

BARBARA HECK

Titus 2:11-14

Barbara (Ruckle) Heck was born in 1734 in Ballingrane (Republic of Ireland), daughter of Bastian (Sebastian) Ruckle and Margaret Embury and she married in 1760 Paul Heck in Ireland, and they had seven children, of whom four survived infancy. She died on August 17, 1804 in Augusta Township, Upper Canada.

Barbara Ruckle was a member of a distinctive community of German refugees, commonly known as the Palatines, who were settled in Ireland by the British government in 1709. In the wake of John Wesley's second visit to Ireland in 1748, which would lead to the establishment of the Irish Conference, many in this group of about 100 families became Methodists. Among the converts who were brought together in Methodist societies were Barbara Ruckle and her future husband, Paul Heck. In 1760, the year of their marriage, the Hecks, along with several other families of their faith, emigrated to New York intending to found a linen factory in New York City. This objective was not achieved and the new settlers took various other forms of employment.

At this time Methodism had not penetrated formally to the British North American colonies and without leadership the little group of German-Irish Methodists became religiously indifferent. The tradition is that Barbara Heck's concern about their worldliness came to a head in 1766 when she came upon a group of her friends playing cards in her kitchen. Angrily she "lifted a corner of her apron, swept the cards from the table into it with her hand, went to the fire and cast them from her apron into the flames. . . . She put on her bonnet and went to Philip Embury and said to him, 'Philip you must preach to us or we shall all go to hell together, and God will require our blood at your hands!'" Embury, formerly a local preacher in Ireland, hesitantly took up her challenge and held the first service in his home. It was attended by five persons including the Hecks and their African slave. The congregation grew rapidly and in 1768 the Wesley Chapel (John Street Church), the first Methodist church in New York, was opened.

By the mid-1760s continuous emigration from Britain had brought many former Methodists to the North American colonies. The group gathered by Mrs. Heck's example was one of several which emerged in Maryland, Pennsylvania, and New York. Wesley's awareness of this development led him to send two missionaries to New York in 1769. They and their successors, notably Francis Asbury, would lay the foundations of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States between 1784 and 1800. Meanwhile, through their own movements, the Hecks and other Palatine families participated unwittingly in the diffusion of Methodism.

In 1770, evidently dissatisfied with life in New York, a group including the Emburys and the Hecks settled in Camden Township near modern Bennington, Vt. Again Embury formed a society, at Ashgrove, N.Y., which subsequently became a major centre of Methodism in the New York Conference. The growth of the Camden community was interrupted, however, by the onset of the American Revolutionary War. Paul Heck enlisted in a loyalist regiment and inevitably, in 1778, his farm was confiscated by the rebels. The Hecks, offspring of refugees, now became refugees themselves, members of the motley collection of people who were caught between the bitter proponents of the imperial government and of colonial

independence. As such, they sought refuge in Montreal, Que., and as loyalists were resettled in 1785 in Township No.7 (Augusta).

Paul and Barbara Heck and their surviving children established a new home on the third concession of Augusta. They and other former Palatine families who came to this area and to the Bay of Quinte townships apparently sought to keep alive the rudiments of Methodist fellowship and discipline. These two groups were the nuclei of the first circuits in what would become the Canada Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Paul Heck died in 1795; Barbara died suddenly on 17 Aug. 1804 in her son Samuel's home. She was buried in the cemetery of the Blue Church (Anglican), near modern Prescott.

In 1909 the Methodist churchman [Albert Carman](#) commented that Barbara Heck "led a humble, holy, blameless life, and died among her kindred with her Bible . . . on her knees." Her determination surely had something to do with the growth of Methodism in New York City; similarly her faith must have influenced her family and her friends to remain loyal to Methodism in adversity and migration. Her son, [Samuel Heck's](#) career as a prominent local preacher in the St Lawrence settlements was at least in part a testimony to his mother's strong convictions.

Methodism has very strong roots in the desire of those who wanted to live righteous lives. Barbara Heck's example is obvious in this regard. As Titus proclaimed... "*The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age, to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly...*" (Titus 2:11-12) Our heritage includes the idea that the only qualifier for attending a Methodist Class meeting was the desire to flee from the wrath to come. And we would escape the wrath of God by living righteous lives and having a serious relationship with Jesus Christ. "*He it is who gave Himself for us that He might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for Himself a people of His own who are zealous for good deeds!*" (Titus 2:14)

Romans 6:13 – *No longer present your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and present your members to God as instruments of righteousness!* We should react with the same enthusiasm to wickedness that Barbara Heck showed when she found people playing cards in her house. And although card-playing may only be a means for gambling, which would make it a sin, she saw it as a sign that the community needed the Word of God desperately. Can we become desperate like that?

CALL TO WORSHIP Psalm 25:4-10

Make us to know Your ways, O Lord; teach us Your Paths!

Lead us in Your truth, and teach us, for you are the God of our salvation; for You we wait all day long!

Be mindful of Your mercy, O Lord, and of your steadfast love, for they have been known from of old!

Do not remember the sins of our youth or our transgressions; according to Your steadfast love remember us, for Your goodness' sake, O Lord!

Good and upright is the Lord; therefore God instructs sinners in the Way.

God leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble The Way!

The paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep God's covenant and God's decrees!

Come, let us sing to the Lord, Praising God for God's steadfast love!

Special recognition??? ***Leave blank***