

HISTORY OF THE EARLY BAPTISTS OF VIRGINIA

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(1826-1908)

The earliest account of any Baptists in Virginia is the statement of Eld. Morgan Edwards, that, in 1695, there were some Baptists in North Carolina who had gone over from Virginia to escape the intolerance of the laws of the latter colony. The first organized church of which we find mention is that at Burley, Isle of Wight Co., to which, in 1714, the Eld. Robert Nordain came from England as pastor. From labors in this vicinity several churches were formed, which in part composed the Kehukee Association, organized in 1765.

In 1743 some Baptists from Chestnut Ridge, Md., removed to Opeccon Creek, now Occoquan, in Prince William County, and constituted the Occoquan church in 1743, with the Eld. Henry Loveall as pastor. The church was afterwards called Mill Creek. Other churches were organized, and some joined the Philadelphia Association, from which they were regularly dismissed to form, with another church, the Ketockton Association, in London County. This was the first District Association wholly composed of Virginia Baptist churches.

Many churches along the southern border of the State belonged to the Sandy Creek Association, mainly in North Carolina, and formed in January, 1758. All the associated Baptist churches of the State belonged to one of these three Associations. The Sandy Creek churches were called "Separate Baptists;" the Kehukee churches "General Baptists;" and the Ketockton churches, "Strait," or "Calvinistic," or "Regular Baptists." These all coalesced, adopting the doctrinal formulary of the "Regular" Baptists as their "Basis of Union" in 1787. The "Separate Baptist Association," or "General Association of Separate Baptists," or "Rapidan Association," was organized May 11, 1771.

Some of the early laws against "Dissenters" in Virginia bore heavily against Baptists, and they were severely persecuted. The first imprisonment of preachers was that of John Waller, Lewis Craig, James Childs, and others, June 4, 1768, in Spottsylvania County. Many other cases followed elsewhere, accompanied often with fines, whipping, and other penalties.

These trials awakened a sturdy determination to sweep away all civil obstacles to religious liberty. To combine efforts, a "General Committee" was formed, Oct. 9, 1784, of two delegates from each Association, the "General Association" having been dissolved in 1783. Four Associations were represented. Instead of this General Committee, which had nobly and effectively served its purposes, the "General Meeting of Correspondence" was formed of delegates from Associations in May, 1800. This continued as the State board of Baptists co-operation until June 9, 1823, when the present "Baptist General Association of Virginia" was organized for missionary, Sun-

day-school, and other work. What is now West Virginia was part of the field cultivated by the General Association.

Baptists more than any others, and sometimes against a combined



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opposition, secured complete religious freedom for Virginia. Many were whipped, imprisoned, fined, or mobbed, and remarkable cases of steadfastness, heroism, and sacrifice are recorded in Virginia Baptist history. They have grown in numbers, intelligence, and enterprise, and now outnumber any other, indeed, almost all other religious denominations in the State. (Continued)

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They were the college at Richmond, and many academies for males and females, under Baptist auspices. Since 1863 the colored churches have constituted themselves separately, and have their own Associations.

Virginia Baptists point to their history with gratitude to God and to the memory of their pioneers in the faith. Their ministry is the peer of any other in piety, intelligence, power, and enterprise. Their churches number 1,346; ordained ministers, 718 members, 207,559; Associations, 32.

The Baptists of Virginia, in their patriotism, in heroic sufferings for Christ, in zeal to spread the gospel in their own and in other states, and in success, have made for themselves a glorious record; Virginia Baptists have given to several other States their divine principles, and preachers who constructed a multitude of Baptist churches. — (BAPTIST ENCYCLOPEDIA, Vol. II, p. 1, 196, 1881 edition).