

## A Bishop for New York



*By keeping the historic episcopate, the Church of England has preserved a visible sign of continuity that reaches back to the primitive church. Bishops are consecrated into the historic episcopate; priests are ordained into the apostolic succession through the laying on of hands by the bishop; by the bishop the laity are received at confirmation into full membership. . . .*

—H. W. MONTEFIORE

The New York Convention in September 1786 shied away from debating the proposed Prayer Book, probably because the esteemed chairman, Samuel Provoost, wished it deferred “out of respect to the English Bishops and because the minds of the people are not yet sufficiently informed.” Provoost disapproved any prayer book changes, having already been dismayed by those alterations that facilitated Unitarianism at King’s Chapel, Boston. He well knew that if the Church in the various states desired to continue the English line of succession, it must be very careful of liturgical changes. In New York, only thirteen copies of the Proposed Book were sold, and Provoost expressed his opposition to it when he said, “We should not be able to adopt the book at present without danger of a schism.”<sup>1</sup> When discussing the new constitution for the American Church, the New York delegates recommended a surprisingly High Church amendment, “That the Bishop be amenable only to General Convention.” Then came another resolution: “In compliance with the direction of the General Convention, *Resolved* that the Rev. Mr. Provoost be recommended for Episcopal consecration.”

This resolution, however, came as no surprise. Provoost himself neither sought nor shirked it. Who else in New York was eligible, especially in a city that had suffered the troubles of enemy occupation? Samuel Provoost was in 1786 the only candidate who could win unanimous approval in a diocesan convention whose members would ask each other, “Who is completely above suspicion?” Provoost was popu-

lar with the city's Episcopalians, and respected by all others who knew him. His wartime retreat added a touch of gallantry. He was intelligent and able (but a dull preacher). He was social and well-connected. His patriotism bade him dine at Washington's table, and his scientific and agricultural studies probably led him to more than one hearty conversation with Jefferson. His classical learning was a formidable and ongoing avocation. He had the means to live well, was much respected by the clergy of other churches, and, above all, had already shown a capacity to preserve and improve the fortunes of Trinity Church—and thus those of the Church in the entire state. For it was Provoost who began the practice of Trinity's generosity to needy churches. What other man in New York approached him in those abilities?

The New York convention of June 1786 appointed Provoost, Joshua Bloomer of Long Island, and Benjamin Moore the clerical delegates to the next General Convention. The laymen elected were Provoost's friends and onetime East Camp neighbors, James Duane and Robert Cambridge Livingston. Other lay delegates present were John Jay—"a sensible man and good churchman"<sup>2</sup>—Robert Crommelin, and a "Mr. J. Farquhar." This delegation was "instructed not to consent to any act that may imply the validity of Dr. Seabury's ordinations"—for, Seabury, upon returning from Scotland in June 1785, had proceeded to ordain four candidates almost immediately. The New York Convention, either by their own knowledge, or tutored by Samuel Provoost, knew that plans to obtain consecration in the English Church would be jeopardized by an overcordial reception of Seabury and his nonjuring line.

The delegates at that New York Convention in September 1786 signed Samuel Provoost's certificate of election (where is it now?), and the parishes were asked to help defray the expenses of his voyage to England. William White, the Bishop-elect "for the State of Pennsylvania," and Samuel Provoost set sail from New York Harbor on November 2, 1786, on what would be the fastest crossing then known.<sup>3</sup> They were greeted as important old friends in London (which says something about British halfheartedness in fighting a war that produced no more determined opponents than the two men they now welcomed). But when the Archbishop of Canterbury sought to delay the consecrations, Samuel Provoost ingenuously declared it was absolutely necessary that he return to New York by Easter because of a "peculiarity in the charter of his church."<sup>4</sup>

The consecration document, as found in the Act Book of the Archbishop of Canterbury,<sup>5</sup> records the event on one page, naming White and then Provoost. This explains why, in the American succession, Provoost is listed as third, following Seabury and White, though it is said that Provoost was actually consecrated first at the ceremony in Lambeth

Palace Chapel on February 4, 1787, because his ordination was prior to White's.<sup>6</sup> The Provoost section of the consecration certificate reads:

... And at the same time, The Reverend Samuel Provoost Doctor in Divinity, Rector of Trinity Church in the City of New York, and a subject or citizen of the United States of America, having been elected to the Office of a Bishop by the Convention of the State of New York, One other of the said United States, was consecrated by the said Lord Archbishop of Canterbury in his Chapel aforesaid, Bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the State of New York; the said Lord Archbishop having first obtained His Majesty's Royal License authorizing and empowering him to consecrate the abovenamed William White and Samuel Provoost to the Order of a Bishop respectively, according to the Tenor of an Act of Parliament passed in the Twenty Sixth year of his Majesty's Reign; which Act of Parliament, and the several other instruments used on this occasion are hereafter transcribed at large.

His Grace, the most Reverend William Lord Archbishop of York, primate of England and Metropolitan, the Right Reverend Charles Lord Bishop of Bath and Wells and the Right Reverend John Lord Bishop of Peterborough assisted in this consecration.

Mem<sup>dum</sup> Mr. Robert Jenner, Noty Publick, attended as Deputy Registrar and read the King's License; the Attendance of the Vicar general, or of any other persons from Doctor's Commons, besides the Deputy Registrar was not thought necessary.

So I attest

Wm. Dickes      Secretary<sup>7</sup>

White and Provoost embarked, after some brief festivities in England, and after heavy Atlantic seas arrived in New York on Easter Day, 1787. They could look back upon a pleasant London sojourn, filled with meetings with old acquaintances (including Inglis), many of the prominent clergy, and even King George III himself. With perhaps less pleasure they could look forward to the work they would assign themselves in their respective places. Both men knew that, instead of adopting the titles and respectabilities obtaining in England, it would be their duty to transplant an episcopacy "simplified according to the original intention as much as possible."<sup>8</sup>

When Samuel Provoost returned to New York after his consecration, the Episcopal Church there numbered six clergy, and perhaps twenty-six parishes. King's College, renamed Columbia, was a place dear to the new bishop; the college was about to install layman William S. Johnson in the president's chair once occupied by his father, the Rev. Samuel Johnson. The college remained nominally, and by a courtesy that saluted its foundation, a Church institution; those ties, how-

ever, were strong enough to lead Jeremiah Leaming of Connecticut to sound out the new president about having Seabury join White and Provoost in consecrating David Griffiths, thus saving the Church in Virginia the expenses of a transatlantic voyage. Johnson demurred.<sup>9</sup> He probably sensed this was a Seabury-inspired maneuver aimed at gaining approval of the Scottish consecration.

This seemingly innocent approach to Columbia's president was only one of the difficulties entailed in putting the Church on a sound course, one that White of Pennsylvania, though he too insisted upon descent in the English line, regarded as a thing trivial when compared with other problems. White and Provoost certainly discussed these matters in their voyages together, and had agreed that the prayer book and a constitution for the Episcopal Church in the United States merited priority. The Church in America would never realize consolidation until these matters were settled. Sectional antipathies must be recognized. Connecticut, for instance, still abhorred the principle of lay participation in the highest councils of the Church, though this was already the practice in the South and in the middle states. New England also opposed the Proposed Prayer Book, all the more since a few deft alterations had been enough to remake King's Chapel, Boston, into a Unitarian church. For their part, the middle and southern states would block any move that sought to enlarge the powers of the bishops at the expense of the laity. Provoost was very firm about this, and could point to what he considered to be the ecclesiastical posturings of Seabury.

These, however, were problems peculiar to transplanting the Church. In due time they resolved themselves so that, miracle of miracles, Samuel Provoost would invite Samuel Seabury to dinner, a genial moment that ended their public quarrels. Provoost grew accustomed to Seabury's presence in Connecticut, and William White (as always) was adroit and patient.

#### NATIONAL SKEPTICISM

For there were greater problems. The country was experiencing that constant phenomenon of postwar periods, an examination and reassessment of religious thought. In those postwar years there was a distinct unfriendliness toward revealed religion,<sup>10</sup> and an exuberant swing toward what has been called rational, natural religion. Ethan Allen's *Reason the Only Oracle of Man* (1784) was a direct attack on Christianity. More general was the notion that God is a force seen best, and perhaps solely, in creation. A corollary insisted that all good aspirations may readily be found already residing in the human spirit. True reli-

gion, then, required no cultic elaborations. A very popular book that stated this philosophy was the novel *Paul and Virginia*, published in New York City by Evert Duyckinck. Its characters, a boy and girl cast ashore on a desert isle, find ethics to be natural, not requiring their application by a sponsoring society. This book was widely read (and, boosting its popularity, gloried in the woodcuts of the first American illustrator, Alexander Anderson). Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason* (1784) had, at least, the imprimatur of the author's patriotism and war career. Paine has always had a place in the American pantheon and one must agree that the treatment he eventually received at the hands of church-people in New Rochelle justly earned them his contempt, and that of his followers. (But it is fair to add that staunch Episcopalian James Duane was one of those who found a home for Paine.)<sup>11</sup> Deism was popular in colleges that had hitherto been exactly Christian. Lodges and secret societies sprang up at this time—the Masonic Grand Lodge was formed in New York in 1781. These tended to offer a substitute for the churches. Chancellor Robert Livingston, for instance, supported Samuel Provoost and was a Trinity churchwarden; but he was a religious skeptic all his life. The Chancellor was pleased to be installed Grand Master in 1784, and "because of the respect in which he was held contributed much to the reputation and growth of the Fraternity during his administration," which ended in 1801.<sup>12</sup> During that time sixty-six Masonic lodges were established in New York State.

#### PROVOOSTIAN ORTHODOXY

It cannot be said that Samuel Provoost, now in his fortieth year, was prepared to sally forth and wage battle in the name of Christian orthodoxy. But neither can he be accused of vague rationalism. His sermons—practically the only holograph material known to survive him—are ponderous after the fashion of the day. And they are sound. We have, for instance, a sermon he preached at St. Paul's Chapel in the morning, and repeated in St. George's in New York City that same afternoon, the Fourth Sunday in Advent, 1789. His properly liturgical subject is repentance, and having announced the topic the bishop proceeds:

Let us enquire into the nature of Repentance and consider it as the first step to be taken as the preparation of the day of the Lord—for if we do not keep Duties apart and treat them with distinctiveness; if we do not range them in their proper place, and according to their respective Subordinations, we shall never know how to proceed, where to begin or end—(we shall fight as those who beat the air). [Stating

that repentance begins with "an Appeal to the natural conscience of every sinner," the bishop continues:] Let us, my Brethren, never deceive ourselves by trusting to anything but a good life or a Sincere and timely Repentance, for nothing else can with the least shadow of reason be trusted to—nothing else can give as rational comfort and assurance in the hour of Death and in the Day of Judgment . . .

Many years later, the very orthodox Morgan Dix of Trinity Church declared Provoost's sermons to be most commendable for the age, but William A. Duer is probably equally close to the mark when he recalled that the bishop's popularity in the city never depended upon his preaching.

#### PREVAILING ANGLOPHILISM

If Bishop Provoost managed to walk with rationalism without compromise, and in other ways commend the Episcopal Church to New Yorkers, his troubles with the prevailing mood were softened by factors definitely favoring the Church. First of all, there was the orderliness, the cadence—the *reasonableness*—the beauty and stateliness of Prayer Book worship. These appealed to a people who, having cast off the moorings of their political past, still felt a need for the sound and acceptable things of that past. Also, implicit in English religion was a tender reluctance to require much more than credal assent. Other denominations might demand catechetical certainty from their adherents, but the Episcopal Church (because of its to-and-fro swings long experienced in politics from the Tudors through the Hanovers) shied away from dogmatic demands.

Another factor (and perhaps the most decisive one) militating toward a quick revival of Episcopal Church fortunes in New York is the undeniable fact that things English had an irresistible glamour after Yorktown. Those who win are often quickest to forget the war they have won. Samuel Provoost knew that many of his acquaintances (indeed, some of his own kin) had trimmed to both the Whig and Loyalist winds, and were now as content to be in an independent New York as they would have been content to be in a city still royal. Provoost maintained his integrity and was respected by those who read Paine and Allen and joined the lodge. This sophistication was fruitful. Broad-mindedness was very much in the air.

There was, however, a drawback to this casual Episcopalianism: it was ill-prepared to meet the challenge of that American phenomenon, the American frontier. The Book of Common Prayer does not easily adapt to informal usage (one of Hobart's gifts, it was said later on, was that he could use the ancient forms in remote places; or was it that

pioneer people hungered for what they thought they had left behind?). "Those denominations that took seriously the challenge of the West *and developed methods* of meeting it were to become the giants," explains one historian.<sup>13</sup> The Methodists, Presbyterians, and Baptists met frontier demands by such singularly American forms as lay preaching and revivalism, modes entirely alien to the traditional Episcopal spirit. Can one imagine any Bishop of New York at a camp meeting?

Religion in America may well have foreseen a dismal future had not news of the French Revolution shown what the "logical result" of Deism and Rationalism might be.<sup>14</sup> Americans who remembered Lafayette's timely arrival here announcing help on the way during their own Revolution were disillusioned by developments in France, especially when French politics came to threaten American commercial interests.

Bishop Provoost's first convention following his return from Lambeth convened in New York, June 27, 1787. He was elected, according to the General Constitution of the Church in New York then prevailing, its president. Six priests and twenty-four laymen were present, representing congregations in New York City, Staten Island, Long Island, Eastchester, North Chester, Rye, New Rochelle, Philipsburgh (Garrison), Fishkill, and Poughkeepsie. Letters from the churches in Albany and Balltown (Ballston Spa) asked that they be recognized as belonging to the union of Episcopal parishes in the State of New York; the word "diocese" was still not in ordinary use in 1787.

#### REASON FOR OPTIMISM

When the delegates of that 1787 convention began making mental lists of where Episcopal congregations might exist, they might arrive at a total as high as thirty-five. One historian has claimed there were twenty-six Episcopal churches in New York in 1774 and the same number in 1789.<sup>15</sup> It is probable that no one knew for sure in 1787 where all the New York Episcopal congregations had once gathered, or still existed, but if the delegates put their heads together they might come up with encouraging statistics. In the city, of course, there was Trinity. The building lay in ruins, and the congregation of the mother church had joined with that worshipping regularly in St. Paul's Chapel, which had been built twenty years earlier. There was also St. George's Chapel, built in 1752, for a congregation recognized by Trinity's vestry as early as April 1748, because "accessions from the Dutch Church had become so numerous, and the seating capacity of Trinity Church was so utterly inadequate."<sup>16</sup>

In the convention, Trinity and its chapels were represented by the

rector-bishop and his assistants, Benjamin Moore and Abraham Beach. But what about those other places not represented in the convention but known to have congregations? Prayer Book services were held in Pelham Manor as early as 1695, and John Pell, Sr., was elected in 1702 as first "Vestry-man" for this part of the Westchester Parish provided by the Ministries Act of 1693.<sup>17</sup> In nearby New Rochelle John Pell and his wife, Rachel, had given a large parcel of land for "the French church erected, or to be erected." This was probably in the year 1696, for the church was built the next year, and conformed to the Episcopal Church in 1709. St. Paul's, Eastchester, represented in the 1787 convention, is said to have been founded as a result of "the settlement by the Ten Families from Fairfield";<sup>18</sup> services were held there as early as 1707. St. Peter's, Westchester (1702), was still scarred by the war (and since Seabury had been its rector, perhaps the people preferred not to appear at a Provoost convention!). St. Anne's, Morrisania (1703), was known to exist. Mamaroneck (1704) and Scarsdale (1724) might be expected to be present. Lewisboro (1725) and North Salem (1725) were known to exist and, given the current Yankee trend of moving across the state line, must be promising. St. Andrew's in Walden (1733), St. Thomas, New Windsor (1733), and St. David's, Otterkill, could count upon the ministrations of St. George's in Newburgh (1729). As far as was known, there was now no congregation in Kingston, which had been burned by the British and, in any case, had always been a very Dutch town. Patterson (1744), South Salem (1759), and Croton (1756) might also find their lot improved by the Connecticut immigrations. The Peekskill congregation (1744) could look to the rector of Philipsburgh (1768), who was present in the convention. And there was the congregation in Beekmantown (1766) revived as St. Ann's in 1793. Bishop Provoost himself would have added Catskill to the list, for he had held services there during the war; and, of course, he had heard that services were now required "in the Manor of Livingston."<sup>19</sup> And, it was said, St. John's in Yonkers (1702) would soon be strong enough to support services in Tuckahoe.

Long Island delegates to that first convention could count nine congregations there: St. James', Newtown (Elmhurst); St. George's, Flushing; Grace Church, Jamaica; St. George's, Hempstead; Christ Church, Oyster Bay; St. John's, Huntington; the two congregations farther out, in Setauket and Islip (Oakdale); and St. Ann's in Brooklyn, founded during the recent war.<sup>20</sup> Bedford, (1704), Newcastle (Mt. Kisco) (1722), White Plains (1724) in Westchester County each held promise of revival. The church building at Fishkill (1755), though new at the war's outbreak, was now in ruinous condition, having been used as a barracks and hospital by patriot soldiers; Christ Church, Pough-



keepsie (1759), had been closed during much of the hostilities and there were probably many in the town who remembered that its rector had profited by some questionable land grants under the old government. By 1787 both congregations showed marked signs of growth.<sup>21</sup>

In what is now the Diocese of Albany, there were two churches: St. Peter's, Albany (before 1708), and St. George's, Schenectady (after 1750). Just before the war Sir William Johnson had built a fine church near his home, Johnson Hall, but the church had not been used very long. Much more unfortunate was the plight of the Mohawk Indians. There had been Indian congregations at Fort Hunter and Upper Castle, and their strength was due not only to energetic missionaries but, as we have seen, even more to the landed Johnson and his Indian counterpart, the distinguished Joseph Brant.<sup>22</sup>

This, then, is the picture that may well have appeared to the knowledgeable delegates of the 1787 convention. If they were allowed to lapse into that optimism that has always informed Church statistics, they might well count more than forty congregations that could be expected to attend future conventions. This is a scene much brighter than has customarily been thought to be the case and perhaps its most important aspect is that, in the present Diocese of New York, all but one of these congregations exist to this day; the sole exception, Beekmantown, after a very brief post-Revolutionary War renaissance, lapsed into oblivion soon after 1800. Yet, that is the very neighborhood from which came all the Potters!

If the delegates were glad to be able to count to forty, imagine their delight had they been able to foresee the very near future. For, within fifteen years, four new churches would be firmly established; two in New York City (Christ Church, 1793, and St. Mark's, 1799), and two congregations in rural villages: St. James', Goshen (1793), and St. Peter's, Lithgow (1801). There was indeed much reason for hope, and it was heightened by the election of a blue-ribbon Standing Committee "to advise with the bishop in all matters in which he shall think proper to consult them"—an amazing role description when one considers Bishop Provoost's insistence against Seabury that the laity share powers equally with the clergy in Church councils.

On the third day of that initial convention there was a ceremony of the sort that delighted the eighteenth-century New Yorker. The convention lay and clerical delegates proceeded with the students of Trinity Charity School, congregation, and vestry to the bishop's residence, where he met them at the door and joined them in a procession to St. Paul's Chapel. There they heard an address in which the bishop was congratulated on his return from England and recovery from "a painful and dangerous illness." The theme of Provoost's many maladies runs

through the remainder of his days, and it is hard to escape the fact that he did indeed suffer poor health—and allowed that fact to curtail his duties as bishop. He always considered his role primarily as rector of Trinity Church. There is every reason to believe he was a superb rector, rebuilding both a destroyed church and setting it on its great role in New York. The speaker at this convention ceremony, however, alluded to the importance of New York's having a bishop—"a Church complete in all its parts"—to which Bishop Provoost later replied (perhaps it was a swipe at Seabury) by praising the English bishops for "their benevolent and paternal exertions in our favor."

There was yet another New York Convention that year, in November. Now the bishop and eight priests were joined by twenty-five laymen. The bishop "expressed his satisfaction to the Convention on account of the increasing state of the church and informed them that he had ordained several persons," and made a visitation to several churches on Long Island, for confirmation, and "hoped that the other churches here represented would be equally prepared for the reception of that sacred rite, as he intended to visit them next spring."<sup>23</sup> Represented in this November 1787 convention were the congregations in New York City, Jamaica, Newtown, Flushing, Hempstead, Staten Island, Rye, White Plains, Brooklyn, Phillipsburgh, Poughkeepsie, Eastchester, "Upper Salem," North Castle, Bedford, and New Rochelle.

The next year, other parishes were represented: Huntington, Oyster Bay, "Ulster County," and Albany. Bishop Provoost noted the "prosperity of the church in the State," and regretted that he had failed to "visit the congregations in distant parts," due to much business in the city. Among other matters, the convention considered the request for ordination of Theodore Bartow, reader at New Rochelle, and recommended more study. Preparing their delegates who would soon attend the General Convention in Philadelphia, the New York Convention agreed to stand by the promise Provoost and White had made in London "to preserve the Episcopal succession in the English line." When this was discussed Provoost had yet another opportunity to fault Seabury for that irregular consecration in Scotland. The nonjurors, he said, were the enemies of freedom; "their slavish and absurd tenets were a disgrace to humanity, and *God grant* that they may never be cherished in America [which], as my native country, I wish may always be saved to liberty both civil and religious."<sup>24</sup> Anyone who supposed that Samuel Provoost was lethargic need only mention the nonjurors to see the sparks fly! Unfortunately for him (if not for the Church at large), the New York delegates were insufficiently informed of the nonjuring iniquities, and they eventually disregarded instructions and approved Sea-

bury's consecration. Understandably, this angered Provoost, who inexplicably had not managed to attend the great General Convention of 1789 in Philadelphia.

#### THE NATIONAL CHURCH

There were two General Conventions that year. The first convened on July 28. Bishop White presided. Perhaps Bishop Provoost absented himself because he sensed the tide was running toward approving Seabury's consecration. The General Convention might recognize that consecration, but no legislation could force Provoost into participating with Seabury in the consecration of Edward Bass of Massachusetts. Provoost was somewhat appeased when he heard that the delegates provided for a bicameral General Convention. At least that was a proper defeat for Seabury! And perhaps Provoost wished he might have gone to Philadelphia after all when he learned that the convention had extended greetings to newly elected George Washington, adding, "We anticipate the happiness of our country under your future administration." How did Seabury like *that*?

The second session of the Philadelphia Convention was William White's triumph. A constitution was adopted, along with accompanying canons. There was, also, agreement about a prayer book for the Episcopal Church in the United States. It would be much like the English book of 1662 except for substitutions for words considered antiquated, the deletion of some holy days and the ornaments rubric, changes in Morning and Evening Prayer, Holy Matrimony and Visitation of the Sick, the omission of the Athanasian Creed, and the addition of some services and occasional prayers. Seabury was present, and was able to fulfill his promise to the nonjurors that he would see that an Invocation was included in the prayer of consecration in the Holy Communion.

It was exactly two weeks prior to the first of these General Conventions that the mob in Paris stormed the Bastille. Very soon, Church property in France was confiscated. The American public's applause of these first events of the French Revolution turned to revulsion when, several years later, new riots brought about the infamous Reign of Terror. Americans, depressed by what they saw as the low estate of the churches in America, might well despair of what was happening to Christianity in places where it had long been established. The Episcopal Church in New York, however, was fortunate in having the eager help of men notable in the rebuilding of society after the war. No layman was more loyal and useful than James Duane. He had been a moderate Whig during the war and, upon returning to the city after the

evacuation, opposed baiting the defeated Tories who remained (many of them were his friends, some his relatives).<sup>25</sup> Duane was the first postwar mayor of the city and was "a skillful administrator and an able leader in the work of municipal reconstruction."<sup>26</sup> The Hamiltonians were in power in New York until 1800, and thus it was entirely agreeable to Duane that he accept Washington's offer of a federal judgeship in 1789. He then resigned as mayor of the city, but remained a governor of New York Hospital, vice-president of the Society for Promoting Useful Knowledge, and active in the Society for the Relief of Distressed Debtors. Throughout the 1780s, and until he moved to his large holdings near Albany, Duane was a conspicuous member of Trinity's vestry and the diocesan Standing Committee.

No less notable was John Jay, also related to Provoost by marriage. As we shall see in due course, several generations of Jays were passionately concerned with the sad and cruel situation of black people. As early as 1777, John Jay tried to secure emancipation by law. Failing in that, soon after the peace he worked for a law prohibiting the importation of Negroes for sale in New York. At the same time he helped found the Society for Promoting of Manumission (of which he became active president). Thanks largely to John Jay, gradual abolition was voted in 1799, but in fact slavery existed in New York until 1841.<sup>27</sup>

#### DEVELOPMENTS IN NEW YORK

The city's population in 1790, 33,131, made it larger than Philadelphia. Ten years later, the figure would be doubled. Immigration was the cause. In the years 1789-94, there were 1,500 immigrants from Boston alone each year.<sup>28</sup> Immigration from Ireland was already notable: "Too many United Irishmen arrived here within a few days," complained Federalist Hugh Gaine toward the end of the decade.<sup>29</sup> The importance of the harbor and the increasing China trade attracted families to New York City. Some of them were New Englanders sighting faster rewards in the city's maritime trade than Boston or Providence could offer. Other New Englanders, especially Connecticut Yankees who thought their taxes too high, spread across the border westward to the Hudson and beyond, looking for richer farm lands, better mill seats, or greater fields for the Merino sheep that were the new rage. Not a few of these Connecticut newcomers carried Prayer Books with them, and they were often glad to help revive old or establish new Episcopal churches. We will not be surprised to see many Yankee surnames appear in Diocese of New York records.

Samuel Provoost was aware of upstate developments, but he was

essentially a man of New York City. In a life of eighteenth-century benignity he enjoyed the prestige the rectorship of Trinity conferred upon him, and he returned the compliment by preserving the fortunes of the parish and making them often available to other churches so that, long after his lifetime, Trinity Church would be the bountiful bestower of riches upon many places. This was not always an easy thing to do, for there were churchfolk who maintained that Trinity's endowments belonged to all Episcopal churches in the city, possibly the state. One of the more vexing situations of Provoost's rectorship occurred in 1794, when a fair number of Trinity people separated to form a new parish, Christ Church, in a building they proposed to build very close to Trinity itself. Because there were signs that the new congregation might make claims to a share in Trinity's endowment, both diocese and parish acted together in denying Christ Church admission to convention until 1802, when the new parish formally relinquished whatever claims it might have to Trinity's wealth.

Apart from Provoost himself, the man most insistent that Trinity Church use its endowments to help other Episcopal churches was James Duane. When he resigned in April 1794 because of his removal to Duanesburgh, he wrote to the rector and vestry:

I am happy after our hard struggles to leave you in the quiet enjoyment of your valuable temporalities . . . [b]ut less fortunate brethren of the same communion who are establishing new settlements have still every difficulty to encounter and demand a share of your sympathy and attention. Be entreated to be mindful of them.<sup>30</sup>

That Trinity Church was mindful of the needs of the churches is indicated by a letter written in the spring of 1796 by a New York City parson to a friend in Maryland:

The country parishes in this State are badly off. Our church in the city has lately distributed among them £7000. This may animate them a little. We have lately erected a new church in the vicinity of the city [St. Marks-in-the-Bowery]. When it is finished another clergyman will be wanted. Are there any clever fellows in your quarter?<sup>31</sup>

Duane further hoped to see "the establishment of one or more itinerant ministers to visit congregations which are destitute [and] supply the poorer members and youth with Prayer Books."<sup>32</sup> Provoost's gracious reply to James Duane's letter implies that Duane had written what the bishop had all along been telling the vestry and other prominent Episcopalians in the city.

Who were some of these prominent church members in the last years of the eighteenth century? Apart from Duane (whom John Adams

characterized as "very shrewd, very sharp"),<sup>33</sup> there were Richard Harrison, city recorder; Chief Justice Richard Morris; Isaac Sears, assemblyman; Marinus Willet, alderman, sheriff, and mayor; Robert Troup, judge; John Alsop, president of the Chamber of Commerce; John Jay; Morgan Lewis (who later was governor); William S. Johnson, president of Columbia College and United States Senator from Connecticut (at the same time); Rufus King; Thomas Randall; William Bayard; Wynant Van Zandt; Jacob LeRoy; Nicholas Carmer—most of these latter on the Common Council of the city.

Most of these men were well-known to Levinus Clarkson, one of New York's import merchants and member of Trinity Church, whose cash book contains the names of many other New York families: Van-Horne, Haviland, Nichols, White, Gilcrist, Duffie, Bowne, Crommelin, Verplanck, Egbert, Hazard, Johnstone, Woodhull, Stilwell, Classon, Hamilton, Talman, VanBuren, Van Cortlandt, VanSinderin, Watson, Greenleaf, Schermerhorn, Bogart, Childs, Stewart, Merrill, Laight, Dunlap, Bond, Fullam, Ludlum, Lefferts, Smith, Kissam, Cromwell, Levy, Rankin, Storm, Suydam, Staats, Hunter, Billings, Ward, Pell, Seton, Judah, and Ludlow. These men (by no means all of them Episcopalian) often did the ordering of household necessities, and might be seen sauntering homeward with three yards of "flemmish Linnen" under their arms. Or "Camphire for the Cloths," 200 quills, or a ream of writing paper. Or wheeling home a pipe of gin (at five shillings a gallon, probably the best quality from Holland). Merchants like Levinus Clarkson preferred to range widely, buying wholesale at the dock whatever imports looked salable. They dealt in blankets, tea, and ivory combs from China, wheat, casks of gunpowder, waffle irons, nutmegs, linseed oil, slates. Clarkson dealt in bills of exchange, discounted notes, and somewhere in his cash book noted that he had paid John Lewis, the appointed collector for pews in the new Trinity Church, the sum of £34<sup>34</sup>.

The fact that Levinus Clarkson and so many of his acquaintances were members of Trinity Church or its chapels suggests that whatever animosity they bore that old citadel of Toryism was now forgotten. The Episcopal Church seemed already to be on a much firmer basis than it had enjoyed—or suffered from—when New York was a province. Then, the political ties were between church and state, and could be embarrassing. Now, church and state were formally separated, and officials of both sat together on a voluntary basis, a most happy arrangement that continued for some years.

If city merchants like Clarkson were careful to keep records of their dealings, the Church should do the same. After the 1790 diocesan

convention Bishop Provoost "enjoyed upon the Churches belonging to his Diocese to present the State of their respective congregations, thro' their deputies, at the next Convention. The writing to be delivered in under the hands of the Minister and Churchwardens . . . He has in contemplation to visit the churches on the Hudson whenever circumstances will permit." In such a way were the first "Parochial Reports" required of the churches in the Diocese of New York. Bishop Provoost probably had little interest in these reports other than insofar as they indicated the satisfaction or the disappointment of his clergy.

Much pleasanter were his occasional confirmations, his renewed friendship with George Washington (whom he probably first met at Clermont in 1782) when the President lived in New York City, the rebuilding of the burned church in 1788-90, and the gradually improving state of the Church. Since very little is left of Samuel Provoost's personal papers—a few letters and books and some sermons—and since his family seems to have gone on to successive generations without undue attention to a distinguished progenitor, we know very little of his personal life except that it was attended by much illness and sadness. Therefore, William A. Duer's description of Provoost is important to us. It was written in 1847 when Duer, retired president of Columbia College, was in the midst of churchmanship troubles, which served to enliven his pen when he wrote of Provoost:

In character and appearance, he was every inch a bishop—not, indeed, according to modern notions and exemplars, but after the model of the fathers of the reformation in the English Church. Devout without ostentation, stately without pride, dignified without austerity, he commanded the respect and esteem both of his clergy and the people—and he won the friendship and affections of all admitted to his intimacy. Like his saintly fellows in the Episcopacy, White and Madison, he was the follower of Cranmer, Latimer and Ridley—not the follower of Bonner, Laud and the non-Juring Bishops of Scotland, like some of his successors. He was truly Catholic, both in his principles and in his feelings; nor was his charity confined to his own denomination. It comprehended all who confessed "the Lord that bought them," within the pale of that universal church which is defined to be a "congregation of faithful men." One of the few among the Episcopal Clergy who adhered to their country at the Revolution—he sought an asylum when the British took possession of the city among his relatives in the manor of Livingston, where he resided during the war. Upon the evacuation of New York by the British he returned, with the rest of the inhabitants who had fled at their approach; and when his Whig friends gained the ascendancy in the vestry he was chosen for its Rector instead of Dr. Benjamin Moore,

who had remained in the city as an adherent to the Crown. Nor was the preference given to Dr. Provoost merely on account of his political principles—but for qualifications essential and germane to the office. He had received his education at the University of Oxford [sic], and brought from it acquisitions more valuable than the tory principles she more usually dispenses. Besides being a learned and sound divine he was a polite scholar and accomplished gentleman. He read the noble Liturgy of his Church with critical accuracy, without impairing the devotional spirit it is so well calculated to excite. As a preacher he was not so happy. His deliberate and sonorous declamation was better adapted to the reading desk than the pulpit. Although his enunciation was distinct as well as forcible, yet his sermons were delivered so emphatically—*ore rotundo*—that the exertion thus induced, together with plethoric habit, rendered the public services of the Church tedious and laborious to himself and to his hearers. But it is by no means certain that these circumstances did not tend to the improvement of his sermons by rendering them shorter. In private life the bishop, though studious and retired in his habits, and in mixed companies oppressed by diffidence, was certainly more agreeable, and a greater favorite, than in public. He possessed a vein of genuine humor, which gave zest to his conversation without infringing upon clerical or conventional propriety—and the playfulness of his manner when surrounded by his family and intimate friends was quite captivating. He was particularly condescending and attractive in his intercourse with the young; with whose tastes and feelings, from the simplicity of his own character, he could more easily sympathize. I shall ever gratefully remember his kindness to me as a boy, and the companion of his sons. He would frequently admit us all to his study—the upper room in the back building of the house which stood at the corner of Nassau and Fair (now Fulton) street, when he would show us his rarest and most valuable prints, exhibit to us the objects of his microscope, and divert himself with our youthful wonderment; and sometimes of a bright starlight evening he would display to us the more fascinating wonders of his telescope, and from his serious and impressive explanations he seemed to derive a graver and more holy pleasure from our curiosity and admiration. I thought, at that time, that Bishop Provoost was perfection itself; but before many years had elapsed, I discovered he was but a man. His faults, however, were those of one whom he resembled both in character and station. Like Eli of old, he was ever indulgent to his sons—and like Eli, he was punished by their loss.<sup>35</sup>

Those last cryptic words refer to the profligacy of Provoost's sons. Their troubles, and the prolonged illness of the bishop's wife, made it impossible for him to enjoy the improved fortunes of the Church.



## APPROACHING A NEW CENTURY, A NEW ERA

The diocesan convention of 1798 was canceled when yellow fever broke out again in the city. Had the convention been held, there would have been general satisfaction at news of the Church's growth upriver. The Connecticut migrants often included the Book of Common Prayer in their baggage. In 1795 Ebenezer Dibble (related to Punderson of Trinity Church, New Haven, and Christ Church, Rye) was missionary in Delaware County; Stamford there is named after the town of the same name in Connecticut.<sup>36</sup> Perhaps earlier, another Yankee had initiated services in Claverack, Athens, and Catskill. Two names are outstanding, however: Gideon Bostwick, and Daniel Nash, his protégé. In his labors as rector of Great Barrington, Bostwick must often have followed his flock as they and their friends settled new lands in Columbia County. From Bostwick's vantage point on the Berkshires, the distant Catskills would soon be a field white for the harvest. And that region, though forty miles from his own parsonage, was much closer to him than it was to Trinity in New York City. Young Daniel Nash caught the vision. After his ordination by Bishop Provoost, he set out to the country J. Fenimore Cooper would one day romanticize in his novels. Like Stuart before him, "Father" Nash had the help of a wife no less devoted than himself. Together for nearly forty years, they endured the privations of what was frontier life. Churches in at least nine counties owe their existence to Daniel Nash and his wife.

Yet another star was on the horizon: Philander Chase. Born in Vermont, tutored by Ellison, the unreformed Tory rector of St. Peter's, Albany, Chase was ordained deacon by Bishop Provoost in 1798, and with help from the new diocesan Missionary Society organized congregations from Troy to Lake George. This was the beginning of a life work that took him to New York City, Poughkeepsie, New Orleans, and eventually the episcopate in two dioceses in the midwest—Ohio and Illinois.

The Episcopal Church was destined to grow. Samuel Provoost could see this, and being a man of intelligence he could see that now the role of Episcopal Bishop of New York was far different from what it was in 1786. Then, it seemed that the rector-bishop had one task: to conserve the fortunes of Trinity Church and regain goodwill toward a church whose clergy, during the Revolution, had, perhaps rightly, lost the respect of the public. Provoost was fifty-six in 1798—by no means an old age—but his private troubles were heavy upon him. Maria Bousfield Provoost, his wife, died, after a very long illness, on August 18, 1799. Both his sons disappointed him. When George Washington died,

just as the splendid century was drawing to a close, Provoost could see another portent: ill, tired, depressed, and very possibly aware of new demands that must soon come upon him, he and his circle of heroes would not be men for a new century. Perhaps, then, it is fitting that Provoost's last extraordinary public appearance was at the "funeral" of Washington in New York City. Nothing more appropriately characterized that century's sense of public stateliness:

The Reverend the Clergy walked in full dress, with white scarfs, and twenty-four beautiful girls, in white robes, scarfs and turbans, strewed laurels as they went along. The Funeral Urn and its decorations was supported by eight soldiers upon a Bier, in form of a palanquin, six feet by four . . . As soon as the procession have been seated [in Trinity Church] music suited to the occasion was performed, a prayer was offered up to the most High by the Right Reverend Bishop Provoost, and an oration on the character and history of the deceased was delivered by the Honorable Gouverneur Morris. After the solemn services of the temple had concluded, the bier was deposited in the cemetery.<sup>37</sup>

Difficulties for Provoost multiplied in those last months of the century. His celebrated assistant minister, John Bissett—an "eloquent and powerful preacher," especially popular with the ladies—was far gone in alcohol, and resigned in disgrace in March 1800. This was something of a *cause célèbre* in the parish because the man had won an impressive election in the congregations of Trinity and the chapels several years before. While Provoost and the vestry were seeking a replacement for Bissett—they had their eye on a man named Hobart—the bishop's younger son, John, committed suicide and, in accordance with the custom of the day, was buried perforce under the sidewalk outside St. Paul's churchyard; even the very humanitarian Bishop Provoost would not read the service.<sup>38</sup>

The next month, Provoost "nominated the Reverend Mr. Hobart" to be an assistant clergyman at Trinity Church. That done, the rector intimated, September 8, 1800, his impending resignation from Trinity. A biographical sketch written by the bishop's sons-in-law, and published in 1844, states that Samuel Provoost was "induced" to resign. Whether this was a careless choice of word, or whether Provoost was strongly encouraged to resign for the sake of his health, or whether there was already strong pressure from younger clergy and laymen, we cannot know. Each is possible, but circumstances appear to opt for the latter. Why else did he deliberately prove himself to be as lethargic as his critics said he was? The rector was slow to leave the stage. Morgan Dix, Trinity's historian-rector, asserted that Provoost waited "for the completion of the transaction" of Hobart's acceptance, and thus an

assurance of Trinity's future welfare. A generous assessment. The rector remained to nominate Benjamin Moore to be his successor, and lingered yet longer until the vestry granted him an annuity of \$1,000 a year beginning August 1801. The instrument of resignation (why was such an elaborate document thought necessary?) was signed December 22, 1800. But, since the annuity did not commence until the following August, and since Provoost remained Bishop of New York, there is no reason to suppose he was not often to be seen in Trinity Church or St. Paul's Chapel. The church historian will always regret that no one was present to record what conversations Provoost and the young assistant minister, Hobart, might have had in the vestry room.

Bishop Provoost now planned the next step: retirement from the episcopal office. If his leaving Trinity had been accompanied by appointments and documents and agreements, this time Samuel Provoost would exit in his own style. Nevertheless, the resignation was somewhat expected; no one in the 1801 convention was very much surprised when the bishop simply announced that "ill health, afflictive occurrences, and an ardent wish to retire from all public employment" led him to resign his "jurisdiction as Bishop." The convention delegates were, however, nonplussed when, after his statement, the bishop walked out of the church. The General Convention then meeting in Philadelphia viewed the move as most disconcerting, if not irresponsible, because bishops simply didn't enter into "the design in question." Had Provoost been coerced? If so, the House of Bishops stated that, though prepared to consecrate an elected successor for New York,

this house must be understood to be explicit in their declaration, that they shall consider such a person as Assistant or Co-adjutor Bishop during Bishop Provoost's life, although competent, in point of character to all the Episcopal duties.

Having declared this, the House of Bishops proceeded to do just the opposite: they approved the consecration of Benjamin Moore as "Bishop-Elect of the Church in the State of New York." Eleven years later, the right reverend gentlemen would be glad they made the mistake.