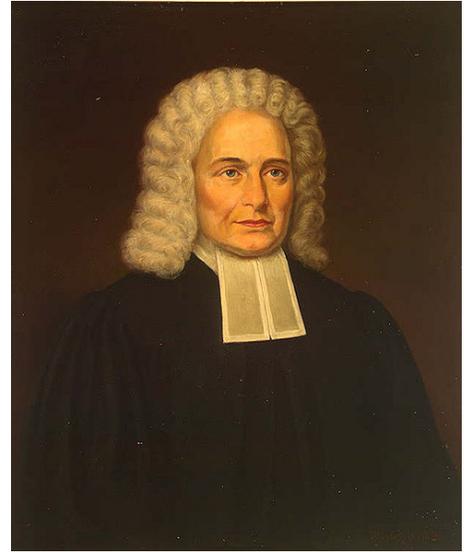


Reading: The Dissenter Movement in Virginia

What is important to your family today? Pretend you lived in Virginia in the 1700s. Your family moved to the colony from England with hopes of making a lot of money with the cash crop of tobacco. In the 1700s, you value family, hard work, the truth and your religion. You attend church with your family. The only church is the Church of England. No other religion is allowed. Your parents hear about a traveling minister. They hear he is bringing a message of truth about the way you should live your life. This is an exciting message and one that many people want to hear. Do you dare to go and listen to the traveling minister? What will happen to your family if you attend one of his services?



Rev. Samuel Davies

What would life be like living in a world where only one religion was allowed? Those who lived in Virginia in the 1740s knew this all too well. A young man named Samuel Davies changed all of this. At the age of twenty-three, he applied for a license to preach as a minister who went from town to town. Since he was not from the Church of England, this was required of him. He was the first minister from a different religion to have such a license in the Virginia colony. He was known as a dissenter. He spoke about the rights of religious freedom to others who would listen. A dissenter is someone who goes against what most people already believe.

Those who followed him and listened to him also became known as dissenters. The punishment for dissenters included beatings and even death. Samuel Davies knew, like others who followed him, that freedom of religion was a natural right. A natural right is one that people have from nature or God. A natural right is one that cannot be taken away by another person or by the government. Davies believed that freedom of religion was important.



Left: The Historic Polegreen Church Site Foundation

Davies preached at seven places throughout Virginia. By preaching throughout Hanover County and other nearby counties, he started the Presbyterian Church in Virginia. By 1755, the Presbyterian Church began and flourished. Davies talked about his religion with much enthusiasm and excitement. He started the movement for religious freedom in the south. He spent much time preaching at the Polegreen Meeting House in Hanover County. Hanover County, Virginia became the birthplace of religious freedom and start of the Presbyterian Church in the southern colonies.