

# The Founders Journal



Committed to historic Baptist principles

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## SANDY CREEK REVISITED



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Cover Photo: Sandy Creek Baptist Church.  
Photo by Matt Miller, SWBTS, courtesy of BP News

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# The Founders Journal



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# Sandy Creek Revisited

*Tom Ascol*

One of the most popular and widely repeated explanations for the doctrinal make up of the Southern Baptist Convention is that the denomination was formed by the convergence of two distinct, if not opposite theological traditions. These traditions are often referred to as the “Charleston” and “Sandy Creek” streams, named after the two churches and associations that best represent those traditions.

Charleston refers to the First Baptist Church of Charleston (established in 1682 and relocated to Charleston in 1696) and the Charleston Baptist Association of churches (established in 1751). The Second London Baptist Confession of Faith was the doctrinal foundation of the church and was formerly adopted by the association, as well. As a result it became known throughout the south as the “Charleston Confession.” This association, like its sister association in Philadelphia that was formed in 1707, was thoroughly committed to the Particular (or Calvinistic) Baptist viewpoint on the sovereignty of God in salvation. In America, those of this persuasion became known as Regular Baptists.

Sandy Creek is the name of the church that was founded in North Carolina in 1755 by Shubal Stearns and his brother-in-law, Daniel Marshall. Three years later an association of churches by that same name was formed. These Baptists largely came out of the Great Awakening in the middle of the 18th century and were known as Separate Baptists. The churches that joined together in forming the Sandy Creek Association had a healthy skepticism regarding confessions and creeds. This grew out of experience with the dead orthodoxy that many of them had left behind in their former Congregationalism. This distinguished them from the Regular Baptists, who were enthusiastically confessional in their churches. However, this distinction must not be stretched beyond what the historical record will bear.

Unfortunately, such stretching to the point of distortion is exactly what some have done in the way that the differences between the “Sandy Creekers” and “Charlestonians” are portrayed. The argument goes like this: The Charleston Stream was Calvinistic and confessional while the Sandy Creek Stream was evangelistic and non-creedal. The implication, and sometimes the actual declaration, is that the Sandy Creek tradition was opposed to the doctrines of grace as expressed in historic, evangelical Calvinism. That misrepresentation has been so regularly repeated by so many spokesmen who occupy positions of respect within the Southern Baptist Convention that it is widely regarded as an indisputable fact. In reality, it is closer to an urban legend.

Dr. Paige Patterson recently acknowledged the tendency to overstate the case when distinguishing between the Sandy Creek and Charleston traditions.

In his dialogue on election with Dr. Al Mohler at the 2006 Southern Baptist Convention's Pastors' Conference, he said, "The Sandy Creek tradition was . . . less Calvinistic, though, to be perfectly fair about the whole matter, it was certainly a long way from being Arminian, because the Sandy Creek statement of faith has a very Calvinistic strain to it also."

This observation is patently true and easily demonstrable from the historical record. This issue of the *Founders Journal* addresses that distortion by focusing on the Separate Baptist tradition. Tom Nettles has done all Baptists a wonderful service in his 3 volume work called *The Baptists* (Christian Focus, the 3rd volume is forthcoming). His article that follows is excerpted from his chapter on Shubal Stearns in volume 2. Gene Bridges' article provides some groundbreaking work on the cultural background out of which the Separate Baptists emerged. His insights bring a much-needed perspective on the differences between the Sandy Creek and Charleston traditions.

While the question of Southern Baptist origins is not hugely important in the big scheme of life and ministry, it can be part of a vitally important conversation about the nature of the gospel as it relates to our doctrinal, genetic code. If the Sandy Creekers and Charlestonians were in basic agreement on what the gospel is and how it works, then the united testimony of those two streams can provide a helpful reference point for evaluating the prevalent understanding of these crucial matters in our own day. If what our forebears believed about the gospel was true then, it is still true today. God has not changed. Fallen humanity has not changed. The gospel has not changed. ☞

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## The Raw Calvinism of the North Carolina Separates of the Sandy Creek Tradition

*A Product of Right Doctrine  
In the Right Place at the Right Time*

*Gene M. Bridges*

On November 7, 2005, the Sandy Creek Baptist Church celebrated its 250th Anniversary. The church was founded in 1755 by Shubal Stearns and his brother-in-law Daniel Marshall. In 1758, they established an association. Within seventeen years, the church grew to a membership of over six hundred. It spawned forty-two other churches. Many Southern Baptist historians look to the Sandy Creek Church as one of two tributaries that eventually formed the Southern Bap-

tist Convention in the 19th century, and they often perpetuate a popularized theory from Walter Shurden and Fisher Humphreys<sup>1</sup> alleging that the “high church” Charlestonians were confessional Calvinists, while those in the Sandy Creek Association were either opposed to Calvinism or believed in a “softer” or “moderate” or “kinder, gentler” Calvinism. Moreover, they imply that the Charlestonians were less evangelistic than the Sandy Creek Association.

Paige Patterson, president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, who would never recognize Humphreys and Shurden as friends of the conservative wing of the Convention, has perpetuated this thesis. He preached at the church during its anniversary celebration, and stated that Baptists usually describe the “Southern Baptist river as flowing from two tributaries, one having its beginning in Charleston, South Carolina, the more Reformed tradition of Baptist life, and the other at Sandy Creek ... I am a Sandy Creeker. If I could manage to have honorary church membership in any church in the Southern Baptist Convention, it would be Sandy Creek,” adding that he fully appreciated what the church has carried on throughout the years. “We Sandy Creekers still believe we are in the era of evangelism, missions and great revival.”<sup>2</sup> Dr. Patterson’s comments raise an important question as to what constitutes a “Sandy-Creeker.”

Baptist historians of the past differed with this thesis, but to some extent this should not come as a surprise given that some even then were at times unsure how to treat the North Carolina Separates. On the one hand, R.B.C. Howell blunderingly called them “Arminians.” In his work, *The Early Baptists of Virginia*, Howell notes that the early Baptist immigrants from Virginia came from both General and Particular Baptist stock, but labels the Regulars as Particulars and Separates as General Baptists.<sup>3</sup> Among those differing with Howell, we find William Whitsitt.

These Separate Baptists were all of them Calvinists by persuasion. They were not Calvinists of the stern old type that formerly had prevailed but rather Calvinists of the school of Jonathan Edwards and adherents of the New Divinity. On that account they were often described as New Lights. For the main part their sympathies and cooperation were given to the Calvinistic brethren in New England and against the Arminian Baptists. Thus by the agency of Mr. Whitefield a change was produced almost in the twinkling of an eye by means of which the Calvinistic Baptists gained ascendancy in the New England colonies. Nothing could have been more extraordinary or unexpected than such a transformation. Arminianism had been steadily growing in New England for several decades; making progress not only in the Baptist community as has been shown but likewise in the established order. Jonathan Edwards rose up to stem the tide and to stay the progress of defection, and by the aid of Whitefield accomplished a revolution. This revolution, however, was more apparent among the Baptists than in the ranks of the Established Church. It altered the whole aspect of affairs.<sup>4</sup>

M.A. Huggins went so far as to say that Stearns was an Arminian,<sup>5</sup> and George Paschal even denied that the soteriological section of the Sandy Creek Confession itself was from Stearns hand.<sup>6</sup> Lumpkin classifies most Separates as “modified Calvinists” who had little to say about predestination, particular atonement and unconditional election.<sup>7</sup>

*The Founders Journal* has revisited this thesis a number of times.<sup>8</sup> Tom Nettles has devoted an entire chapter of his most recently published work to the legacy of Shubal Stearns.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, this all leaves the clear impression that folks have never been entirely sure how to treat the North Carolina Separates, and there is a need to revisit the historical data to rehabilitate their history in light of what many believe to have been the hand of historians generally hostile to Calvinism. Clearly, however, the Separates and the Regulars differed, and they differed enough that historians have been unsure what to do with them, leading to some varied, if not contradictory evaluations of them. Some historians may have been biased against Calvinism; others, however, may have been biased toward it, so simply chalking the assortment of competing theses up to bias appears to be little more than an exercise in the genetic fallacy. No doubt, however, this element does enter into any evaluation of the Separates that endeavors to categorize them theologically. How then can this tension be resolved?

There are no easy answers, particularly when looking for interpretive historical connections. In this article, we shall first review the confessional data, as Baptist historians have tended to concentrate their evaluations here. In the second section, we shall introduce some data not often considered that may help shed light onto the North Carolina Separate (Sandy Creek) tradition and suggest that perhaps the answer lies not in perpetually rehashing their confessional tradition, but in evaluating the actual nature of the differences between the Separates and Regulars in North Carolina in light of the cultural character of North Carolina and its people during the time in question. In short, what is the actual nature of the differences between the Regulars and Separates; what was North Carolina like, and how might this have affected the Separate tradition as a whole?

### **Principles of Faith of The Sandy Creek Association (1816)<sup>10</sup>**

1. We believe that there is only one true and living God; the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. equal in essence, power and glory; and yet there are not three Gods but one God.
2. That Scriptures of the Old and New Testament are the Word of God, and only rule of faith and practice.
3. That Adam fell from his original state of purity, and that his sin is imputed to his posterity; that human nature is corrupt, and that man, of his own free will and ability, is impotent to regain the state in which he was primarily placed.
4. We believe in election from eternity, effectual calling by the Holy Spirit,

and justification in his sight only by imputation of Christ righteousness. And we believe that they who are thus elected, effectually called, and justified, will persevere through grace to the end, that none of them be lost.

5. We believe that there will be a resurrection from the dead, and a general judgment, and that the happiness of the righteous and punishment of the wicked will be eternal.
6. The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful persons, who have obtained fellowship with each other, and have given themselves up to the Lord and one another; having agreed to keep up a godly discipline, according to the rules of the Gospel.
7. That Jesus Christ is the great head of the church and that the government thereof is with the body.
8. That baptism and the Lord's Supper are ordinances of the Lord, and to be continued by his church until his second coming.
9. That true believers are the only fit subjects of baptism; and that immersion is the only mode.
10. That the church has no right to admit any but regular baptized church members to communion at the Lord's Table.

### **Objections to Portraying the Sandy Creek Association as Strong Soteriological Calvinists**

**Objection One:** Paragraph Three does say “that man, of his own free will and ability, is impotent to regain the state in which he was primarily placed.” The *Principles* restrict depravity to an inability “to regain the state in which he was primarily placed,” rather than offer it as a reason why “we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil.”<sup>11</sup> The *LBCF* says that Adam's corrupted nature was inherited by us (6.2). The *Principles* simply say that “human nature is corrupt,” while remaining silent as to the source of that corruption. Is this a reference to our own choices or to Adam?

**Response:** The full text reads:

That Adam fell from his original state of purity, and that his sin is imputed to his posterity; that human nature is corrupt, and that man, of his own free will and ability, is impotent to regain the state in which he was primarily placed.

The first statement is abundantly clear by any fair reading, stating that the result of the fall is the imputation of Adam's sin to Adam's posterity. Following this, in the same sentence, we see that human nature is corrupt. The contextual solution, seems to be that this is a result of the choice of Adam and the imputation of his sin to us. In addition, we should note that genuine Arminianism includes a

doctrine of universal prevenient grace, but there is no affirmation of this doctrine here, and it is completely absent from the remaining statements in the *Principles*. If the statement about the fall was moderated, we would also expect something that could be construed as a reference to prevenient grace or a statement about calling being co-extensive with the atonement, being equally possible for all men, or a declaration about the freedom of the will. It strikes one as anachronistic for an objector to fail to notice this, in that modern “moderate Calvinists” (often Four-Point Arminians) tend to deemphasize prevenient grace themselves.<sup>12</sup> One wonders if a historian or theologian viewing the *Principles* through those eyes is not mirror-reading, imputing his own doctrinal formulations back into the *Principles*, and, because he has no clear doctrine of prevenient grace, he forgets that, in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, Arminian Baptists were not so careless as he. None of these statements on the freedom of the will are present in this document, yet one or more of these are usually found in Free Will Baptist Confessions.<sup>13</sup> The burden of proof is on the advocate of the two-streams to explain why typical Arminian statements are not present, when they could have been present, and are present in documents that are obviously Arminian.

**Objection Two:** The Confession does not mention limited atonement.

**Response:** This objection is valid as a descriptive statement, insofar as the confession does not speak to that issue. However, we do know that a parallel confession from that era by Daniel Marshall, the authorship of which is not controversial, does speak to this issue.

Prior to Sandy Creek adopting more formal *Articles of Faith*, the Georgia Association was constituted in 1784. It was composed, in part, by several churches which Daniel Marshall, Stearns’ brother-in-law, helped constitute, including Kiokee Church where he served as pastor until his death in 1784. Also, Elder Silas Mercer, formerly a member of Kehukee Church, in the Kehukee Association, was involved with the constitution of the Georgia Association.

Article 4 of the Georgia Association *Articles of Faith* reads:

We believe in the everlasting love of God to his people, and the eternal election of a definite number of the human race, to grace and glory: And that there was a covenant of Grace or redemption made between the Father and the Son, before the world began, in which salvation is secure, and that they in particular are redeemed.<sup>14</sup>

Article six further demonstrates Daniel Marshall believed in sovereign grace, stating:

We believe that all those who were chosen in Christ, will be effectually called, regenerated, converted, sanctified, and supported by the spirit and power of God, so that they shall persevere in grace and not one of them be finally lost.<sup>15</sup>



In addition, the *Abstract of the Articles of Faith and Practice of the Kiokee Church of the Baptist Denomination* states a clear intent to “defend all the articles of faith ... such as the great doctrine of Election, effectual calling, particular redemption, Justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ alone ... absolute final perseverance in Grace ...denying the Arian, Socinian, & Arminian errors, & every other principle contrary to the word of God.”<sup>16</sup> Notice there that the Abstract mentions not only unquestionably strongly Calvinist doctrines, but it also goes out of its way to condemn Arminianism and Socinianism. No doubt, they were quite conscious of the functional Unitarianism to which Arminianism is prone, since the Father and Spirit are rendered passive in election and regeneration and only the cross of the Son in view by way of the atonement. In contrast, Calvinism is actively Trinitarian from beginning to end. Perhaps they were thinking about the history of the General Baptists who had fallen in that direction, leading to the rise of the New Connection, which sought to recover evangelical doctrine.

Between the writing of the 1816 *Principles of Faith* and the founding of Sandy Creek Church itself, controversy erupted in Virginia in the Kehukee Association. That Association began as an association of Arminian churches, until 1765. Calvinism’s introduction is attributed to Stearns’ influence before coming to North Carolina after stopping in the Kehukee Association. When they reformed, they adopted the *Philadelphia Confession* and then later developed their own confession in 1777.<sup>17</sup> On this issue, it said:

3. We believe that God, before the foundation of the world, for a purpose of His own glory, did elect a certain number of men and angels to eternal life and that His election is particular, eternal and unconditional on the creature’s part.
4. We believe that, when God made man first, he was perfect, holy and upright, able to keep the law, but liable to fall, and that he stood as a federal head, or representative, of all his natural offspring and that they were partakers of the benefits of his obedience or exposed to the misery which sprang from his disobedience.
5. We believe that Adam fell from his state of moral rectitude, and that he involved himself and all his natural offspring in a state of death; and, for that original transgression, we are both guilty and filthy in the sight of our holy God.
6. We believe that it is utterly out of the power of men, as fallen creatures, to keep the law of God perfectly, repent of their sins truly, or believe in Jesus Christ, except they be drawn by the Holy Ghost.
7. We believe in God’s appointed time and way (*by means which He has obtained*) the elect shall be called, justified and sanctified, and that it is impossible they can utterly refuse the call, but shall be made willing by divine grace to receive the offers of mercy. (emphasis mine)

Note the italicized statement in the parenthesis points to hyper-Calvinism's early denial of "contrivances" and means. In fact Primitive Baptist historians point to this document in order to document a confession of their doctrines on this point. Here is where Article 4 of the 1816 Sandy Creek Association strongly differs:

We believe in election from eternity, effectual calling by the Holy Spirit of God, and justification in his sight only by the imputation of Christ's righteousness. And we believe that they who are thus elected, effectually called, and justified, will persevere through grace to the end, that none of them be lost.

Note the absence of the parenthetical statement that had appeared in the Kehukee Confession. Are the Sandy Creek Baptists affirming the traditional Reformed understandings of election, calling, justification, and perseverance and, at the same time, denying equal ultimacy and affirming the free offer of the gospel or affirming the use of means, in contrast to their daughter-neighbor association in Article 7 of their confession? Perhaps they were, as Kehukee became a key association in the anti-missions movement. It does not seem to be a stretch to think that this would very likely have been on their minds when they wrote the *Principles of Faith*.

This is also important, because Stearns is said to have introduced Calvinism to the Kehukee Association before coming to North Carolina. Thus, we have here what amounts to a sister-daughter association spelling out what the neighboring confession omits, while simultaneously raising an issue the parent association will later seek to rectify in its own confession. Is this proof the Sandy Creek folks believed this? No, but considering the parent document (the parent church's covenant) and the histories of their daughter churches, it is likely a bigger stretch to read foreseen faith or more moderating Calvinism into the document than it is to do otherwise.

Circa 1780, the Sandy Creek Association established some churches in Tennessee near Boon's Creek. In 1781, the Sandy Creek Association supervised a group of Tennessee churches, which became the Holston Association in Eastern Tennessee in 1786. Until they organized formally they submitted to the inspection and direction of the Sandy Creek Association. The distance involved made this relationship difficult to maintain, so, with the approval of the parent association, they formally organized with seven churches: Kendrick's Creek, Bent Creek, Beaver Creek, Greasy Cove, Cherokee, North Fork of Holston, and Lower French Broad. These churches were composed of Separate and Regular Baptists, but the two groups are known to have agreed in matters of theology if not practice. The Holston Association adopted the *Philadelphia Confession*.

The problem with the Sandy Creek *Principles of Faith*, for us, is that it's just an abstract, not a detailed confession. As such, it is more of an outline than an elaborate statement of faith. However, how would Separate Baptists of that time

have understood election, particularly those in the mother church, given what we know of the beliefs of her founders and the fruit they produced in their daughter churches? In order to hold the thesis that they moderated their doctrine, one would have to believe that they wrote their *Principles of Faith* fifty years after being established, were examined by Regular Baptists who extended fellowship to them, including John Gano who said they had “the root of the matter at heart,”<sup>18</sup> and yet they disagreed with them over theology as well as practice and spawned or assisted no less than three associations that very certainly did *not* moderate their views or move toward Arminian doctrine. Additionally, one would expect to find somebody writing about dissent over these issues. One simply cannot find any such evidence.

Finally, the church that split from the mother church was, in fact, a Primitive Baptist church. In fact, no church which they formed includes Arminian statements of beliefs in their constitution. The Sandy Creek Church itself split in 1830, some fourteen years *after* the date of the *Principles of Faith*, seventy years after the founding of the mother church, according to the current pastor, over the issue of Sunday School.<sup>19</sup> The parent church wanted to start a Sunday School. The group that did not wish to start the Sunday School remained on the church property for a time and built a new church. That church was named “Sandy Creek Primitive Baptist Church.” That name alone speaks to the theological beliefs that they must have held. There is no known record of the two churches disagreeing over soteriology at that time or of the departing church disagreeing with the *Principles of Faith* of the parent association. A person reading the *Principles of Faith* in a looser manner would have to account for the daughter churches’ and associations’ histories, particularly this one, since it was organized after the *Principles of Faith* was adopted and sprung from the mother church itself, without record of a dispute over these doctrines, during a time in which men in this region wrote to each other prayerfully when there was substantial disagreement over doctrine.

**Objection Three:** Portraying this as a toning down or moderating of the doctrine is not anachronistic; the *Charleston Confession* and *Philadelphia Confession* were widely available and in use at the time, correct?

**Response:** Perhaps, but the brevity of the confessions and lack of borrowing from the *London Baptist Confession of 1689* or the *Philadelphia Confession* can be attributed to the general reticence to the use of creeds and confession by the Separate Baptists in this region as a whole. In 1815, Francis Oliver, Moderator of Neuse Association (neighbor to the Sandy Creek Association) said of creeds and confessions:

They cast contempt upon the Scriptures, and their authors, assuming the prerogative of Christ, they presuppose that the Scriptures are imperfect, and short of being in themselves a sufficient rule for a Church; forasmuch as they add traditions that are not to be found in the word of God and bind them upon their adherents by which they are led to read and

consider those writings more than the Scriptures, thereby lay a greater stress upon them, and so to be like those that seem somewhat in the Church and less regard Christ and his word. This is contempt indeed.<sup>20</sup>

It is hard to imagine a scenario where one could read election based on foreseen faith or any other non-Reformed doctrine into the *Principles of Faith*. One would have to conclude that a Primitive Baptist Church split from the parent church and all or most of the Calvinists went there. That would mean, however, there was a group of “dyed in the wool” Calvinists in the church that sat there for seventy years before splitting from the church fifteen odd years *after* the formal acceptance of the *Principles*. It is worth noting: (1) there was no record of a dispute over theology within the church or between the two churches or the association before or after the split—and this during an age where there was much less disparity between what persons believed and what they did not believe with respect to adhering to confessions, abstracts and creeds, if they were used at all; (2) the church covenant contained language that identified it as Reformed; (3) nobody raised concerns that Free Will Baptist doctrine was being believed and taught within the parent church, whose covenant likely formed the basis of the *Principles of Faith*, in a region in which Arminian/General Baptist churches intentionally self-identified, to this very day no less, as “Free Will Baptists,” specifically to distinguish themselves from their Particular (Separate and Regular) Baptist brothers’ and (4) no Free Will Baptist historian claimed that the 1816 *Principles of Faith* could be read in any way other than a traditionally Reformed manner, in order to make a historical claim to be related to the Sandy Creek tradition.

In addition, Southern historians regard religion of this time as a brand of Puritanism. Fred Hobson points out that “Southern Puritanism was vastly different than the New England variety, less structured, less intellectual, more emotional—raw Calvinism; rather than the cerebral Puritanism of the Massachusetts Bay.”<sup>21</sup> Hobson notes that W. J. Cash saw popularized Calvinism as part of the major dichotomy of Southern psychology. The South was the world’s supreme paradox of hedonism in the midst of Puritanism. Cash believed that by the mid-19th century the whole South, including the Methodists, had moved toward a position of thoroughgoing Calvinism in feeling if not in formal theology.<sup>22</sup> It would seem then, that a historical thesis that “moderates” or “softens” the Calvinism of this period tugs in the opposite direction from the wider thesis secular historians have affirmed. If they did, then, soften their theological views and “Arminianized” in some manner, then it appears to have occurred during a time when others were becoming “Calvinized.”

Additionally, one would have to believe that, in their union with the Charleston Association later on, that Sandy Creek did the opposite of the Kehukee Association, which had begun Arminian and reformed due to Regular influence and the influence of Stearns himself. That is to say that Sandy Creek moderated its doctrine, but then later they reformed like Kehukee in order for Charleston to offer union with them. It would be, if that is true, the only association we know

to have begun as Reformed, moderated itself, then tightened its reforms—all the while supervising associations that were confessionally Reformed. Remember also that the Sandy Creek Association helped spawn the Georgia Association through the parent church's own brother-in-law, who is known to have held to Calvinistic beliefs. If this “soft Calvinism” thesis is true, then this daughter association very clearly affirmed the doctrines of grace, while the parent association moderated its stance. One can only call such a thinking “ad hocery.” Surely, something is amiss.

One would expect, if there was a softening due to a moderating in theology, we would have some record of it. The opposite appears to be true, particularly if we consider the churches and associations that Sandy Creek established. Any “toning down” of the confessions in North Carolina at this time can be accounted for as a general trend with specific emphasis on practices and a general rejection of difficult, wordy documents, not a result of soteriological differences.

What then were the differences between the Regulars and the Separates and by what means can they be properly accounted?

### **An Immethodical People**

From the beginning, the Separates were known to differ from their Regular brethren, but the latter often approved of the former. John Gano pastored a church in the in the Jersey Settlement of North Carolina in the 1750's. Jersey Settlement lies in present day Davidson County.<sup>23</sup> Gano visited the Sandy Creek associational meeting in 1759. He observed “doubtless the power of God was among them; that although they were rather immethodical, they certainly had the root of the matter at heart.”<sup>24</sup> Gano had been commissioned by Philadelphia Association. He had personally participated in the reformation of a number of General Baptist associations in the past. Philadelphia Association, in 1752, determined not to extend churchly fellowship to those denying unconditional election, original sin, or perseverance of the saints.<sup>25</sup> In short, if the Separates in Sandy Creek did not fully affirm these doctrines, then why did Gano make this favorable report?

In 1754, Benjamin Miller traveled from the Philadelphia Association to Virginia to investigate these churches. Apparently Shubal Stearns and Daniel Marshall were present in the churches. Robert Semple reports this event.

They were very zealous, had much preaching, and were remarkable warm in their religious exercises, and more particularly so after Mr. Daniel Marshall came among them. They went to such lengths that some of the more cold-hearted lodged a complaint in the Philadelphia Association. Mr. Miller was sent to see what was the matter. When he came he was highly delighted with the exercises, joined them cordially, and said if he had such warm-hearted Christians in his church he would not take gold for them. He charged those who had complained rather to nourish than complain of such gifts.<sup>26</sup>

If the Separates were theologically deficient, then why did neither Miller nor Gano detect it? This is not to say that there was no variation among the Separates as a whole. Some were sound theologians and expositors. Others were of a plainer sort, not as sure of their homiletic abilities, but zealous for the gospel itself. Some on this end of the scale did tend toward Arminianism. Robert Semple confirms this, noting that at the time of the union between the Virginia Regulars and Separates, a large majority believed as much in the *Philadelphia Confession* as the Regulars, but there were some who leaned toward Arminianism. Those who did were men of exemplary piety and usefulness. They were retained because of their usefulness and because they had endured persecution for their zeal. Moreover God had blessed their labors.<sup>27</sup>

Given this confessional paper trail and positive judgment of their Regular brethren, what then made the Separates “immethodical”? Morgan Edwards informs us of the nine rites they recognized. These were baptism, the Lord’s Supper, love feasts, laying on of hands, washing feet, anointing the sick, the right hand of fellowship, kiss of charity, and devoting children. They allowed women to preach at times. They believed in the immediate agency of the Spirit in guiding decision making, even to the point of waiting on one of the messengers to the associational meeting to feel led to begin giving exercises. Note carefully that these are largely relative to orthopraxy and orderliness, not soteriology, Christology, theology proper, etc. No doubt they attempted to ground these practices in Scripture, but they do not necessarily reflect a “moderate” Calvinism at all. They can just as easily reflect a raw, unintellectual, zealous, emotional Calvinism unwaveringly rooted in the doctrines of grace. Rather than redefining their confessional tradition, we need an interpretive thesis that fits the evidence. The evidence shows they differed from the Regulars in their practices, not in their confessional soteriological views. These differences can be better understood sociologically than theologically.

The Sandy Creek tradition originates in Stearns’ arrival from New England, but it is also firmly planted on North Carolina soil. The Separates did not live in a religious or cultural vacuum. They were Calvinists and Baptists, but they were also North Carolinians of a particular time and place. Could it be that the means to account for the different tenor, different practices, and different order can be attributed to such things as mundane as these? The evidence suggests just that.

## Tarheel Religion

The earliest settlers in North Carolina were likely members of the Anglican parishes of Virginia. However, in 1677 William Edmundson arrived and found little interest in religion. George Fox soon followed as a Quaker missionary. By 1678, the Society of Friends was well organized in North Carolina. In 1740, more Quakers settled in the area now known as Alamance, Guilford, Chatham, Randolph and Surry Counties.

Most Anglicans settled near Cape Fear, Hillsborough (near present day Chapel Hill / Durham), Salisbury in Rowan County and New Bern. Anglicans re-

garded Quakers as enemies of religion. Presbyterians, however, were “too daunting a presence for Anglicans to make any inroads. They looked the Church of England as an agent of the Crown in Mecklenburg County.”<sup>28</sup> In 1765, Governor Tryon stated that the Anglicans had the majority of all churches in North Carolina.<sup>29</sup>

Moravians settled in present day Forsyth County in the Piedmont Foothills, calling their land “Wachovia.” There, they established three settlements: Bethania, Bethabara and Salem. Salem is now present day Winston-Salem.

Reformed and Lutheran believers migrated there as well, with a Huguenot settlement forming between Cumberland and Mecklenburg just east of then Guilford County (at that time Rowan-Orange) where Stearns would locate his church. Like the Presbyterians, they were often served by itinerant ministers who labored in multiple congregations.

Scots-Irish Presbyterians settled in Mecklenburg County, concentrating mainly in the present day Charlotte area. Highland Scots brought Presbyterianism with them to the Cumberland area near present day Fayetteville in the Southeast Sandhills.

Some Particular Baptists may have arrived prior to the founding of Sandy Creek, as an Anglican missionary described a people “somewhat like Presbyterians, which sort is upheld by some idle fellows who have left their lawful employment, and preach and baptize through the country, without any manner of orders from any sect or pretended church.”<sup>30</sup> In 1727, the first North Carolina Baptist church was founded by Paul Palmer in Chowan County near Cisco and organized along General Baptist principles. By 1769, the Kehukee Association of Eastern North Carolina was composed of some 61 churches with 5000 members drawn from Halifax, Edgecombe, Martin, Washington, Beaufort, Carteret, and some other counties in North and South Carolina.<sup>31</sup> In 1772 Morgan Edwards listed 32 Baptist churches, 30 ordained ministers, 3591 members and 7950 families.<sup>32</sup> To this day, Free Will Baptist churches appear with some frequency in the Eastern Carolinas.

## Tarheel People

The other colonies viewed North Carolina as a frontier colony, and consequently, it was settled relatively late. This is partly due to the North Carolina coastline, which is not given to easy navigation. As a result, many settlers entered from Virginia and Pennsylvania. Others entered from the port of Wilmington or at Charles Town (Charleston) in South Carolina.

By the time Shubal Stearns arrived, North Carolina had been settled only as far as present day Hickory in Western Carolina. The Sandy Creek Church itself was located at the intersection of four pockets of established religion—one populated by Highland Scots to the east (Cumberland), another by Scot-Irish Presbyterians to the west (Mecklenburg), one by Quakers to the North in Guilford and a fourth by the Moravians to the west of the Quakers in Salem, Bethabara and Bethania. A small pocket of Huguenots settled to the immediate east. The Wagon

Road connected Cross Creek in Cumberland, populated mostly by Presbyterians, to Salem in the Northwest, passing directly through Randolph County (then Guilford County), near the Sandy Creek Church. The Yadkin Road connected them to Salisbury and Charlotte. Another road connected Charlotte to Charleston. Sandy Creek was located near the Anson/Rowan County lines in 1760, in Guilford County itself.<sup>33</sup> The community extended to the east toward present day Orange County and slightly northward toward Guilford Courthouse, present day Greensboro.

In addition to their actual location along the roads, North Carolinians traveled by river. The rivers progressively change direction in North Carolina as one moves further east. In the East, most rivers run in a North-South direction. The further west one moves, the more the rivers run in an East-West direction, with those in the Piedmont, like the Yadkin-Pee Dee River, emptying in Charleston rather than Wilmington. In the mountains, no rivers run to the oceans. Consequently, this transportation pattern affected settlement and interaction among the colonists. This would become a major factor in the growing sectionalism of North Carolina, in which cultural, economic, social, and political differences and rivalries shaped the people. North-South conflicts later gave way to East-West conflicts.<sup>34</sup> The East became culturally like Charleston. The West tended toward frontier-manship that isolated it from the East.

Each wave of colonists brought their own distinctive character to North Carolina. Powell characterizes the Scots-Irish as “self-reliant, industrious, unemotional, opinionated, and often considered bigoted, reserved, and cold, but loyal to friends and family.”<sup>35</sup> The Highland Scots of Cumberland were of similar stock, but more loyal to the Crown. The Mecklenburg colonists would participate in the Mecklenburg Declarations, calling for independence from the Crown, while the Highland Scots in Cumberland were viewed with suspicion by their brethren in the West, because they traded with the Colonials and the British. Some believed they were Tories, but they were probably simply pragmatic and viewed neutrality as good business, as they could trade peacefully with both sides in the Revolution, thus ensuring they would remain in the good graces of either party after the conflict.

The Germans who settled Wachovia came to North Carolina from Pennsylvania. They were known for their industry and hospitality. They built schools, ran a well known tavern in Salem, which George Washington himself visited, and welcomed visitors from all over. They were also, unlike the Separates, a methodical people who kept immaculate records, including architectural plans, educational records, religious records, burial records, and even built a very precisely planned town at Salem. One could freely worship with them, buy and sell goods, obtain medical and dental care, or just come to enjoy the food.

North Carolina society stratified into three orders. The gentry consisted of planters, public officials, and other professionals, including clergy. Small farmers and tradesmen were below these, and they were a proud people who took pride in their titles, yet they “worked hard, played hard, and lived hard.”<sup>36</sup> Below these



were the indentured servants who came to the colonies to serve the gentry who had paid their way, until they had worked off the cost of their voyage. For many years, this class served as the chief source of labor. Many Virginians who completed their contracts moved to North Carolina and became small farmers and tradesmen.

The evangelicals, including the Separates, primarily appealed to these lower two classes. They held the gentry to be decadent, degenerate, worldly, and scandalized by Deism. The elite viewed the evangelicals as ranters whose appeal lay more in their volume and gesticulations than anything else.<sup>37</sup> The Separates and other evangelicals directed their message to those who were disenfranchised by “the world,” the lower classes. Those who responded were frequently young people, white yeomen, artisans, and women of all classes. North Carolinians both before and after the Revolution joined churches at least in part because they wished to reject the cultural values of those who stood above them in the eyes of the world.<sup>38</sup> In the West, this meant rejecting values associated with the East, including Charleston.

A look at some of the early laws in North Carolina gives us a clear impression of the people in the West. Ironically, while the Westerners viewed the people of the of the East, particularly the gentry, as decadent, degenerate and scandalized by Deism, the Easterners viewed the residents of the West as vile and corrupt, acting more like the Indians surrounding them than civilized human beings. Thus, when Westerners converted to Christianity, they were, because of the rudeness of their religious practices, still just as offensive if not more so to the Easterners, claiming Christ yet still behaving improperly. The latter regarded the former as desolate and debauched, in part because they lived with only the rudiments of basic civilization.<sup>39</sup>

In 1715, the General Assembly passed laws prohibiting public drunkenness and fining those intoxicated on the Sabbath. They also passed laws prohibiting labor on Sundays, including hunting and fishing. These laws applied to both white and black, slave and free. Tavern keepers were prohibited from selling alcohol on Sundays, though later this was relaxed to apply only to the sale of liquors before and after church hours. In 1741, laws were passed prohibiting swearing and common law marriages. The General Assembly also took the opportunity at that time to make it clear that the clergy were not except from the penalties of the law.<sup>40</sup> Watson notes that Methodist Hugh Jones remarked of people in Virginia and North Carolina that they were given to swearing, cursing, and imprecations.<sup>41</sup>

This was the surly, unruly, uneducated, rude lot of men and women that God was pleased to convert under the work of the Sandy Creek Association. Stearns really did, it seems, start out with nothing. Truly only God’s grace could convert such as these. Will anyone seriously argue that we should expect that such people coming from such a background would be as orderly and intellectual as the Regulars? No wonder that even in their redeemed state they were “immethodical.” This mutual suspicion was also the ideal psychosocial melee for the rise of deep sectional conflicts between the East and West.

## North Carolina Sectionalism

In order to understand North Carolina in any age, one must understand the sectionalism of the state. North-South tensions gave way to East-West tensions which have in turn given way to rural-urban tensions in the modern era. In many ways, the history of North Carolina is the history of conflict between each of these. Many key events came about because of rivalries and jealousies between these regions. Contributing factors have included geographical differences, a variety of national origins, religious beliefs, wide social distinctions, and economic interests.<sup>42</sup>

North Carolina's sectionalism began early, when settlers crossed the Albemarle Sound and Pamlico River. The residents along Neuse and Cape Fear Rivers were concerned over bank patents. They quarreled over representation and even the location of the colonial capital.

When Shubal Stearns came to North Carolina in the mid-18th century, a recent squabble in the General Assembly over the location of the capital at New Bern had resulted in confusion, rebellion and anarchy in the northern half of North Carolina.<sup>43</sup> While conflict over the location of the capital occupied the North and South, a situation in the backcountry of the West, where Stearns would plant his church, began laying the foundation for another conflict. This one would rise from the East, centering on the location of the Governor's home.

For forty years after its Charter, the capital was located wherever the Governor lived. Records were literally carted from town to town. Consequently, they could easily be lost or damaged beyond recognition. In 1746, the attempt to make New Bern the capital was not approved. Governor Dobbs tried to take steps to find a permanent location, so he bought land near Kinston in modern Lenoir County. A number of delays ensued, and eventually Dobbs died with the property still in his possession. In 1766, the Assembly acted to build a new Governor's home. It became known as Tryon Palace and was built on the backs of the people in the backcountry through the poll tax. Money was scarce the further West one traveled in North Carolina, and, needless to say, the shortage of money to pay a tax for the Governor in the East did not set well with the residents of the West.

In addition, public officials began to form a fourth class. The people themselves had little say in electing their officials, as the government was centralized under the Crown, and the Governor could exercise control through his command of the colonial militia. Consequently, common people felt unable to get relief from their grievances, which included excessive taxes, dishonest officials, and extortionate fees—all of which was compounded by the shortage of money.<sup>44</sup>

Corrupt sheriffs and deputies of this new class ruled the roost in those days. The same men who flaunted money acquired it by openly embezzling taxes and were equally elegant in charging exorbitant fees. Edward Fanning was said to have amassed a fortune of £10,000 "all out of the people." He did it while serving as an Orange County assemblyman and Superior Court judge *and* a salaried colonel in the militia, *as well as* Register of Deeds. In another time, he would have

been called a “carpetbagger.”<sup>45</sup> Eventually, riots broke out, even among the usually reserved Mecklenburg Presbyterians. Demonstrations erupted in Granville and Orange Counties. Eventually, in 1768, the indignant citizens formed “the Regulators,” who rode into Hillsborough to rescue the property of one of their number, infuriated by the sheriff. Two of the Regulators were rounded up in the Sandy Creek settlement itself and taken back to Hillsborough for trial, charged with incitement to riot. Governor Tryon warned them to disband, calling the militia to Hillsborough. The Regulators chose not to interfere. One of those arrested, Husband, was acquitted. Butler and two others were convicted but pardoned to keep the peace.

The Regulators realized the courts had failed them, therefore, they sought political change. In 1769, elections were held for the new Assembly. Orange, Granville, Anson, and Halifax Counties elected all Regulators. Resolutions were proposed, but the Governor dissolved the Assembly. The movement grew as did their distrust of the East and all things associated with them. Panic ensued when violence erupted, and reform was laid aside when Regulators were found to be trying to overturn the New Bern Assembly by force. In 1771, the legislators favoring the Regulators asked Governor Tryon to hear them out. He refused. Shots were fired between them and the colonial militia.

The Regulation ended when fourteen Regulators were captured at Alamance on May 17, 1771. Governor Tryon offered to pardon any Regulator who swore an oath of allegiance. In six weeks, 6409 Regulators had capitulated. This was the environment in which the Sandy Creek Church conducted its work. Stearns himself signed four petitions in favor of men accused as Regulators, and the Regulation did not leave the mother church untouched. After the Regulation, many of the Separates moved westward toward Tennessee. The Sandy Creek Church, which had mushroomed from 16 to 606 members, dwindled to only 14!<sup>46</sup> Clearly the Regulation had found many sympathizers among the Separates. The Revolutionary War, for which the Regulation was a prelude, served as an interlude in the sectional conflict in the colony.

The Regulation was the first of many sectional struggles between the East and the West. Whigs in the East saw the post-Revolutionary condition of the state as a way to bring control to anarchy. The Whigs in the West saw it as an opportunity to continue the Revolution, which for them had begun with the Regulation, as, in their minds, it gave them an opportunity to rectify their problems with the East. The Western radicals clashed with the Eastern conservatives, some of whom had participated in the Regulation as well, over the cancellation of pre-Revolutionary debts and the question of confiscated Tory property. The radicals wanted an inflated currency to reduce debts, and they wished to use confiscated Tory property to redistribute wealth, and with it, increase their representation, because voting rights were indexed to property ownership. The conservatives of the East, who controlled the General Assembly, returned Tory landholdings to their owners, currying favor with them. The radicals were incensed. In the end, the West favored Jeffersonian ideals; Easterners favored the Federalism of Adams.

Property, not people, controlled the government of North Carolina at that time.<sup>47</sup> The East was populated by affluent, well-educated, conservative gentry who owned land. Western residents were small farmers who farmed hard red clay, much of it as sharecroppers. The social system of the West tended toward democracy and individualism, while the people of the East preferred orderly republicanism.

The Easterners were ultra-conservatives who patronized the citizens of the West, opposing giving land to the common people who they believed only wanted more political power and state aid to help them. Between 1776 and 1825, the General Assembly rejected every public education bill to furnish aid to the University of North Carolina. In 1828, the education committee, then led by Westerners appealed to “God Almighty” to help educate North Carolina’s children because the state legislature, under Eastern control, would not do so.<sup>48</sup> In the West, ministers and ministerial candidates were forced to either leave the region for formal education or to rely on self-teaching. This also fostered a sense of resentment as well as intellectual ignorance, which, real or perceived, may have contributed to the anti-confessional stance of many Separates. Why should they accept the highly developed confessions of faith preferred by the Regulars of the East, if the East as a whole believed the residents of the West unable to understand them or articulate them anyway?

The state was also organized into a borough franchise based on a number of representatives elected by those who owned property in each county, with an imaginary dividing line that emerged politically, socially, and economically running through Granville, Wake, Cumberland and Robeson Counties.<sup>49</sup> The population of the East, although composed of wealthy landowners, increased by 53% during the last half of the 18th century. In contrast, the Western population increased by 156%.<sup>50</sup> Perceiving a threat to their dominance in the legislature, the East attempted to prevent the creation of new counties. The West gained an upper hand for short periods when new counties were formed, as this enabled the number of landowners in the new county to then vote their own representatives into the legislature. A new county in the West meant more Westerners in the Assembly. Any gains, however, were short lived.

Because representation for each county was based on land ownership but there was a cap on the number of senators and representatives for each county, the East offset any advantages the West temporarily gained when a new county formed in the West, simply by dividing a county in the East. This is why Eastern North Carolina has a large number of small counties today. Between 1777 and 1823, 33 new counties were created; 18 were in the West, and 15 were in the East. The West’s population was greater, but the East retained dominance in the government. By 1830, 64 counties were in North Carolina; 36 were east of Raleigh, and they contained only 41% of the voting population. However, they elected 59% of the General Assembly! The voting population of the East was also under 10% of the total white population of the whole state, but that small percentage of whites in the East elected the majority of legislators! It is clear—the West resisted

the East and everything associated with it with good reason. “Down East,” became a pejorative term in North Carolina. “He’s too big for his britches, he’s from Down East” remains a common epithet in parts of the North Carolina Piedmont to the present day.

### **Separate-Regular Differences Culture Bound?**

The Eastern counties were, during the pre-Revolutionary and post-Revolutionary periods, very much the cradle of civilization in North Carolina. North Carolina’s political and cultural history in this period is very clearly the history of struggle between the East and the West. The Charlestonians and Wilmingtonians themselves were more prone to “writing books,” but then, they were each in a very stable geographical area, in a port city, cities, by those standards, metropolitan by comparison to the North Carolina Piedmont. Life was simply easier for them than it was for their brothers to the northwest and west. Consequently, they had more resources and more time to spare for educational and cultural pursuits in comparison to those living on the frontier.

Major group migrations to the Piedmont of North Carolina were made by German Lutherans and Moravians and Reformed settlers from Pennsylvania beginning in the late 1740s; Scots-Irish Presbyterians from the Pennsylvania-Maryland border area in the 1750s; Quakers from many locations in the 1750s; scattered Virginia Baptists organized meetings in the 1750s; and Methodists from the Eastern Shore of Maryland in the 1770s and 1780s.

Sandy Creek was on the North Carolina frontier in those days. In many ways, it is still the same—this part of North Carolina remains largely rural. Salem, the Moravian settlement, had been established to the West in present day Forsyth County. Guilford County was much larger, and Greensboro itself was not established until 1808. In 1829, Greensboro had a population of 470 people. The Sandy Creek Church alone had a membership of over 600 at its peak! The position of the church and the surrounding community put them on a prime piece of cultural real estate. They were surrounded by Moravians, Quakers, Presbyterians and Huguenots near the intersection of the main roads in North Carolina.

Any consideration of Separate-Regular differences must keep in mind the social stratification of the state and mutual perceptions of the East and West about each other. Recall that the evangelicals as a whole appealed to the underclasses and women and looked at the gentry as worldly and scandalized by Deism, while those in the East regarded those in the West as rude and surly, to say the least. In addition, the more well educated Easterners who were drawn into the Regular Baptist churches found a natural fit. Regulars were known for their order, structure and precision, as well as their confessional structure, which was highly developed. For an educated evangelical, a Regular Baptist church would make a good fit, whereas the looser structure and order and general character of a Separate church in the West would not be a good fit at all. In fact, it may have been offensive early on in Separate history. The differences in tenor between Separates and Regulars are thus

largely part of the overall differences in culture and class structure in the Carolinas at that time. Our evaluation of them needs to account for this cultural framework. Would we really expect a Separate Baptist living in the North Carolina Piedmont in that period to act like a Regular Baptist in the East? No, and the evidence we have fits what we should expect given these differences.

Many churches were often established by circuit riders. When a pastor came to lead a new church, the circuit rider left, and the churches took on the character of the theology of the pastors that came, unless there was a large variance between what the people believed and what the new pastor taught. That is why, down East in North Carolina, you see lots of Episcopal and Presbyterian churches, and, the further East you move, the more Baptists and Methodists appear. Presbyterian churches, with the exception of Mecklenburg, which was largely settled by Presbyterians, are few and far between in the Piedmont by comparison to Baptists and, later, Methodists. Presbyterians preferred to establish their own churches because they spent a great deal of time educating their teaching elders before sending them out. Rather than accept a circuit rider as pastor, they preferred to assign a teaching elder several churches. Many Baptist pastors were self-taught men coming from the established Baptist churches in those days. Stearns came when he heard of the need for a preacher in that part of North Carolina. Many Separate churches were established in this way. Essentially, Stearns was a circuit riding preacher that established the church and never left it.

This is all to say that the differences in the Charleston and Sandy Creek Traditions are mainly cultural, not theological. Take for example, the practices of love feasts, dedication of children and the selection of moderators. These practices would seem odd to a Pennsylvania Baptist in that day, but not to a resident of Western North Carolina.

The geographical position of the Sandy Creek Church and its daughters put them in a prime position to interact with their other Christian neighbors, with whom they would have naturally felt a sense of cultural solidarity in view of the growing cultural divide with the East. Love feasts and fellowship meals remain a tradition in this particular part of North Carolina, primarily in the Moravian churches, however, many Baptists, Methodists and Presbyterians also practice them at Christmas time, admittedly because of the Moravian influence. The Moravians were well established in the 18th century and were more readily accessible for trade to Sandy Creek Church's members than were the Charlestonians. In fact, Moravians composed the majority of the next large community, Salem. No doubt, the Sandy Creek folks saw this practice, for the Moravians were a people known for their hospitality and willingness to share their community with visitors.

The practice of devoting children would seem odd to a Philadelphia Baptist, but not to a North Carolina Baptist in Sandy Creek. No doubt, they likely were influenced by Mecklenburg Presbyterians and Salem Moravians who were just west of the area and by the Cumberland Presbyterians who were to the immediate east, and the Hillsborough area Anglicans who were to the northeast, all of whom engaged in this practice. All of these were within trading distance of the asso-

ciation at that time. Cumberland Presbyterians and Mecklenburg Presbyterians frequently migrated through this corridor, often stopping to form new settlements or being absorbed into existing ones.

Some of the leadership practices and the freedom of speech for women should come as no great surprise for an association of Baptists in Guilford County in that age, for to the north and northeast large pockets of Quakers lived, having settled just north of Sandy Creek in present day Greensboro in the New Garden area and Cane Creek in present day Orange County. Quakers also settled in Alamance. All of these border present day Randolph County. To this very day, Guilford County, North Carolina, Randolph County's immediate neighbor, is known for the number of churches established by the Society of Friends. By orderly Baptist standards in Philadelphia or Charleston these practices would seem odd, but not to Baptists in Guilford, particularly with their Friends to their immediate north acting very like them. Perhaps Quakers, as well as some from these other traditions, were absorbed into Separate churches, bringing the Quaker emphasis on the immediate working of the Holy Spirit and women's right to speak openly to the congregation and these other rites with them. On the other hand, perhaps the Separates simply mimicked their neighbors or otherwise simply took the Bible very literally (foot-washing, the kiss of charity). The same can be said of these other practices. These items do not readily fit into the church order of Regular Baptists, and they were points of contention between Separates and Regulars.

No doubt, Charleston was "bookish" and more orderly, but then so was everybody else in the Coastal Carolinas in those days. They were anchored in a city; they owned land, and, as we have seen, Eastern Carolina as a whole was naturally prone to education, order, and general conservatism. Sandy Creek was naturally missionary oriented because they were on the frontier, and, on the frontier Shubal Stearns' New Light heart for establishing new churches was greatly needed and could come to full expression. The church and the association adopted the frontier spirit of Western North Carolinians. They did not need to "moderate" their Calvinism in order to do this, for it was only natural for them to send missionaries to the unsettled reaches of the continent. When the Regulation ended and Sandy Creek lost the majority of its members, they moved West and they took the Sandy Creek/Separate Baptist tradition with them. It was the spirit of the times. They were never as dour and orderly as their metropolitan cousins, and with good reason, for not many people on the frontier in the Piedmont were like the people Down East, nor did they desire to be. In fact, as we've seen, the folks Down East thought of them as ruffians and the residents of the West wanted little to do with their eastern cousins.

Even the Mecklenburg Presbyterians shared in this upstart spirit. In 1775, those same Presbyterians issued the Mecklenburg Resolutions, which said, by unanimous resolution, the people were free and independent and all laws and commissions from the king were henceforth null and void, but their Highland brothers in Cumberland and Hanover Down East in remained largely loyal to the crown or traded on their neutrality. This was the culture and spirit of the North

Carolina frontier! This is why God was pleased, “through the establishment of the nature of second causes” in this case a prevailing “frontier spirit” in the dominant culture of the people, to make Sandy Creek more noticeably revivalist and evangelistic, and not as static and bookish as their Philadelphia and Charleston brethren. They were the right people, with right, sound doctrine, living at the right place, in the right time. Truly, this is raw Calvinism.

If a historian speaks of the more studied character of Charlestonian Baptists, we should agree. It seems to be true that they tended to look before they leaped when planting churches and doing missions, but that seems more of a cultural idiom than the product of any theological paradigm that is driven by an anti-missions spirit. Virtually all of the denominations Down East did the same thing. This is merely the temperament of their culture and geography at work, not so much the result of theology itself. They were settled in more cosmopolitan areas, thus they produced more orderly congregations. They tended to be well-educated people who approached life more thoughtfully, perhaps even thinking that the frontiersmen comported themselves in a more cavalier manner. In North Carolina, the Westerners, with good reason, believed the Easterners constantly “looked down their noses” at them, and more than one dispute arose between the West and East because of this divide. The two geographical areas were disjointed, divided by education, economics, class, and politics and just plain manners. Often they just simply did not like each other. No wonder they developed different characters; no wonder the two streams differed in many respects! If the Westerners in the Carolinas were the souls of their colonies, the Easterners were the thinkers, and only the grace of God would traverse their social, economic, political, and cultural divide to unite them later.

### Concluding Thoughts

In the past, Baptist historians have either claimed ignorance about the origin of Separate-Regular differences, particularly the nine rites, or simply engaged in *ad hoc* theological theorizing about the Separates’ “moderate Calvinism.” At the same time, Southern historians in general have, as we have already noted, characterized this period as the rise of “raw Calvinism” and Southern Puritanism, with even the Methodists becoming less Arminian. These two theses logically tug in opposite directions looking at the evidence we possess. Admittedly, because of the lack of evidence, no theory is completely sure.

That said, explaining Separate-Regular differences theologically seems hopelessly *ad hoc*. One is asked to believe North Carolina Separates began as Whitefield/Edwards Calvinists who helped move at least one General Baptist association toward Calvinism, but they “moderated” or “softened” their theological position while establishing confessional Calvinist churches, some of which embraced the Philadelphia Confession, including one association that became anti-missions (Kehukee) later in its history. In addition, this thesis must ignore the fact that



representatives of the Philadelphia and Charleston Associations approved of the Separates enough to extend offers of cooperation.

It seems much more consistent and much simpler to remember that Sandy Creek Association and the North Carolina Separates as a whole were deeply affected by both time and place. Baptist historians are also people of their time and place, consequently perhaps their theories have overlooked the obvious by seeking to explain these differences theologically. Why appeal to supposed soteriological differences when a more mundane (and obvious) explanation would do, especially in light of the confessional paper trail? The differences between them are consistent with what we would expect from Baptists who were residents of Western North Carolina in the 18th and early 19th century given their culture, their geographical location, and the simple fact that many of these same practices can be found in their immediate neighbors, some of whom must have been added into the Separate churches.

The Sandy Creekers were Calvinists and Baptists, but they were also North Carolinians living in the West. They began, from what has been said by North Carolina historians, as a surly, rambunctious lot of unregenerate men and women, and it is truly a testimony to the grace of God that so many were converted. God did not remove them, however from their cultural, social, and political situation any more than He delivers any one of us today. They were more emotional, less intellectual, and less structured than their cerebral brethren, which is exactly what we would expect from Western North Carolinians of this era. This also fits the description of Southern Puritanism of this period perfectly.<sup>51</sup> They were not soteriologically, confessionally “moderate” Calvinists, they were simply expressing their Calvinism within the tools their time and place afforded them. Someone may object that these differences led to a change in their soteriological doctrine, but, as we’ve seen, that is an orphaned assertion bereft of and contrary to the evidence. Those historians making such an appeal find themselves in a peculiar position that contradicts the documentation in our possession. We do know what the culture of the day was like for them and all of the differences between them and their Regular brethren are variations we would expect to find in Baptists of that particular time and place. This admittedly mundane solution fits the available evidence. Sometimes the answers really are that easy to find, but look what God was pleased to do through ordinary providence. Even His ordinary providence is neither mundane nor ordinary. So has been, so it shall ever be. ☹

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## Notes:

<sup>1</sup> See Fisher Humphreys, *The Way We Were: How Southern Baptist Theology Has Changed and What it Means to Us All* (New York: McCracken Press, 1994), 85. Humphreys follows the view of Walter Shurden as set forth in “The 1980–81 Carver-Barnes Lectures” (Wake Forest: Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1980).

<sup>2</sup> Gregory Tomlin, “Sandy Creek: Tributary of Baptist life celebrates 250 Years,” Baptist Press, November 7, 2005.

- <sup>3</sup> R.B.C. Howell, *The Early Baptists of Virginia* (Philadelphia: The Bible and Publication Society), 89.
- <sup>4</sup> William Heth Whitsitt, “Baptists in America”, handwritten ms, in Tom Nettles, *The Baptists*, vol. 2 (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus/Mentor, 2006), 171.
- <sup>5</sup> M.A. Huggins, *A History of North Carolina Baptists 1727–1932* (Raleigh, NC: General Board of the North Carolina Baptist State Convention, 1967), 66.
- <sup>6</sup> Nettles, *The Baptists*, vol. 2, 167. Excerpted here on pages 26–31.
- <sup>7</sup> Lumpkin quoted in Nettles, *The Baptists*, vol. 2, 170.
- <sup>8</sup> See Josh Powell, “Shubal Stearns and the Sandy Creek Tradition,” *The Founders Journal* 44 (Spring 2001), 16–31.
- <sup>9</sup> Nettles, *The Baptists*, vol. 2, 153–173.
- <sup>10</sup> William Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (rev. ed., Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1969), 358.
- <sup>11</sup> *Second London Baptist Confession*, 6.4.
- <sup>12</sup> Elmer Towns of Liberty University and Seminary on his website ([www.elmer-towns.com](http://www.elmer-towns.com)), states clearly, “It is our position that *common grace* is extended to all and that everyone has an opportunity and the ability to accept Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. It seems to us that only if God makes the same provisions for all and makes the same offers to all, is He truly just” (emphasis mine). Unless Dr. Towns is redefining terms, this is clearly a reference to human ability by way of design, not universal prevenient grace as postulated by Arminians. Arminians teach that UPG comes as a benefit of the cross itself. It is, therefore, a type of special grace.
- <sup>13</sup> Free Will Baptist Confessions generally contain statements like, “The call of the Gospel is co-extensive with the atonement to all men, both by the word and strivings of the Spirit, so that salvation is rendered equally possible to all; and if any fail of eternal life, the fault is wholly his own.” or “The human will is free and self-controlled, having power to yield to the influence of the truth and the Spirit, or to resist them and perish.” Also, “It is God’s will that all be saved, but since man has the power of choice, God saves only those who repent of their sin and believe in the work of Christ on the cross.”
- <sup>14</sup> Michael N. Ivey, *A Welch Succession of Primitive Baptists*, Chapter 8, online text, available at <http://www.reformedreader.org/history/ivey/ch08.htm>.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>16</sup> James Donovan Mosteller, *A History of the Kiokee Baptist Church in Georgia* (Ann Arbor, MI: Edwards Brothers Inc, 1952), 267.
- <sup>17</sup> Ivey, *Welsh Succession*, Chapter 8, online text.
- <sup>18</sup> Robert Semple, *A History of the Rise and Progress of the Baptists in Virginia* (Richmond, Pitt and Dickinson, 1894), 65–66.
- <sup>19</sup> Bob Burchette, “Mother Church of Southern Baptists Marks Anniversary,” *Greensboro News and Record*, November 5, 2005.
- <sup>20</sup> Quoted in Charles Crossfield Ware, *Onslow’s Oldest Church* (Wilson, NC: Carolina Disciplina Library, December 2, 1956), 4.
- <sup>21</sup> Fred Hobson, *Tell About the South: The Southern Rage to Explain* (1983), in John H. Leith, “Calvinism,” *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, Volume One: *Religion*, vol. ed. Samuel Hill, gen. ed. Charles Reagan Wilson (Chapel Hill, NC: UNC-Chapel Hill Press, 2006), 48. (The Encyclopedia will be hereafter called Wilson).
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>23</sup> Readers may want to consider finding a map of North Carolina in order to follow portions of the this article, if only to get an orientation to the state. A current map will do. See note 32 below.
- <sup>24</sup> Semple, 65–66.
- <sup>25</sup> *Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association* (1707–1807), ed. A. D. Gillette (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1851) 69.

<sup>26</sup> Semple, 376.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 100. Paraphrased here.

<sup>28</sup> Andrew Morton, Letter from Andrew Morton to the Secretary, in *Saunders Colonial Records*, 7:252–253, in *North Carolina Society — A Documentary History*, ed. Alan D. Watson, (Raleigh, NC: NC Dept. of Cultural Resources, 2000), 255–256. (Hereafter referred to as Watson, *Documentary History*).

<sup>29</sup> William Tryon, Letter from William Tryon to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, July 31, 1765, in William S. Powell, *Correspondence of William Tryon*, 1:144 in Watson, *Documentary History*, 229. (Both volumes are collections of primary source documents published by both Powell and Watson; Watson lifts this letter out of Powell for his own collection).

<sup>30</sup> William S. Powell, *North Carolina Through Four Centuries* (Chapel Hill, NC: UNC-Chapel Hill Press, 1989), 73. (Hereafter, Powell, *North Carolina*).

<sup>31</sup> Alan D. Watson, *Society in Colonial North Carolina* (Revised Edition), (Raleigh, NC: Office of Archives and History, NC Department of Cultural Resources, 2002), 93.

<sup>32</sup> G.W. Paschal, “Morgan Edwards’ Materials,” in Watson, *Documentary History*, 394–395.

<sup>33</sup> Rowan County was formed from Anson County prior to Stearns’ arrival. Guilford County was formed out of Rowan and Orange Counties after Stearns’ arrival. The church location itself can thus be referenced by historians in lower Guilford–upper Randolph County areas in the present day, but can be referenced as being in Orange or Guilford Counties, depending on what time frame is in view. In this article, county names are given to give the reader a general geographical orientation. For a detailed discussion of the formation of North Carolina counties and precise maps see *The Formation of the North Carolina Counties, 1663–1943*, by David Leroy Corbitt.

<sup>34</sup> The East–West geographical division in North Carolina historically proceeds from an imaginary line drawn near Hillsborough. Raleigh–Durham–Chapel Hill is considered to be “Central North Carolina.” Parts West are the Piedmont–Foothills and Mountains; parts East are called “Down East.” When one leaves the Triangle area (Raleigh–Durham–Chapel Hill), one is said to be heading “Down East.”

<sup>35</sup> Powell, *North Carolina*, 109.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>37</sup> Harry C. Watson, “An Independent People,” in *The Way We Were in North Carolina*, ed. Job Mobley (Chapel Hill, NC: UNC-Chapel Hill Press, 2003), 218. (Hereafter referred to as Mobley).

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.

<sup>39</sup> Watson, *Society in Colonial North Carolina*, 95–96.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>42</sup> Powell, *North Carolina*, 145.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>45</sup> Elizabeth A. Fenn and Peter H. Wood, “North Carolina Before 1770,” in Mobley, 92.

<sup>46</sup> H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage*, (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman, 1987), 232.

<sup>47</sup> Powell, *North Carolina*, 252.

<sup>48</sup> Milton Ready, *The Tarheel State—A History of North Carolina*, (Columbia, SC: USC Press, 2005), 166–167.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

<sup>50</sup> Powell, *North Carolina*, 251.

<sup>51</sup> Hobson, in Wilson, 48.

# Shubal Stearns and The Separate Baptist Tradition

*By Tom Nettles*

Excerpt from Chapter 7 in *The Baptists, Volume 2: Beginnings in America* by Tom Nettles (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2005), 153–158.

“Special thanks to Josh Powell, Ph D student at SBTS, for helpful work in research, organization, and interpretation of this article.”

## Anointed with Zeal

When the fame of Mr. Stearns’ preaching had reached the Atkin [Yadkin], where I lived, I felt a curiosity to go and hear him. Upon my arrival I saw a venerable old man sitting under a peach-tree with a book in his hand and the people gathering about him. He fixed his eyes upon me immediately, which made me feel in such a manner as I never had felt before. I turned to quit the place but could not proceed far. I walked about, sometimes catching his eyes as I walked. My uneasiness increased and became intolerable. I went up to him, thinking that a salutation and shaking hands would relieve me: but it happened otherwise. I began to think that he had an evil eye and ought to be shunned; but shunning I could no more effect than a bird can shun the rattle snake when it fixes his eyes upon it. When he began to preach my perturbations increased so that nature could not longer support them and I sunk to the ground.<sup>1</sup>

According to Morgan Edwards, other witnesses give like details about the effects of Shubal<sup>2</sup> Stearns. By any estimation, this was a remarkable man. His impact on individuals silhouettes the influence that Separate Baptists had on the religion of the southern States in general and Baptists in particular. After establishing their first church in 1755, passion for souls and the spread of the gospel flowed from this little group until, three years later, their proliferation and activities gained notice from brethren healthily curious about their evangelistic success. Within those short three years with “a few churches having been constituted, and these having a number of branches which were fast maturing for churches,”<sup>3</sup> Under Stearns’ leadership, the churches formed the Sandy Creek Association in 1758.

The Separates' remarkable personalities, novel practices, and fiery style of worship and preaching prompted some special attention from the Particular Baptists. An understandable uneasiness about their doctrinal soundness gave occasion for a visit from John Gano. Perhaps sent by the Philadelphia or Charleston Association, Gano attended the 1759 meeting of the Sandy Creek Association. "He was sent, it seems, to inquire into the state of these *New Light Baptists*." Robert Baylor Semple reports the visit in this way:

He was received by Stearns with great affection. But the young and illiterate preachers were afraid of him, and kept at a distance. They even refused to invite him into their Association. All this he bore patiently, sitting by while they transacted their business. He preached also every day. His preaching was in the Spirit of the Gospel. Their hearts were opened, so that before he left they were greatly attached to him.... This Association was also conducted in love, peace and harmony. When Mr. Gano returned to his own country, being asked what he thought of these Baptists, he replied, that "*doubtless the power of God was among them; that although they were rather immethodical, they certainly had the root of the matter at heart.*"<sup>5</sup>

What made the Separates "rather immethodical," and what did Gano mean by "the root of the matter"? At least part of the answer is found in the magnetic life and thought of Shubal Stearns.

### Biographical Information

Stearns was born on January 28, 1706, in Boston. His parents' names were Shubal and Rebecca Larriford Stearns.<sup>6</sup> Early in his life his parents moved to Tolland, Connecticut, where they joined the Congregational church. Stearns remained a Congregationalist until 1745 when he heard the evangelist George Whitefield preach. Stearns was converted and adopted the New Light understanding of revival and conversion. McLoughlin summarizes the dynamic. "Religious zeal spilled over into very bitter quarrels about doctrine, church government, and ritual. By the end of the 1740's" he continues, "many fervent New Lights were ready to conclude that it was impossible for them to reform established churches from within." They must, therefore, start new churches. Their favorite verse was 2 Corinthians 6:17—"Come out from among them, and be ye separate"—from which they received the stigma of "come-outers" or "Separates."<sup>7</sup> Stearns followed suit and subsequently separated from the main stream, or Old Light, Congregational church.<sup>8</sup> Benedict states:

Soon after these reformers, who were first called New-Lights, and afterward Separates, were organized into distinct Societies, they were joined by Shubael Stearns, a native of Boston, (Mass.) who, becoming a preacher labored among them until 1751.<sup>9</sup>

In 1751 Stearns' church became troubled with the pedobaptist-antipedobaptist controversy.<sup>10</sup> In rapid succession, Stearns rejected infant baptism, received baptism from Reverend Wait Palmer, minister of Stoneington,<sup>11</sup> and by March 20, 1751, was ordained into the Baptist ministry. Palmer and Joshua Morse, the pastor of New London conducted the ordination.<sup>12</sup> The epithet "separate" remained with those that moved to the Baptist position, thus denominating them the Separate Baptists. The Separates brought with them the zeal and spirit of first leader, George Whitefield. By emulating his example, a fast growing body of Separate Baptists, fervent in evangelism and strong in heart-felt religion, began in New England. Though Curtis Goens claims that they were immensely different from established Baptist churches in New England,<sup>13</sup> these differences should not be exaggerated. Isaac Backus went through the same conversion and denominational change as Stearns and emerged as a spokesman for the entire Baptist movement in New England. Stearns ministered as a missionary preacher to New England until the year 1754.<sup>14</sup>

Three years after his adoption of the Baptist beliefs, Stearns moved South (1754), believing that the Spirit urged him to do so. He, along with several of his members, moved to Opekon, Virginia.<sup>15</sup> Here Stearns joined Daniel Marshall who in 1748 had married Stearns's sister, Martha, and already had become active in the Baptist church there.<sup>16</sup> While in Virginia, Stearns and Marshall preached with such warmth and demonstrated such zeal, that some members took offense and lodged a complaint with the Philadelphia Association against them as disorderly ministers. This charge eventually was judged as groundless and those who dissented were charged "rather to nourish than complain of such gifts."<sup>17</sup>

Impatient because he had not met with the success that he had desired, Stearns decided to leave Virginia. He received information from some friends in North Carolina about the need for a preacher in that area. That was enough to convince him to move further south on November 22, 1755. "He and his party once more got under way, and, traveling about two hundred miles, came to Sandy Creek, in Guilford county North Carolina."<sup>18</sup> The group consisted of eight men, along with their wives, the majority of which were Stearns' relatives.<sup>19</sup> Not long after arriving at Sandy Creek the group constituted as a church under the same name. Benedict states:

As soon as they arrived, they built them a little meetinghouse, and these 16 persons formed themselves into a church, and chose Shubael Stearns for their pastor, who had, for his assistants at that time, Daniel Marshall and Joseph Breed, neither of whom were ordained.<sup>20</sup>

Stearns remained pastor there until his death and it was from this "meetinghouse" that the revival in the South spread. The church grew from sixteen to 606 in a short period. Church members spread into other areas and started other churches, and then in 1758 the Sandy Creek Association was formed. The Association grew rapidly causing Morgan Edwards to exclaim that, "in 17 years, [Sandy Creek] has spread its branches westward as far as the great river Missis-

issippi; southward as far as Georgia; eastward to the sea and Chesopeck[sic] Bay; and northward to the waters of the Pottowmack[sic]; it, in 17 years, is become mother, grandmother, and great grandmother to 42 churches, from which sprang 125 ministers.”<sup>21</sup>

A description of Stearns is necessarily dependent upon Morgan Edwards who passed through Sandy Creek in 1772, the year after Stearns’ death. From people that knew and loved Stearns dearly he developed this description.

Mr. Stearns was but a little man, but a man of good natural parts and sound judgment. Of learning he had but a small share, yet was pretty well acquainted with books. His voice was musical and strong, which he managed in such a manner as, one while, to make soft impressions on the heart, and fetch tears from the eyes in a mechanical way; and anon, to shake the very nerves and throw the animal system into tumults and perturbations.... His character was indisputably good, both as a man, a Christian and a preacher.<sup>22</sup>

Although there are no extant sermons from Stearns, the doctrine of the new birth appeared to be central to his preaching. This doctrine was new to his hearers in the central part of North Carolina. Although, because of their Anglican background, they had been raised in the Christian religion, the people “were grossly

#### Sandy Creek Association

This Association developed from the work of Shubal Sterns, along with his brother-in-law Daniel Marshall, in North Carolina. Its formation in 1758 included three churches: soon it expanded to include churches in three states: North Carolina, South Carolina and Virginia. Benedict records, “These people were so much engaged in their evangelical pursuits, that they had no time to spend in theological debates, nor were they very scrupulous about their mode of conducting their meetings.” Its rapid growth, the span of its territory, the increasing centrality of power and the possessiveness of Shubal Stearns led to a division in 1770 into three Associations. Its confessional statement begins, “Holding believers’ baptism; laying on of hands; particular election of grace by predestination of God in Christ; effectual calling by the Holy Ghost; free justification through the imputed righteousness of Christ; progressive sanctification through God’s grace and truth; the final perseverance, or continuance of the saints in grace; the resurrection of these bodies after death,” etc. Some historians have sought to discredit the more Calvinistic elements of this confession claiming that it did not originate with Stearns. Since no documentation demonstrates otherwise, this judgment appears to be more prejudice, concluding that such evangelistic Baptists could not possibly be doctrinal Calvinists.

ignorant of its essential principles.”<sup>23</sup> Hearing that religion was much more than outward signs seemed very odd.

The preaching style of the Separates was “much more novel than their doctrines.”<sup>24</sup> Stearns was the figure to which all the Separate preachers looked. In fact, Edwards claimed that “all the Separate ministers copy after him in tones of voice and actions of body.”<sup>25</sup> The group had “acquired a very warm and pathetic address, accompanied by strong gestures and a singular tone of voice”<sup>26</sup> described by some as a “holy whine.” Stearns’ message was always the simple gospel, which was “easily understood even by rude frontiersmen”<sup>27</sup> particularly when the preacher himself felt overwhelmed with the importance of his subject. Most of the frontier people of North Carolina had never heard such doctrine or observed such earnest preaching, and though many jeered and mocked, others trembled and the powerful influences of the Spirit subdued many to saving faith in the redeeming blood of Christ.

Stearns labored in this area until 1771. Just two years before his death, Stearns had a vision that he related to many friends. In turn, these friends passed it on to Edwards to procure Stearns’ legacy. Edwards relates it accordingly:

The time was Sep. 7, 1769 memorable for a great storm. As he was ascending a hill in his way home he observed in the horizon a white heap like snow; upon his drawing near he perceived the heap to stand suspended in the air 15 or 20 feet above ground. Presently it fell to the ground and divided itself into three parts; the greatest part moved northward; a less towards the south; and the third, which was less than either but much brighter, remained on the spot where the whole fell; as his eyes followed that which went northward, it vanished; he turned to look at the other, and found they also had disappeared. While the old man pondered what the phantom division [sic], and motions of it meant this thought struck him, “The bright heap is our religious interest, which will divide and spread north and south, but chiefly northward; while a small part remains at Sandy-creek.”<sup>28</sup>

Through the organizational skills of Stearns and the untiring preaching endeavors of Daniel Marshall, the Great Awakening spread deep into the South. Marshall went into Virginia where Dutton Lane was converted. A flurry of activity followed and soon a number of churches from Virginia began to participate in the activities of the Sandy Creek Association. Daniel Marshall also preached in Georgia, established a Baptist church in Kiokee. His son, Abraham, eventually became the leading pastor for the pioneer Baptist movement in Georgia laboring there for thirty-five years. Looking back Stearns’ explanation of the vision was proven true. ☺

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## Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Morgan Edwards, “Materials Towards the History of the Baptists in the Provinces



of Maryland Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia,” 19, Special Collections, James P. Boyce Centennial Library, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY. Also the same prepared for publication by Eve B. Weeks and Mary B. Warren in 2 volumes, (Danielsville, GA: Heritage Papers, 1984), 2:93. This version will be referred to as “Warren” because it is copyrighted by Mary B. Warren.

<sup>2</sup> “The correct spelling of Mr. Stearns’ name seems to be that given by Edwards, ‘Shubal.’ Mr. Stearns himself so spelled it in signing four petitions in favor of men accused as Regulators, *Colonial Records*, IX, 27ff. The same spelling was used by Semple in his *History of Virginia Baptists*. The spelling ‘Shubael,’ a Scripture name, was used by Backus in his *Abridgment*, 250, in the year 1804, and later by Benedict and other writers.” quoted in George Walsh Paschal, *History of North Carolina Baptists* (Raleigh, NC: The General Board, North Carolina Baptist Convention, 1930), 228.

<sup>3</sup> David Benedict, *A General History of the Baptist Denomination in America and Other Parts of the World* (Boston: Lincoln & Edmands, 1813; reprint, Gallatin, TN: Church History Research & Archives, 1985), II, 49 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

<sup>4</sup> Robert Baylor Semple, *A History of the Rise and Progress of the Baptists in Virginia* revised and extended by G. W. Beale (originally published 1810, rev edition in 1894; reprint, Lafayette, Tenn.: Church History Research and Archives, 1976), 65. (page citations are to the reprint edition).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 65–66.

<sup>6</sup> William Latane Lumpkin, *Baptist Foundations in the South* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1962), 21.

<sup>7</sup> William G. McLoughlin, *Soul Liberty* (Hanover: Brown University Press, 1991), 103–4.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Benedict, *The Baptist Denomination*, II, 37.

<sup>10</sup> Lumpkin, *Baptist Foundations*, 21.

<sup>11</sup> Edwards, 19, Warren, 2:93.

<sup>12</sup> Benedict, *The Baptist Denomination*, II, 37.

<sup>13</sup> Charles Curtis Goen, *Revivalism and Separatism in New England, 1740–1800* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1962), 206–207.

<sup>14</sup> Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1972), 319.

<sup>15</sup> Benedict, *The Baptist Denomination*, II, 38.

<sup>16</sup> Semple, *Baptists in Virginia*, 13n.

<sup>17</sup> Semple, 376.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>19</sup> The men of the group were Shubal Stearns, Peter Stearns, Ebenezer Stearns, Shubal Stearns, Jr., Daniel Marshall, Joseph Breed, Enos Stimpson, and Jonathan Polk. Semple, *Baptists in Virginia*, 14n. Morgan Edwards claims that while Stearns was married to Sarah Johnston he “left no issue.” Edwards, *Materials*, 19. If this is the case, it can only be assumed that Shubal Stearns, Jr. would be his brother and not his son. The author can find no other reference to the family of Stearns.

<sup>20</sup> Benedict, *The Baptist Denomination*, II, 38.

<sup>21</sup> Edwards, “Materials”, 18.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 19, Warren, 2:93

<sup>23</sup> Semple, *Baptists in Virginia*, 15.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Edwards, “Materials”, 19, Warren, 2:93.

<sup>26</sup> Semple, *Baptists in Virginia*, 15.

<sup>27</sup> Lumpkin, *Baptist Foundations*, 31.

<sup>28</sup> Edwards, “Materials”, 20, Warren, 2:94

# Letters

Pastor Ascol,

I was reading the new introduction to Boyce's *Systematic* on your website, and I thought I would send you an email. You mentioned the beginnings of the Founders Conference back in 1983 and I wanted to give you a word of testimony from one who has been rocked in the cradle of Founders Conference and now thankfully looks back at what God has done through you and the Founders Conference.

I was born in 1981 in Memphis while my dad was a student at Mid-America. I remember toting my coloring books to Founders Conference when it was held, I'm pretty sure, at Rhodes College and following Dad around through the one or two book tables out in the hallway. The Founders Conference was always a fun event as Dad's friends would travel and stay with us.

When I was nine, Dad graduated from Seminary (yeah, it took awhile :) and we moved to north Kansas where dad became the pastor of the only Baptist church in Nemaha County. We weren't able to go to Founders Conference anymore, and in fact, there wasn't much theological fellowship at all. I recognize this in retrospect, because it wasn't until we moved to Kansas that God saved me. As a boy of 9 I didn't know how hard it was to affirm the things my father and mother affirmed and minister among those who, at best, couldn't care less or were defiantly opposed. ...

I don't want to take up any more of your time. I just wanted to let you know that Founders Conference has played an extremely formative part in my life. I've struggled through issues of whether or not to become a Presbyterian and "Grass is Greener SBC Syndrome"; through all of them, Founders Conference and those I know through Founders Conference have helped me remain dedicated to the SBC and also dedicated to gospel of Jesus Christ which humbles every man who truly understands it.

Thanks for everything you do and have done. May our Lord protect you and your family. May He keep you all for Himself and make your ways prosper.

B.H.

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I was amazed at how fast my copy of *Abstract of Systematic Theology* arrived. Thanks for your prompt attention to my order. I have enjoyed the biography of Dr. Boyce, and the first two chapters, and am looking forward to spending many hours in the future, reading the book. I am a layman having never been to seminary, but have loved the doctrines of grace since my conversion, even though not knowing much about them. I always knew that, "Salvation is of The Lord." Keep up the good work of informing people. I pray for your ministry every morning.

May God continue to bless.

J. W.

# News

## Southern Baptist Founders Conference

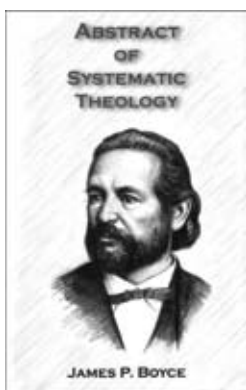
Make plans now to attend the **2007 Southern Baptist Founders Conference**, June 26–29, hosted by Bethel Baptist Church in Owasso, OK. This will be the 25th anniversary of the conference. The theme will be “*God’s Truth Abideth Still: Confronting Postmodernism*” with keynote speaker Dr. David Wells.

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