecting the heart. He is a born orator. You have already heard of his deep-toned, yet clear and melodious voice. It is perfect music. It is wonderful to see what a spell he casts over an audience by proclaiming the simplest truths of the Bible. I have seen upwards of a thousand people hang on his words with breathless silence, broken only by an occasional half-suppressed sob.”

(Mark A. Noll, *The Evangelical Awakening*, p. 106)



Sarah Pierpont Edwards at age forty-one

Testimonies to the Impact of Whitefield's Labors

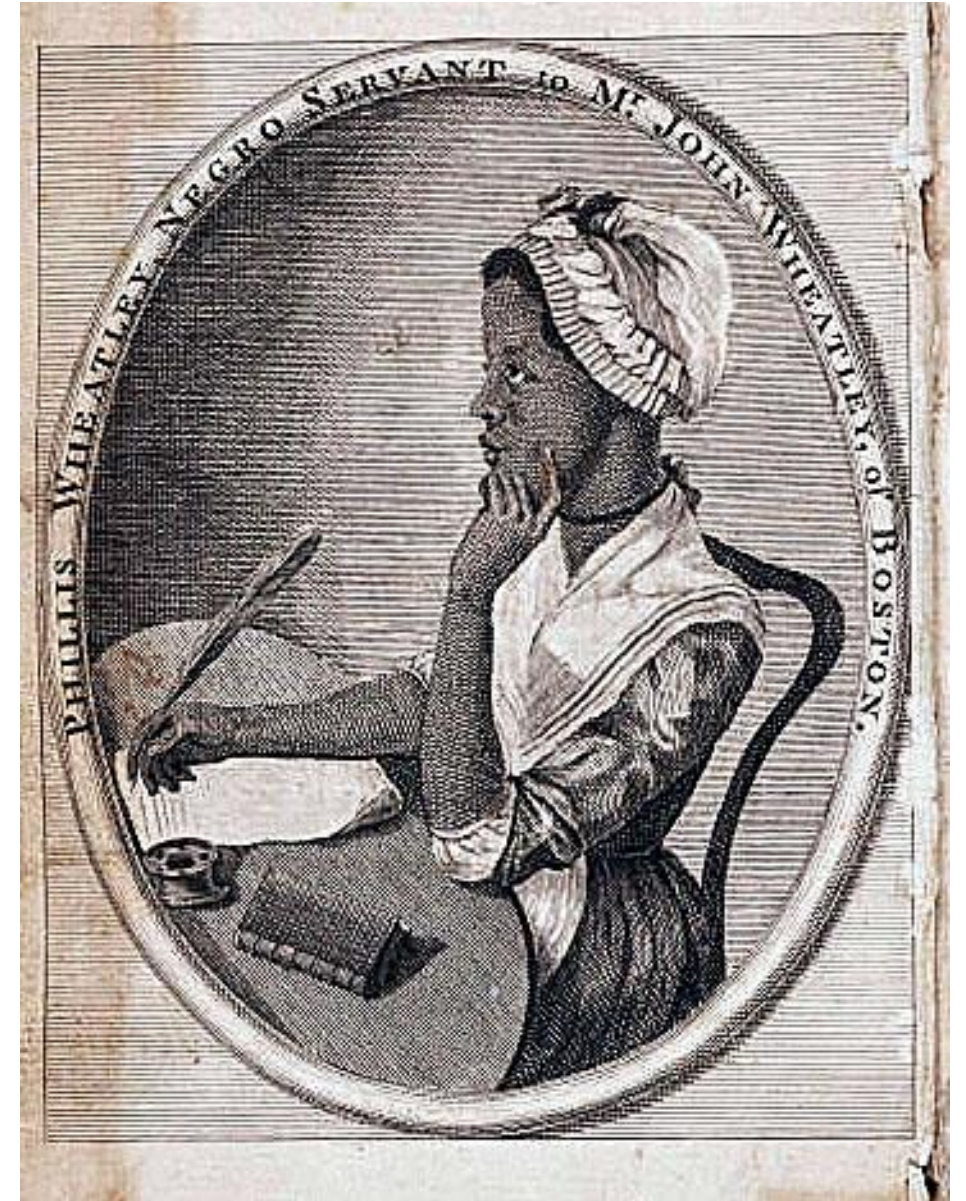
Phillis Wheatley

Brought to America from Senegal at about age 7 as a slave.

She was bought by a family named Wheatley in Boston. When the family discovered what a gifted child she was they included her in the education of their own children.

She was, by her own testimony converted under Whitefield's preaching. Her first collection of poems, published in England in 1772, included a eulogy to Whitefield, which reads, in part,

*He pray'd that grace in ev'ry heart might dwell,
He long'd to see America excell;
He charg'd its youth that ev'ry grace divine
Should with full lustre in their conduct shine;
That Saviour, which his soul did first receive,
The greatest gift that ev'n a God can give,
He freely offer'd to the num'rous throng,
That on his lips with list'ning pleasure hung.*



The Awakening Continued...

Whitefield made 5 more journeys to America with continued success.

Jonathan Edwards chronicled and analyzed the ebb and flow of revival bringing the Scriptures to bear in seeking to understand how God was working in revival. The primary fruit of this labor is *The Religious Affections* first published in 1746.

Networks were developed among those burdened for spiritual life both in American and in England and Scotland. Americans like Jonathan Edwards, Benjamin Colman, Gilbert Tennent, Samuel Davies and others were regular correspondents with Isaac Watts, John Guyse, William McCulloch, James Robe and others.

Still, awakenings continued to ebb and flow throughout the 1740's, 1750's and 1760's.

The end of the Great Awakening is usually dated at Whitefield's death in 1770. He died at Newburyport, Massachusetts on September 30, 1770. His remains lie in the graveyard of the Presbyterian Church in Newburyport.

The Legacy of the Great Awakening

It left an enduring evangelical stamp upon American Churches.

“Whitefield’s influence in America – because of this tour but also his six other visits and the flood of writing by and about him – was momentous. He helped confirm American Presbyterians in a much more consistently evangelical course than their fellow Presbyterians in Scotland and Ireland were pursuing.”

(Mark A. Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism*, p. 107)

For better or worse, “evangelical” and “revival” are part of our vocabulary and history.

Religion and the American Revolution

Alan Heimert of Harvard wrote *Religion and the American Mind from the Great Awakening to the Revolution* in 1966. His thesis was that the revivalist Calvinism of the 1740’s gradually expanded to become the democratic republicanism of the 1770’s.

Heimert’s work is much debated, but the Great Awakening and the American Revolution are the two great events in America in the 18th century.

Evangelicals including those at Princeton largely supported the revolution. “Cousin America has run off with a Presbyterian Parson.”

What About Virginia?

Dissenting groups in Virginia (and the South) were tightly controlled by colonial governors even after the Act of Toleration in 1689. In fact, Dissenters often fared better in England than they did in the colonies where colonial governors sometimes argued that the Act of Toleration did not apply in the colonies. The Anglican Church continued as the established church in Virginia until 1786.

While most Anglican clergy were hostile to Whitefield, one notable exception was James Blair of Williamsburg, who, was not only the first President of William and Mary, but also the Commissary of Virginia, as well as Rector of Bruton Parish Church.

Blair invited Whitefield to the Bruton Parish pulpit on December 6, 1739 where Whitefield preached a sermon entitled “What Think Ye of Christ”.

“Despite Whitefield’s effectiveness, the Great Awakening was slow to penetrate Virginia.”

(Park Rouse, James Blair of Virginia, pub. UNC, 1971, p. 230)





Dissent in Virginia

Dissenters, including Presbyterians, had been coming into Virginia from the middle colonies even before 1700, but with the Anglican Church established they were not free to have their own churches or to worship as Presbyterians.

Of particular interest to us is a group in Hanover County where a man named Samuel Morris set up a reading room where sermons of Luther and Puritan classics by Bolton, Baxter, Flavel, Bunyan and others were read and studied.

In July of 1743 a Presbyterian named William Robinson came to Hannover. As Morris later recalled to Samuel Davies, *“Before Mr. Robinson left us, he successfully endeavored to correct some of our Antinomian mistakes and to carry on the Worship of God more regularly at our Meetings.”* (Samuel Davies, “The State of Religion in Virginia,” a letter to Joseph Bellamy reprinted in Heimert and Miller, *The Great Awakening*, p. 385)

Samuel Davies Brings Awakening to Virginia

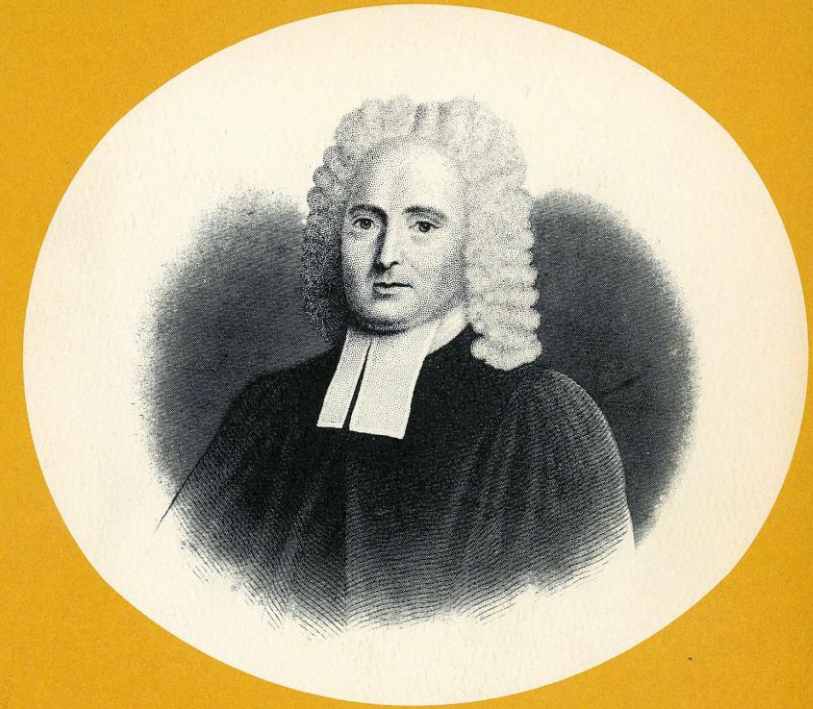
1723 - 1761

Davies had studied under Samuel Blair at Faggs Manor, PA who had been a student of William Tennent's at "The Log College".

Ordained by the New Castle Presbytery, Davies was sent to Hanover to take up labor among those to whom William Robinson had ministered a couple of years before.

Upon arrival in the Spring of 1747 Davies called on Governor Gooch in Williamsburg to apply for a license which he obtained thus becoming the first settled Dissenting Pastor in Virginia. Before the General Court, "He confessed his faith to the authorities, not only in the Westminster Confession and catechisms, but also the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England, with a few qualifications which were accepted."¹ (James H. Smylie, "Samuel Davies – Preacher, Teacher and Pastor" in *Colonial Presbyterianism: Old Faith in a New Land*, ed. S. Donald Fortson III, pub. Pickwick Publications, 2007)

¹ Smylie does not document this. Court records for the period were destroyed in a fire.



SAMUEL DAVIES

Apostle of Dissent in Colonial Virginia

GEORGE WILLIAM PILCHER



Polegreen Church

Davies began ministry on the site of the old Morris Reading Room and eventually the Polegreen Church was built. The original building was destroyed by fire during the Civil War, but this outline has been erected on the foundation of the original building.

Among those who regularly worshiped here were young Patrick Henry and his mother. Though Patrick's uncle (also named Patrick Henry) was the local Anglican rector and hostile to Davies, his mother had Presbyterian leanings and from the age of about 11 until a young man, Patrick was often among Davies' hearers.

(The site is maintained today by a foundation and is located near the site of the Cold Harbor Civil War battle.)

Hanover Presbytery

“The Mother Presbytery of the South”

Davies was originally given permission for only 5 preaching stations, but the work grew rapidly both in numbers and geographical area. Davies often preached to crowds of 500 at Hanover, though the building held far fewer.

By 1750, Davies’ biographer notes, *“With seven pulpits located in five different counties – three in Hanover and one each in Henrico, Goochland, Louisa, and Caroline – Davies found himself ministering to about three hundred families.”* (George William Pilcher, *Samuel Davies: Apostle of Dissent in Colonial Virginia*, pub. University of Tennessee, 1971, p. 93)

By 1755, he had five other ministers working with him and the Hanover Presbytery was formed to give bring proper Presbyterian order to the growing work in Virginia. This presbytery was the original presbytery in the southern colonies.



Preacher and Pastor

While Davies was known as a fiery preacher, he was also careful of doctrine and his sermons were carefully prepared and well ordered each based upon a specified text of Scripture. There are 83 sermons which were printed in a variety of editions on both sides of the Atlantic. The sermon here was printed in Colonial Williamsburg's print shop. It was Davies' last sermon.

He was a dedicated pastor who genuinely cared for the people under his pastoral charge. This is reflected in a 1758 sermon entitled, "The Tender Anxieties of Ministers for Their People" appropriately from the text of Galatians 4:19, 20. He reached out to Native Americans as well as African slaves with good effect. He promoted literacy among the slaves and provided good books for those who could read.

He wrote poetry and a number of hymns - "Great God of Wonders" being the best known.

A

S E R M O N

DELIVERED AT

NASSAU - HALL,

January 14, 1761,

On the DEATH of

HIS LATE MAJESTY

King GEORGE II.

By SAMUEL DAVIES, A. M.

Late President of the College of New-Jersey,

TO WHICH IS PREFIXED

A brief Account of the LIFE, CHARACTER and DEATH,
of the AUTHOR.

By DAVID BOSTWICK, A. M.

Minister of the PRESBYTERIAN Congregation in *New-York.*



WILLIAMSBURG:

Printed by WILLIAM HUNTER, MDCCLXI.

A Presbyterian Meeting House *circa* 1770

The Presbyterian Meeting House in Colonial Williamsburg recreates a church which grew directly out of Davies' ministry. The building is typical of the churches which Davies' Dissenters built in Virginia. The main display on the far wall reviews Davies' work.







President Davies

Following the death of President Edwards, Samuel Davies was called to be the fourth president of the College of New Jersey. His congregation in Virginia, petitioned the Hanover Presbytery that they might prevent him from accepting the call.

“Your petitioners most humbly pray, we beseech and intreat your wisdom, in conjunction with our dear pastor, that you will consult, and fall upon some other expedient for the relief of the college, that will not rob us of the greatest blessing we enjoy under God, and leave us a people forever undone.”

(Letter dated September 13th, 1758 The full text is included as Appendix II in Pilcher’s biography)

But the college persisted and Davies finally yielded, leaving Hanover for Princeton in July of 1759. Just less than two years later on February 4, 1761, Samuel Davies died at Princeton.