

THE
KENTUCKY
BAPTIST
HERITAGE



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SOCIETY
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(As of Sept. 15, 1971)

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causing the membership to climb
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Dr. Crismon is Secretary of
the Committee, as well as Editor
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CORRECTING AN ERROR

SECOND ASSOCIATION IN KENTUCKY

Pastor Malcolm G. Lunceford
informs us that the Immanuel Bap-
tist Church, Frankfort, Ky. ob-
serves its Tenth Anniversary on
October 17, 1971. The church was
organized on October 15, 1961. We
had the date - October 15, 1962.

Having presented the story of
the founding of the first associ-
ation in Kentucky - the Elkhorn,
on September 30-October 1, 1785 -
in the June issue of The Kentucky
Baptist Heritage, we now give a
brief account of the formation of
Kentucky Baptists' second associ-
ation - SALEM.

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 66 -back)

KENTUCKY BAPTIST

BACKGROUND

FROM

"RELIGION ON THE AMERICAN FRONTIER - THE BAPTISTS"

WILLIAM WARREN SWEET

While the events we have been recounting are of great moment in the general history of the Baptist in America, of much greater importance for our present study was the extension of the Baptists into Virginia and North Carolina. The Baptists in Virginia came from three general sources. The first group came from England and settled in the south-eastern part of the colony in 1714. There they remained unnoticed and unmolested until past the middle of the eighteenth century. The second group came into Virginia from Maryland in 1743 and settled in Frederick County. These first two groups were general Baptists, that is, they were Arminian in doctrine, though later, largely through the influence of Regular or Calvinistic Baptists from the Philadelphia Association, they gave up their Arminian views and accepted the Calvinism of the Regular Baptists. These first two groups are of little importance from the standpoint of the migration of Baptists westward. We will, therefore, give most of our attention to the third group which came largely from England, bringing with them the fervor and spirit of the Great Awakening.

The early leaders of this third group were Shubal Stearns and his brother-in-law, Daniel Marshall, Separates or New-Lights from Connecticut. Stearns was the product of the Great Revival and united with the New-Lights in 1745. Finally convinced of the futility of infant baptism, he determined to be immersed and unite himself with the Baptists, which he did in 1751. The same year he was ordained as a Baptist minister and three years later (1754) left New England, coming first to Opekon creek, Virginia, where there was a Baptist church. Here he met Daniel Marshall, his brother-in-law, who had just returned from the Susquehanna where he had been preaching to the Mohawk Indians. Like Stearns, Marshall had been converted under the preaching of Whitefield. He came of Presbyterian ancestry but coming into Virginia, he came in contact with the Baptists, and after examining their "faith and order," was immersed and was licensed as a preacher.

Stearns and Marshall preached as evangelists in Virginia for a short time, particularly in Berkeley and Hampshire counties, but here they met considerable criticism and some opposition because of their animated preaching, and charges were preferred against them in the association. The decision of the association, however, was in favor of the evangelists though the results of their labors in Virginia did not meet their expectation. This fact evidently led Stearns and Marshall and their company to leave Virginia and locate in Guilford County, North Carolina, where they settled on Sandy Creek in 1755. Soon after arriving, the little group of new settlers were organized into a church which took the name Sandy Creek, and Stearns was appointed the pastor.

Stearns, Marshall and Joseph Reed, another preacher in the Sandy Creek church, were soon engaged in evangelizing throughout a wide territory. The Sandy Creek church grew from sixteen members to six hundred six; and other churches were formed. New converts at Abbot's Creek, thirty miles away, were formed into a church and Marshall was ordained as its pastor. As the work grew other preachers, to use Semple's expression, were "raised" in North Carolina. Among them were James Reid, Dutton Lane and most important of all, Samuel Harriss, a man of influence in his community, who had held several offices, among them burgess of the county and colonel of the militia.

There had been Baptists in North Carolina since at least 1727, when a church had been "gathered" on Chowan River in the northeast section of the colony. In 1742 William Sojourner, a Baptist minister from Berkeley County, Virginia, settled on Kehukee Creek, North Carolina. Soon there were several churches in the region and ten years later (1752) the number had grown to sixteen. Like the early Baptist churches in Virginia these early North Carolina churches were General Baptists holding Arminian views, and were more or less lax in their administration of discipline, not requiring an experience of religion previous to the administration of baptism. These churches were visited in 1754 by John Gano of the Philadelphia Association and the following year two other ministers of the Philadelphia Association visited the churches and superintended their reorganization.

Such was the general Baptist situation in North Carolina when the Separate Baptists under Stearns and Marshall began their work.

The older Baptists in Virginia and North Carolina, as well as all other denominations in contact with them, generally disapproved of the Separates. This disapproval was largely based upon the pulpit mannerisms and type of preaching generally followed by the evangelists, and by the effects produced upon the congregations. They were very noisy in their preaching and Semple tells us that in the beginning of the revival they "whooped" in "many odd tones." An eyewitness at one of their meetings saw "multitudes, some roaring on the ground, some wringing their hands, some in extacies, some praying, some weeping, and others so outrageous cursing and swearing that it was thought they were really possessed of the devil." One of the peculiar mannerisms developed by the preachers was the "holy whine" a sing song method of speaking which seems to have arisen with outdoor preaching, and which continued to be practiced by the less educated Baptist ministers on the frontier for many years.

The Separate Baptists had the reputation for being an ignorant and illiterate set. As is generally the case, the people attracted to the kind of meeting conducted by the Separate Baptist evangelists represented the lower classes economically and educationally. The intensity of their religious exercises and their excesses alarmed some and angered others who were not swept along by the tide of emotionalism. Those who held to infant baptism thought the Baptists cruel in neglecting the baptism of their infants, and to some the very name Baptist was terrifying.

However, in spite of their lack of education, and the general contempt in which they were held by those about them, the Separate Baptists, under the devoted leadership of Stearns, Marshall and Harriss, and numerous other preachers, were attracting hosts to their meetings and churches were springing up with amazing rapidity. The Sandy Creek church became "the mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother of forty-two churches, from which sprang one hundred twenty-five ministers."

From North Carolina the work spread into Virginia where in 1760 the first Separate Baptist church was established. Samuel Harriss was one of the early Virginia converts and he became the apostle to Virginia. In 1760 the Separate Baptist churches in North Carolina and Virginia formed the Sandy Creek Association and for the next ten years the progress of the Separate Baptists is almost unparalleled in Baptist history. Whole communities were stirred and strong Baptist churches established. Semple thus describes the work of Reed and Harriss in Virginia:

"In one of their visits, they baptised seventy-five at one time, and in the course of one of their journies, which generally lasted several weeks, they baptised upwards of two hundred. It was not uncommon, at their great meetings, for many hundreds to camp on the ground, in order to be present the next day. The night meetings, thro' the great work of God, continued very late; the minister would scarcely have an opportunity to sleep; sometimes the floor would be covered with persons, struck down under conviction for sin. It frequently happened that, when they would retire to rest at a late hour, they would be under the necessity of arising again, thro' the earnest cries of the penitent; there were instances of persons travelling more than one hundred miles to one of these meetings; to go forty or fifty was not uncommon."

The rapid increase of this extreme type of Baptist in Virginia and North Carolina had much more than a religious significance. The growing number of Baptists in Virginia soon made them a political factor of importance. During the early period of the Virginia and North Carolina revival, the Separate Baptists were badly treated by the lower classes, and much of the early trouble experienced by the preachers was at the hands of the rabble. By about 1770, however, the Baptist revivalists had largely overcome this type of opposition. The people came to realize that the Baptists were fighting their battles" and from this time on there began a popular reaction in their favor. But about the same time trouble for the Baptists was brewing in another direction. The Civil authorities began now to oppose them and the years from 1768 to 1774 are known as the "Period of the Great Persecution." The historian of the Kettocton Association states that,

"When persecutors found that religion could not be stopped in its progress by ridicule, defamation, and abusive language, the resolution was to take a different step and see what that would do; and the preachers in different places were apprehended by magisterial authority, some of whom were imprisoned."

Leland states that thirty or more of the preachers "were honored with the dungeon," while some of them "were imprisoned as often as four times." In 1768 five of the preachers were arrested in Spottsylvania County as disturbers of the peace and one of the charges made against them was that "they cannot meet a man upon the road, but that they must ram a text of scripture down his throat."

One of the five, Blair, was released after four weeks, and all were promised release if they would promise to preach no more in the county, for a year and a day, but this offer they refused and the four remained in jail forty-three days.

This is typical of the persecution meted out to Baptists to the outbreak of the Revolution. When the preachers were arrested, it was done on a peace warrant, on the ground that they were disturbers of the peace, and not that they were dissenters.

The civil officials pretended that they were not persecuting religion when they caused the arrest of the Baptist preachers, but were acting in the cause of peace and good order. Preachers

"were not brought to the bar for religion nor for their religious opinions, nor any of their rites, modes or religious ceremonies, but as disturbers of the peace, the perverters of good order, and the calling unlawful assemblies together, taking the people from their necessary employment on their different farms and plantations, bringing the people into habits of idleness and neglect of their necessary business and interesting pursuits and thereby reducing the inhabitants to want and distress."

Semple thus describes how the tide of opinion in favor of the Virginia Baptists began gradually to turn:

"In the meantime, everything tended to favour their wishes their persecution so far from impeding, really promoted their cause; their preachers had now become numerous, and some of them were men of considerable talents. Many of the leading men favoured them; some from one motive and some from another; their congregations were large, and when any of their men of talents preached, they were crowded. The patient manner in which they suffered persecution, raised their reputation for piety and goodness, in the estimation of a large majority of the people. Their numbers annually increased in a surprising degree. Every month new places were found by the preachers, whereon to plant the Redeemer's standard. In these places, although but few might become Baptists, yet the majority would be favourable. Many that had expressed great hostility to them, upon forming a more close acquaintance with them, professed to be undeceived."

Such was the general situation in Virginia as far as the Baptists were concerned, when the War for Independence opened. The Baptists were still a comparatively small body, but they were strong enough to make it important for either side to obtain their support and influence, and the Baptists were not slow in perceiving the advantageous position in which they were placed. In electing members to the new state Legislature, the Baptists united their voices in electing men favorable to religious liberty and freedom of conscience. The opening of the battle for political freedom offered the opportunity for the achievement of religious freedom.

The first breach in the special privileges of the Establishment in Virginia was won by the Baptists in 1775 when the Convention at Richmond granted each denomination of dissenters the privilege of conducting divine service for its adherents in the army, "for the ease of such scrupulous consciences as may not choose to attend divine services as celebrated by the chaplain." From now on the Baptists became active in petitioning the Virginia authorities to abolish the church establishment. In 1776 the Virginia Convention placed in the first state constitution the philosophy of religious liberty when the first independent Legislature declared against all laws punishing men for religious opinions, and exempted dissenters from taxation for the support of the establishment. Meanwhile the Presbyterians, Lutherans, and other dissenting groups united their petitions to those of the Baptists, and of great significance and importance in the struggle for religious freedom were the able allies, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, Patrick Henry and George Mason.

In 1774, Madison wrote in a letter to a college friend:

"That diabolical, hell-conceived principle of persecution rages among some; and to their eternal infamy, the clergy can furnish their quota of imps for such business. This vexes me the worst of anything whatever. There are at this time in the adjacent county not less than five or six well-meaning men in close jail for publishing their religious sentiments, which, in the main, are very orthodox. I have neither patience to hear, talk, or think of anything relative to this matter: for I have squabbled and scolded, abused and ridiculed, so long about it, to little purpose, that I am without common patience."

Throughout the years of the Revolution the Baptists were carrying on their agitation for religious liberty. They had learned the expediency "of petitions, publicity, agitation, commissions and lobbying," and little by little concessions were granted to the dissenters. They petitioned for a law legalizing marriages performed by a dissenting minister; they assaulted the vestries and asked that overseers of the poor be elected by the community at large. But none of these partial measures satisfied them; they demanded complete religious freedom and they continued their agitation until it was achieved.

On June 18, 1779 Jefferson's bill for the establishment of religious freedom was presented to the General Assembly of Virginia, and from that time until its passage in 1785 the contest continued. Other bills were introduced and considered and rejected. The substitute bill which came nearest passage was one providing for a general assessment for religious purposes, with the provision that persons giving in taxes should declare the denomination to which they wished their assessment to go. If they made no declaration, the money should go to encourage seminaries in their respective counties. The Episcopal people, of course favored the measure and the Presbyterians were wavering. Washington could see no harm in it, but the Baptists stood firm and true to their fundamental principles, and continued to demand complete religious liberty and separation of Church and State. So strong, however, was the sentiment in favor of the assessment measure that it was defeated finally only by a majority of three votes.

Finally, the ground was completely cleared for a final consideration of Jefferson's bill for Establishing Religious Freedom. On December 17, 1785 it passed and on January 19, 1786 it received the signature of the Speaker of the House and became law. Thus Virginia became the first government in the world to establish the absolute divorce of Church and State, "the greatest distinctive contribution of America to the sum of Western Christian civilization."

Says Hawks, the historian of the Protestant Episcopalians in Virginia, "The Baptists were the principal promoters of this work, and in truth aided more than any other denomination in its accomplishment!"

While the struggle for religious freedom was at its height in Virginia, a similar struggle was in progress in New England, led by Isaac Backus, while the Warren Baptist Association furnished the machinery for the assault. To the first Continental Congress (1774) Backus presented the grievances of New England Baptists, but the Congress took no official notice of his demands. Backus now turned to Massachusetts, the chief stronghold of Congregationalism, and through the years of the Revolution the Baptists continued their agitation,

and although they were not immediately successful in winning complete religious freedom, yet gradually public sentiment grew against discrimination and the Baptist churches continued to increase throughout New England. In 1796 in New England, not counting Rhode Island, there were three hundred thirteen Baptist churches, an indication that the time was soon to come when the New England form of establishment must give way before the assaults of the New England Baptists and their allies. When Backus learned of the passage of the Virginia Act establishing Religious Freedom in that state, he wrote:

"Equal Liberty of Conscience is established as fully as words can express it. Oh when shall it be so in New England! However, God is working wonders here."

The close of the Revolution found the Baptists in the United States in a vastly different position than they had occupied at the beginning. At the beginning of the War for Independence they were but small persecuted groups, here and there, made up largely of the underprivileged classes, economically and educationally. By 1790 a social revolution had taken place. Influential and wealthy members were now counted among them, and their general reputation was equal to that of any other denomination of Christians. They had supported with almost unanimity the patriot cause in the War for Independence; they had led in the struggle for complete religious liberty which had been so gloriously won in Virginia, and was now moving in ever increasing streams over the mountains into the new empire of the west. The second chapter will trace Baptist migration over the Alleghenies and its establishment and growth there during the latter years of the eighteenth and the early years of the nineteenth centuries.

-- RELIGION ON THE AMERICAN FRONTIER
THE BAPTISTS 1783-1830

By WILLIAM WARREN SWEET. Pages 7 -17.

MORE ON SALEM ASSOCIATION

The second session of the Salem Association was held at Cedar Creek, Nelson County, on September 30 1786. Again, no reference is made to Elkhorn Association.

The third session was aheld at Cox's Creek, Nelson County on October 6, 1787. A letter of correspondence was received from Elkhorn Association through messengers John Tanner, Augustine Eastin, and Marias Hansbrough. There were still only four churches in the association.

At the fourth session, held at Cox's Creek on October 4, 1788, Bra-shear's Creek (located near the future site of Shelbyville) and Rolling Fork Churches were received into the union. The association at th-s time numbered 6 churches with 188 members.

At the fifth session at Cox's Creek on October 3, 1789, the vener-able John Gano from Elkhorn Association preached the introductory ser- on from Acts 15:6. At this session the question of whether church mem- bers should be slave-holders was agitated. The association refused to consider the matter. But it caused much discussion for many years and finally divided the association. Severn's Valley, Mill Creek, and Rolling Fork withdrew after many years of agitation, in 1796. Joshua Carman and Josiah Dodge became irreconcilable emancipationists and organized an emancipationist church. Severn's Va- :ey and Rolling re- turned to the Salem body in 1802.

Long Run Association was formed from the Salem body in 1803.

-- Wendell H. Rone, Sr.

(SECOND ASS'N IN KENTUCKY Continued)

Spencer states that "this was the second association organized in the Mississippi Valley, and embraced the first two churches planted on the soil of Kentucky" (Vol. II, 44).

The Baptists in the western settlements were separated from those on the waters of the Kentucky River by a broad belt of unsettled country much infested by Indians. Communication between them was infrequent in the period 1780-1785. Thus the Baptists in the western settlements were in ignorance of what their brethren were doing on Elkhorn. They were fewer in numbers of both members and preachers than their brethren in the eastern area. Jefferson (1780) and Nelson (1784) were the only counties in existence, north of Green River and west of the Kentucky River at this time. But, like them, they appreciated the advantages and felt the need of an association, in which they meet at least once a year and devise means for the advancement of the great cause that was dearer to them all, and which afforded to them their only solace in the wilderness of toil, danger and wearying care.

The following is a literal copy of the record of the constitution of this fraternity of Regular Baptists, made by the clerk, Andrew Paul, and transcribed by Spencer Clack (in 1826) in his History of Salem Association:

"On Saturday, the twenty ninth day of October, seventeen hundred and eighty-five, four Regular Baptist Churches met at Cox's Creek, Nelson County Ky., by their delegates, in order to form an association, and after a suitable sermon on the occasion, preached by our brother Joseph Barnett, from the first chapter of John and 17th verse, proceeded to business. Brother Joseph Barnett being chosen Moderator, and Brother Andrew Paul, Clerk.

"I. Letters from four churches were read, viz:
Severn's Valley, constituted

June eighteenth, seventeen hundred and eighty-one. Number of members, thirty-seven. No pastor. Cedar Creek, constituted July fourth, seventeen hundred and eighty-one. Members forty-one. Joseph Barnett, pastor. Bear Grass, constituted January, seventeen hundred and eighty-four. Members nineteen. John Whitacre, pastor. Cox's Creek, constituted April, seventeen hundred and eighty-five. Members twenty-six.

"II. The right of churches to associate, the nature, character and authority of an association opened by Brother Barnett.

"III. The constitution, principles and character of the several churches, proposing to associate, minutely inquired into, both in regard to discipline, and left under consideration till Monday morning. Adjourned till Monday morning.

"Met according to adjournment.

"IV. The report of the several delegates being read and attended to. RESOLVED, That the churches have adopted 'The Philadelphia Confession of Faith, and Treatise of Discipline, hereto annexed, and hold ourselves in full fellowship with the Philadelphia, Ketoc-ton and the Monongalia Associations, and proper measures endeavored to obtain assistance from, and correspondence with the same.

(From Spencer, II, 44-45)

Evidence seems to point to the fact that they had probably not as much as heard of the organization of the Elkhorn body about one month previous to this date: as a broad wilderness, filled with blood-thirsty savages, intervened.

One cannot help noting the extreme care and respect they manifested toward the churches, constantly exalting them above the association and the extreme care shown that the churches associating be sound in their faith and discipline. One also notes that where the Elkhorn adopted the Philadelphia Confession with some exceptions, the Salem adopted it in its entirety.

Joseph Barnett, and John Whitacre were the only preachers in attendance at this initial meeting. -- Wendell H. Rone, Sr.