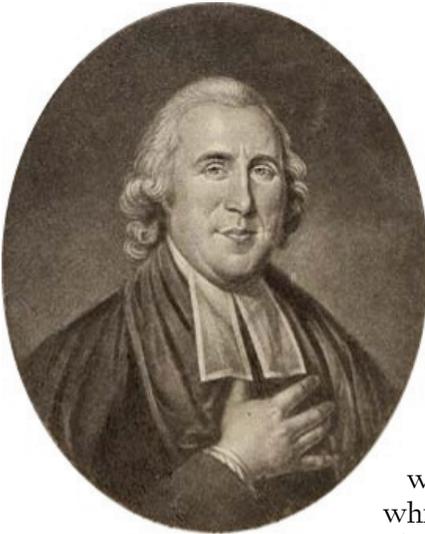


A Newly Discovered Letter Of Joseph Pilmore

Joseph Pilmore (1743-1825) came to America in 1769 along with Richard Boardman, the first two men sent by John Wesley as missionaries to the colonies to support the work of the fledgling Methodist societies that had begun forming there. The letter which is transcribed below recently was discovered embedded in a newspaper column written by Rev. Joseph Lybrand in 1877. Lybrand, then the Philadelphia Conference historian, published a series of articles in the *Lancaster New Era* detailing the origins of Methodism in Lancaster County. The letter, which appeared in Lybrand's article for the issue of December 15, 1877, was addressed to Mary Thorn, nicknamed Molly, who was the first female class leader in America. Though several letters to her from Pilmore survive and are housed in the archive at St. George's, the one below is not among them; as suggested in an article that appeared previously in this journal, Lybrand may have had several early documents in his possession associated with Mary Thorn that have been lost.¹

Just three days before he wrote her, Pilmore had departed from Philadelphia to commence a year-long evangelistic journey to the south which would take him as far as Georgia. According to his journal, Pilmore had passed through Reading on May 27, preaching in the courthouse there that day, and arrived in Lebanon the next afternoon. He wrote that Lebanon was "situate due west, about eighty miles from the City [of Philadelphia], and contains two hundred and fifty families, chiefly Germans. There are two churches in it, one for the Lutherans, and one for the Reformed or Presby-

¹"Mary Thorn, First Female Class Leader in America," *Annals of Eastern Pennsylvania* 2 (2005), 61-71.



 An early engraving
 of Joseph Pilmore

terians.” The Presbyterian church was made available for him to preach, which he did, “to a fine congregation” on the theme, “men should repent.”

The early trans-denominational nature of early American Methodism is demonstrated by both the letter and associated passages in Pilmore’s journal. He records preaching a number of times in Lebanon to congregations consisting of “Lutherans and Calvinists.” Among those whom he met there was Henry Melchior Muhlenberg (1711-1787), the great organizer and pioneer of American Lutheranism, of whom Pilmore says, “I... found my heart so knit to him in the pure love of the Gospel that I could freely give him the right hand of fellowship.” In his journal, Pilmore says that on May 29, “I wrote many letters to my dear people that I have left behind,” evidently including the one presented here.²

In 1774, Pilmore returned to England, where he remained for the duration of the American Revolution. By 1785 he had left the Methodists, came back to the newly independent United States and in November of that year was ordained an Episcopal priest. He served several parishes in Philadelphia and New York until his death in 1825.

²For the journal entries associated with late May 1772, see, Frederick Maser, et al, eds., *The Journal of Joseph Pilmore* (Philadelphia: Message Publishing Company, 1969), 135-136. Pilmore’s name is spelled variously (even by him) as Pilmore, Pillmore, or, as it appears in the letter contained here, Pilmoor.

Lebanon, May 29, 1772

Dear Molly:

Through much mercy and goodness we have been kept, and yesterday afternoon we arrived at Lebanon. I have preached several times since I left you, and it appears the Lord is present to give his word success. Last evening I preached in this place, and had much satisfaction in my own mind. I have long desired an opportunity to visit the country, and am glad that it is now come. Free from noise and worry of the tumultuous city, I'm surrounded with the beauties of nature, and can associate with those who live in sweet peace and walk in artless simplicity. Nothing but a prospect of more extensive usefulness would induce me to stay in the busy crowd, for the rural projects of nature, the ambrosial smell that comes wafted upon the wings of the wind, and the agreeable stillness which I behold, attracts me much. The woods are well stocked with songsters of various kinds, who all join the noble concert without the least guile or dissimulation, and exert all their strength in praising the world's Creator. When, O when will the day come that I shall meet with a company of mortals that will praise in the same artless, undisguised manner? I seek them, but alas! alas! I cannot find them. Wait, oh my soul, wait a little longer, and then I shall find many, very many of those upright spirits who praise God without ceasing and love him with all their souls. In that happy world of glory, nothing but purified saints shall dwell, and they shall be as pillars in the heavenly temple to go out no more. Join, dear Molly.

Yours, &c
Jos. Pilmoor

N.B. I have now preached six times in the Dutch Presbyterian Church in this town, and God has been very present with and precious unto us. To his name be all the praise. Tomorrow morning we set off for Lancaster, where I expect to spend a few days. I seem to be in my element now. O happy, happy state to be an itinerant preacher – to travel through the country to sound the gospel trumpet. Adieu. May 31st, 1772.