

# Kentucky Baptists History

**WILLIAM CATHCART**  
(1826-1908)

The Baptists were the pioneers of Kentucky. The first explorers of its territory were the brothers Daniel and Squire Boone. The latter was a Baptist preacher. The first settlement was made at Boonesborough, in what is now Madison County, in the summer of 1775, by Col. Daniel Boone, his wife and daughters being the only women in the small colony.

Col. Richard Calloway and his family joined the settlers the first day of September. They also were Baptists. The same fall a small settlement was made at Harrodsburg, some thirty miles southwest of Boonesborough. Early in the spring of 1776, Thomas and William Hickman, Baptist ministers, came to Harrodsburg. "Mr. Tinsley," says Mr. Hickman, "preached almost every Sunday." Hickman also preached. Nothing more is known of Mr. Tinsley except that "he was," says Hickman, "a good old preacher." Mr. Hickman returned to Virginia the following summer.

Emigrants, principally from Virginia, now began to pour into the new country rapidly. Among these were Gen. Henry Crist, Gen. Aquilla Whitaker, Gen. Joseph Lewis, Col. Robert Johnson, Col. William Bush, Hon. James Garrard, Gabriel Slaughter, the Clays, and many others, who became prominent in the camps and councils of the State. These were all Baptists.

During the years 1779 and 1780, William Marshall, John Whitaker, Benjamin Lynn, John Garrard, and Joseph Barnett, Baptist ministers, settled in the new country. John Taylor and Joseph Reding visited it and preached during this period.

The first Baptist church formed in Kentucky, or in the great Mississippi Valley, was constituted of 18 members by Joseph Barnett and John Garrard, on the present site of Elizabethtown, forty miles

south of Louisville, June 18, 1781. It still bears its ancient name, Severn's Valley. The second church was constituted by the same ministers, July 4, 1781. It is called Cedar Creek, and is located forty miles southeast from Louisville. The third church in Kentucky was Gilbert's Creek, in Garrard County. It was constituted in Spottsylvania Co., and removed to Kentucky, under the pastoral care of Lewis Craig, in the fall of 1781. Here it held its first meeting the second Sunday in December of that year.

Then followed Forks of Dix River, in 1782; Providence, in 1783; South Elkhorn, in 1783; Gilbert's Creek (Separate Baptists), in 1783; Beargrass, in 1784; Cox's Creek, Clear Creek, Great Crossings, Tate's Creek, Limestone, Brashear's Creek, Rush Branch, Pottinger's Creek, and Head of Boone's Creek, in 1785.

In 1785 three Associations were formed, Elkhorn and Salem of Regular Baptists, and South Kentucky of Separate Baptists. In 1793 an effort to form a union between the Regular and Separate Baptists failed in its object, and resulted in the formation of Tate's Creek Association of United Baptists. From this period till 1799 religion was at a low ebb, and open infidelity much abounded.

In 1800 the religious awakening known as "The Great Revival in Kentucky" began, and continued three years. In this period the number of Baptists in the State was more than doubled. It was at this time that the jerks and the barking and dancing exercises prevailed and in some degree among the Baptists, but much more extensively among the Presbyterians and Methodists.

In 1801 the Regular and Separate Baptists formed a union, and

In 1823, Campbellism began to disturb the denomination, and continued to distress the churches until the Campbellites were cut off. The formal separation began in 1829, but was not completed till 1835, when the Campbellites became a distinct sect, known by various names in different localities.

In 1832 the Baptist State Convention was organized. Its operations were unsatisfactory, and, after a trial of four years, it was dissolved. In 1837 the General Association of Kentucky Baptists was constituted. Its special object was to promote the spread of the gospel in the State. Its success was encouraging from the beginning. It is estimated that 50,000 persons have been baptized under its auspices.

Meanwhile, the anti-missionary spirit, which had first manifested itself in the churches about the year 1818, was fully aroused by the organization of the General Association. Divisions were produced in many churches and Associations. In not a few of these a majority was on the anti-missionary side. The formal division began in 1840. Since that time the Baptists of Kentucky have been divided into missionary and anti-missionary churches. The latter have now an aggregate membership of about 7000.

Since the division last referred to, the denomination has enjoyed a good degree of harmony and prosperity. Until the close of the Civil War, the white and colored people worshipped together in the same churches. Since that period the colored people have formed churches and Associations of their own. The separation was harmonious, and the feeling between the brethren of the two races is kind, and their correspondence is fraternal.

The subjoined table will show the growth of the Baptist denomination in Kentucky from 1790 to 1880:

| Date | Population of The State | Number of Baptists |
|------|-------------------------|--------------------|
| 1790 | 73,677                  | 3,105              |
| 1810 | 406,511                 | ---                |
| 1812 | ---                     | 21,666             |
| 1830 | 687,917                 | ---                |
| 1831 | ---                     | 34,827             |
| 1840 | 779,828                 | 47,325             |
| 1846 | ---                     | 60,991             |
| 1850 | 928,405                 | 69,894             |
| 1860 | 1,155,684               | 81,262             |
| 1870 | 1,321,011               | ---                |
| 1875 | ---                     | 144,269            |
| 1878 | ---                     | 159,743            |
| 1879 | ---                     | 161,190            |
| 1880 | ---                     | 163,696            |

(THE BAPTIST ENCYCLOPEDIA, Vol. I, pp. 650-651, Edition 1881).



Page 5

It voted to withdraw from the work of the Hobolochitto Association again in the fall of 1946. The church now cooperates in the work of the "Interstate and Foreign Landmark Missionary Baptist Association of America of Regular <sup>MISSIONARY</sup> Baptist Churches." This Association was organized about 1951. They are sometimes referred to as "Faithway Baptist."

Though not numbered among the larger churches in membership, it has the historic distinction of being the oldest church in Pearl River and Hancock Counties and areas beyond. Most of the older families of this area are descendants of those pioneer families who once worshipped at Old Palestine.

- 30 -

Information taken from history sources filed in the library of the Mississippi Baptist Commission on History at Southeastern Baptist College in Laurel, Mississippi. 1/5/77

-- L. S. Walker, Chairman