



Telling Our Stories

250 Years of United Methodism
in the New York Area

1766-2016

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Freeborn and Catherine Garrettson

*Early American
Methodist
“Power Couple”*

1752-1827 & 1752-1849



Rev. Freeborn Garrettson was the first great American born Methodist preacher. A missionary to New England and Canada who strongly opposed slavery, he also shepherded Methodists in New York City and the Hudson Valley.

Catherine Livingston was a daughter in one of the most powerful and wealthiest families in the United States. The Livingstons owned almost a million acres of land in the Hudson Valley and Catherine’s brother helped write the Declaration of Independence. Against this backdrop of incredible privilege, Catherine shocked her peers by joining a Methodist class in Rhinebeck, NY.

Rhinebeck’s Methodist class brought Catherine and Freeborn together. The missionary and the socialite soon fell in love and became engaged to be married. However, Catherine’s mother refused to give the couple her blessing because, in her opinion, Methodists could not be trusted to respect

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(Freeborn and Catherine Garrettson, cont.)

the proper social hierarchy and boundaries.

Several years passed before Mother Livingston relented and the couple married in 1793. As husband and wife, Freeborn and Catherine built a life together that nurtured Methodist ministries throughout the region.

For Discussion

- The early Methodist church was seen as a “lower-class” church by the powerful and wealthy who attended more established churches. Do you think there is a social class divide in the church today?
- Catherine Garrettson risked the anger of her family to join a Methodist class. Do you know anyone whose spiritual journey has led them away from the world they grew up in?
- At Catherine’s funeral, she was called “a mother in Israel.” This was a term of endearment used by early Methodists for women like Deborah in Judges 5 who were spiritual mothers to their people. Do you know a “Mother in Israel” today?



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New York Annual Conference
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