

During the English Civil War, Parliament convened the Westminster Assembly to reform the Church of England, moving it more toward Calvinism. Meeting from 1643 to 1648, the Assembly produced several major documents that became integral to Presbyterianism including the Westminster Confession of Faith (1646).

As Presbyterians migrated to America from England, Scotland, and Ireland, they imported this confessional heritage with them. In 1706, when seven Presbyterian ministers gathered in Philadelphia to organize the first presbytery, American Presbyterians still relied on English and Scottish editions of the Westminster Confession of Faith for study and worship. The first American edition, printed in Boston in 1723 by the eminent publisher Samuel Kneeland, may have been more Congregationalist in origin since it copied earlier London editions rather than the current Scotch edition and was sold initially in New England.

The only other edition of the Westminster Confession of Faith printed in colonial America definitely catered to a Presbyterian audience. During the First Great Awakening in the 1740s, Presbyterians split into Old Side and New Side factions. The controversy generated a flood of new American imprints on religious topics. In Philadelphia, Benjamin Franklin published books and pamphlets on both sides of the controversy as well as reprints of canonical texts. His Confession of Faith ..., based on the normative Edinburgh edition and published in 1745, served as the premiere American edition for the next fifty years, until the first General Assembly of the PCUSA adopted a revised version of the confession and printed it as part of the denomination's new Constitution in 1789.



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