



April 21, 1976

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Thriving Church Pre-dates  
The American Revolution

By Jim Newton

CULPEPER, Va. (BP)--Steeped in a heritage dating back to 1774 when it was founded, Culpeper Baptist Church proclaims a revolutionary gospel aimed at changing the lives of modern Americans.

Spiritual freedom is at the very heart of the church's heritage. Its first pastor even went to jail when he took a stand for the freedom to preach the gospel.

Nathaniel Saunders was imprisoned in August of 1773, about a year before the church was organized, for preaching the gospel without permission from the established Anglican church.

Less than a year after he had been in the Culpeper County Jail, Saunders with the help of David Thomas, a highly-educated and famed pastor of the historic Broad Run Baptist Church in nearby Fauquier County, organized the Mt. Poney Baptist Meeting House (church) in Culpeper.

Current church records do not indicate the exact date the church was organized, but do state that 47 members of the Mountain Run Meeting House in Orange County were sent off to help organize the Mt. Poney church in 1774, says pastor John Farrar

Thomas, pastor of the Broad Run church, served as a supply pastor until Saunders was called as the congregation's first pastor in 1774.

Perhaps the church's most famous pastor was not Thomas or Saunders, but rather a flamboyant evangelist, John Leland a native of Massachusetts. Leland arrived in Culpeper County in March of 1777. Soon afterward, he was ordained by the Mt. Poney church, and called as its pastor.

Leland, however, was a controversial figure. His preaching was dynamic and described by Virginia Baptist Historian Robert Semple as "eccentric, but warm and evangelistic."

His ordination was considered by some Regular Baptists of the area to be unorthodox, since it did not include the "laying on of hands." For this reason, Leland and other delegates from the Mt. Poney church were rejected by the Ketchikan Baptist Association in 1778.

Difficulties in the church arose. The church split over Leland's leadership, and Leland either resigned in 1779 or was dismissed--the record is not clear.

"My stay in Mt. Poney was not a blessing to the people," Leland later wrote in his memoirs. "I was too young and roving to be looked up to as pastor." In addition to the controversy over his ordination, some of the members were offended by his manner of dress.

Saunders returned as pastor in 1779 and served the Mt. Poney congregation until 1788.

Leland, meanwhile, moved to nearby Orange County where he became a very popular pastor and evangelist. He was ordained again and attracted huge crowds as a traveling evangelist. In 1787, he reported 400 baptisms as a result of his preaching.

In 1788, Leland is said to have met with James Madison who then was running for election as a delegate to the Constitutional Convention. A number of Baptists in Orange County reportedly opposed ratification of the new Constitution because it did not guarantee religious freedom, and these opponents campaigned against Madison's election since he so staunchly favored the new constitution.

Leland, according to some reports, withdrew as a candidate and threw his support to Madison, thus ensuring Madison's election and eventually the ratification of the Constitution.

This alleged agreement between Leland and Madison is not documented historically, although there is some evidence they met and talked, and some historians reject it as myth.

Culpeper Church has been made most famous, however, by the imprisonment of another Baptist preacher who probably never even preached at the Mt. Poney Meeting House---James Ireland.

Ireland's highly publicized imprisonment in the Culpeper County Jail from November 1769 to April 1770, occurred four years before the Mt. Poney church was organized, but it was his imprisonment that put the church on the map of Baptist history.

The imprisonment of the church's first pastor and at least eight other Baptist ministers in the Culpeper County Jail has given the members of Culpeper Baptist Church today a deeper appreciation for their heritage as Baptists.

"When you consider what they went through to obtain religious freedom, it makes you appreciate your heritage because of the suffering those early Baptist preachers endured," said Miss Barbara Peterson, who wrote the church's history for its bicentennial celebration two years ago.

While things have changed over the last 200 years, the church members have seen dramatic changes in Culpeper the last two decades.

Farrar said that 19 years ago when he came to Culpeper, there was little industry in the area. It was largely devoted to farming, especially dairy farming.

Today, industry is rapidly expanding in Culpeper and dairy farming has diminished. The 8,000 population county seat Town is growing, and modern shopping centers have displaced the old downtown shopping area.

The 1,325-member church is changing and growing with the community. In 1954, the congregation moved to a modern new church plant only a dozen or so blocks from the old building constructed in 1894, supposedly over the very spot where the Culpeper County Jail stood 200 years ago. In 1961, they dedicated a new sanctuary.

In terms of ministries, the church sponsors a kindergarten for almost 90 children, conducts monthly worship services at the Virginia Baptist Home for the aging in Culpeper, provides the Lord's Supper for residents of the home, and offers its facilities for use by numerous community programs.

The Senior Citizens Nutrition Center, for example, uses the church kitchen five days a week to serve hot meals to the elderly. Likewise, the American Association of Retired Persons meets regularly at the church. And the American Red Cross turns the church building into a bloodmobile center once each month.

Farrar said the church today is radically different from the Mt. Poney congregation that met in the meeting house at the foot of Mt. Poney 200 years ago.

"The life of the congregation now is centered in a believing and serving family, while then it was centered primarily around preaching alone," Farrar said.

Both Farrar and Miss Tutty said they felt a recent Lay Renewal Weekend would do a lot to help the church move forward in the future.

"It has really sparked interest and excitement in the church," Miss Tutty explained. She said that the final Sunday night service lasted for four hours as people in the church shared "what the Lord had done for them."

The renewal experience continues through five sharing groups established for members who want to go deeper in Bible study, prayer, and sharing, Farrar added.

As a result, the congregation has drawn closer together he said, blending an appreciation for the church's rich heritage in the past together with a deeper determination and commitment to the future.



# BAPTIST PRESS

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## Baptists Continue Ministries In Midst of Beirut's Unrest

BEIRUT, Lebanon (BP)--The Beirut Baptist School has reopened and the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary continues to operate in the midst of political unrest here, a Baptist missionary said here.

Southern Baptist missionaries who remain say they have all escaped injury and plan to stay and continue their ministries.

Baptist churches continue to have services although three pastors have been robbed or burned out of their homes. All of the pastors will continue their ministries, according to David W. King, Southern Baptist missionary.

Worship services continue at the seminary when residents there are unable to attend regular services in churches in Beirut. A committee of that group is meeting to look into the possibility of forming a church, King noted.

He said the seminary has continued to function throughout the most recent fighting and the shaky cease-fire, but the Beirut Baptist School closed for several weeks. The seminary has five men and two women attending. Its one senior hopes to graduate this spring, in spite of time missed following the Christmas holidays while he visited in Morocco.

The broadcast ministry has been somewhat curtailed, King cited, because it is impossible for personnel to get to the station, but two seminary students are being trained to help. One will answer correspondence from people interested in knowing more about Christ; the other is being trained to do technical work.

The publication ministry has been hampered by the cut-off transportation routes, he continued. No books and materials can be shipped. Likewise, groceries are not being received into the local village grocery stores. The supply is lasting, but unless cross-country transportation lines are opened food could become scarce, according to King.

Missionaries, who used to travel into the city for groceries, are now also shopping at village stores because radio reports about where the fighting is located and the intensity of it are unreliable, King said. All Lebanese radio stations are now in the hands of one side or the other, but missionaries still hear news via Radio Monte Carlo, British Broadcasting Company and Voice of America, the missionary said.

Baptist buildings, other than the homes of pastors and churches, have received no damage, but a large rocket left a 10-foot hole very close to the seminary. King said missionary homes have not been hit.

"We feel definitely that the Lord placed us here," said King. "We are continuing with seminary and with Bible classes. We are continuing with services and visits with neighbors and friends. We are keeping up with each other by telephone."

One group of women that missionaries have been visiting in prison were liberated, including two American women who have returned home after one-and-a-half years in prison. One of the women recently "made a real beginning of faith" and another "rededicated her life to Jesus Christ," King said.

Mrs. Ruby Moore, a volunteer teacher in the Beirut Baptist School, left Lebanon during a cease fire, bringing letters and a cassette tape from missionaries there. Decisions of the missionaries to stay or leave are fully supported by the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, a spokesman told Baptist Press.

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J. D. Hughey, area secretary for Europe and the Middle East, said in his report to the board recently that no distinction is made between the missionaries who stay and those who leave. "There are no brave missionaries and others who are less brave. Each decision is individual and based on several factors."

Remaining in Beirut are the Finlay M. Grahams, the Kings, the William O. (Bill) Hems, the James K. Raglands, Miss Mabel Summers and Miss Emma Cooke.

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Kentucky Baptist Groups  
Retrace Their Beginnings

Baptist Press  
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HARRODSBURG, Ky. (BP)--Members of two major Kentucky Baptist bodies traced their earliest beginnings to a site here where preachers Thomas Tinsley and William Hickman are said to have preached on April 17, 1776.

A day-long celebration in mid-April signified the beginning of a third century of Baptist work in Kentucky. The event was co-sponsored by the General Association of Baptists in Kentucky and the Kentucky Baptist Convention and was scheduled by the latter as a special inspirational convention session, a spokesman said. The GABK is a black Baptist body and the KBC is predominantly Anglo.

A near-capacity crowd swelled the 1,300-seat sanctuary of Harrodsburg Baptist Church, growing to standing room only and with some watching via closed-circuit television by the final evening service.

Keynote speakers reaffirmed, as one said, "While the means have changed, the message of 200 years ago is still the same yesterday, today and tomorrow."

The Baptists marched under a hot sun, four abreast, down Harrodsburg's Main Street, then turned up Lexington Street for a half-mile trek to the traditional preaching site of Tinsley and Hickman.

A replica of the Liberty Bell tolled the Baptists' coming, as they sang the old hymn, "We're Marching to Zion."

At the site, a series of speakers recalled the history made on that spot.

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CORRECTION:

In Baptist Press story mailed 4/20/76 entitled "BPRA Elects Nash to Presidency," please add the following after Jennifer Bryon's title in graph 3: ; and Leonard Hill, managing editor, Baptist Program, SBC Executive Committee, Nashville, newsletter editor. Delete the word and before Jennifer Bryon's name.

In BP outline mailed 4/20/76 on Baptist Public Relations Association officers, please add the following sentence as a last line: Not pictured is Leonard Hill, managing editor, Baptist Program, SBC Executive Committee, Nashville, who was elected BPRA newsletter editor.

THANKS

Baptist Press