

SETTING THE TABLE WITH BIBLES: A HISTORY OF THE NON-ALIGNED,  
NON-CLASS CHURCHES OF CHRIST

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SETTING THE TABLE WITH BIBLES: A HISTORY OF THE NON-ALIGNED,  
NON-CLASS CHURCHES OF CHRIST

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A Thesis

Submitted to

the Graduate Faculty of

Auburn University

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the

Degree of

Master of Arts

Auburn, Alabama  
December 19, 2008

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## VITA

Dana Ray Chandler, son of William C. and Mary Christine (Blevins) Chandler, was born June 7, 1958, in Charleston, West Virginia. He graduated from Randolph County High School, Wedowee, Alabama, in 1977. He attended Auburn University from 1980 to 1984 as an undergraduate in Civil Engineering and returned to Auburn in 2000 and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in History in August, 2002. He entered Graduate School, Auburn University, in September, 2002. He married Teresa (Holmes) Chandler, daughter of Harold and Yvonne (Prince), on June 16, 1979 and has one daughter, Breanna Leigh.

THESIS ABSTRACT

SETTING THE TABLE WITH BIBLES: A HISTORY OF THE NON-ALIGNED,  
NON-CLASS CHURCHES OF CHRIST

Dana R. Chandler

Master of Arts, December 19, 2008  
(B.A., Auburn University, August 5, 2002)

180 Typed Pages

Directed by Charles A. Israel

This study seeks to explore the non-aligned, non-class Church of Christ, a particular movement within the Churches of Christ\Disciples of Christ, which has never been recognized as a separate and independent part of the conservative movement of either of these groups even though their numbers are approximately three hundred congregations within the United States and many more abroad. This particular movement's interrelationships and doctrinal similarities among the affiliated congregations have changed very little over the past 100 years. Their way of responding to problems within their local, independent congregations, coupled with their development from a distinctly different lineage than the 'mainstream' Disciples of Christ or other Churches of Christ, make them an interesting group to study and explore. This group may also be classified as a hyper-congregational organization in their insistence on

maintaining their independence within a loosely confederated fellowship of like faith and doctrine.

Utilizing oral history interviews, primary source documents (such as sermons, correspondence, periodicals, and pamphlets), secondary literature (Church of Christ and non-Church of Christ) and photographic media, this study follows the development of the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ during the early 1800s through the middle of the twentieth century. Five main aspects will be discussed in this document: (1) these congregations developed in rural areas, free from the encroachment of new people and new ideas and yet their influence and characteristics would influence many other groups throughout the southern United States, (2) these congregations began through the efforts of men such as James O'Kelly in the late 1700s and Moses Park in 1845, men with a vision of congregations based upon a primitive pattern established within the Bible almost two thousand years ago, (3) the influx of local Baptists, who had likewise fought against certain religious innovations, into the early development of the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ prompted them to reject missionary societies and paid preachers, (4) they received further instruction from men who helped to maintain the views of the congregations in Randolph County, by reinforcing their doctrines through consistent preaching and teaching, and (5) these congregations maintained strong ties to one another through intermarriage and attending each other's meetings, thereby reinforcing conservative teaching in an unbroken generational line.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank Dr. Robert “Jeff” Jakeman and Steve Murray for their gentle prodding and Drs. Charles Israel, Anthony Carey, Norman Totten and Cathleen M. Giustino for their professional guidance. Furthermore, the author would like to acknowledge all of those affiliated with the Churches of Christ that aided with their memories, photographs, notes, pamphlets and books. Thanks are also due to family members Teresa and Breanna for their support during the course of this endeavor.

Style manual or journal used: A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses,  
and Dissertations (7<sup>th</sup> ed.)

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Computer software used: Microsoft Word 2007

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Lines were drawn. One group was prepared to give in and the other desperately sought to maintain unity while continuing to adhere to their strict conservatism.<sup>1</sup> In the corner of this small country church sat the culprit, the object of their continued feud, made of wood, metal and ivory, a “mechanical invention of man”<sup>2</sup> that was causing the congregation at Haywood, Randolph County, Alabama to split in 1947. Preacher after preacher came and pressed their ideas on how to handle “the problem.”<sup>3</sup> One preacher would stand and beat on the “wicked instrument”<sup>4</sup> with a stick as he preached about the evils of modernism. Another would not look at “that work of the devil” while preaching about how the New Testament allowed only *a cappella* singing and others refused to be in the same building while “it”<sup>5</sup> was there.<sup>6</sup> Their rhetoric reverberated through the

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<sup>1</sup> The terms “liberal” and “conservative,” as defined within the context of this document, refer to distinct religious philosophies within the Church of Christ. “Conservative” comes from the Latin meaning “tending or disposed to maintain existing views, conditions, or institutions (*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Eleventh Edition* (2003), s.v. “conservative.”).” Therefore, the word conservative (in this case, as defined within the traditions of the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ) refers to congregations that seek to adhere to existing or traditional religious views within a strict scriptural interpretation in worship or doctrine. Liberal (again, as defined by the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ) refers to Churches of Christ whose practices exceed or go beyond those espoused by the conservatives.

<sup>2</sup> Bryant Wilson, interviewed by author, November 6, 2002.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

building and community, but even though the visiting preachers were dynamic and influential, they would not be the ones to decide the fate of the congregation. It was the individual members who would decide whether to split or to stay together. There was no “church paper” available to take up either cause. They would decide the fate of the church at Haywood on their own, just like the “Bereans” who searched the scriptures for confirmation of doctrines that they were taught.<sup>7</sup> Men and women gathered in member homes to discuss the biblical authority for such actions. Onward Holmes, a member at Haywood during this traumatic time, spoke of numerous occasions during the debate when it seemed that “the table was set with Bibles” as they tried to “sort out the shambles they had gotten into.”<sup>8</sup> The congregation at Haywood, like so many other congregations of the Church of Christ,<sup>9</sup> would eventually split over the issue of allowing musical

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<sup>6</sup> Luree Benefield, interviewed by author, November 5, 2002. Benefield, of Wedowee, Alabama, attributes the act of beating on the piano to Noah Holt, a visiting preacher from Piedmont, Alabama.

<sup>7</sup> Bryant Wilson interview. Reference to the Bereans is from Acts 17:11.

<sup>8</sup> Joseph Onward Holmes, interviewed by author, June 2, 1998.

<sup>9</sup> There are a variety of groups that refer to themselves as the Church of Christ. Many within the Christian world refer to themselves as the universal Church of Christ. The Catholic and Orthodox Churches officially refer to themselves as the Church of Christ, and this term has been found consistently throughout Catholic documents. Today, there are many groups that use this name: Church of Christ Holiness U.S.A., Church of Christ Scientist, Church of God (there are many different churches using this name), Church of Jesus Christ, Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ of the Apostolic faith, Inc., Church of the Nazarene, Churches of Christ in Christian Union, and Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, are just a few. Within the context of this document, the Church of Christ refers to members of a religious group that “do not conceive of themselves as a new church started near the beginning of the 19th century. Rather, the whole movement is designed to reproduce in contemporary times the church originally established on Pentecost, A.D. 30.” Batsell Barrett Baxter, *What is the Church of Christ*, (Nashville: Privately Published, 1971), pp. 11–13

instruments, in this case a piano, to be included in the worship service, leading to the eventual birth of two new congregations in Randolph County, Alabama.

However, there was a distinctive difference in this breakup compared to others. The group that took the more conservative position in the breakup continued to use a method of dealing with change and problems which had also been used by their parents and grandparents.<sup>10</sup> Unlike other groups within the Church of Christ,<sup>11</sup> they did not rely upon a central authority, a nationally or regionally renowned preacher, or a church-authorized periodical to provide them with the proper response. Their approach to problem solving maintained congregational autonomy while allowing for input from individual members who may have been influenced by the views of certain preachers, commentaries, publications, or pamphlets. Although individual input was allowed, their views were always “tempered by the scriptures.”<sup>12</sup> Many times, though, the problems were “sorted out by those that did not read anything but the Bible.”<sup>13</sup>

Historically, they are not specifically from the Restoration or Stone-Campbell movement, but are the outcome of at least two separate religious movements from the works of James O’Kelly, Christian Herman Dasher, and Shelton Dunning (Dasher and

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<sup>10</sup> Wilson Interview.

<sup>11</sup> James H. Murphy, in his booklet entitled *The Glory of An Imperfect People, The History And Profile of the Non-Sunday School Movement Among the Churches of Christ* (publication information unknown) notes on page 3: other groups of conservative congregations in Texas responded to the issues of “Liberalism, Missionary Societies, Musical Instruments, Women’s Movements, and Sunday School Societies (all considered to be liberal or digressive innovations)” by rallying “around church papers” such as the Christian-Evangelist, the Christian Century, Christian Standard and the Gospel Advocate.

<sup>12</sup> Wilson Interview. Wilson was noting that even though other opinions were entertained by the leaders of the congregation, their words and ideas were researched by members of the congregation, for compatibility with the scriptures.

<sup>13</sup> Wilson Interview.

Dunning are from the Savannah, Georgia area). This religious body, although similar to many congregations of the Churches of Christ, not only differs from the others in their modern origins, but, also, in their continued strict adherence to the principles of primitivism espoused by O’Kelly, Dasher, and Dunning.

This group may also be classified as a “hyper-congregational organization.”<sup>14</sup> This term refers to a congregation of believers that appears isolated and insular from other groups. Yet, this religious body maintains their independence within a loosely confederated fellowship of like faith and doctrine. They do not seek to govern or to be governed by other congregations or groups, but decide independently who they will associate with and who will participate within their services.

Furthermore, their isolation from the Restoration Movement coupled with their strict independence, no doubt fostered by the sentiments originally proclaimed by O’Kelly, allowed them to develop doctrines and traditions that remained static for over 150 years. Issues of distinction between this group and others within Christendom and churches of the traditional Stone-Campbell Movement are abundant. Specifically, this group does not advocate the use of Sunday Schools or Bible Classes, paid clergy, Missionary Societies, women’s leadership in any aspect of the public worship service, and remarriage after a divorce, nor do they associate with those that accept these doctrines. Many also hold fast to their principle of pacifism.

Adhering strictly to a literal interpretation of New Testament scriptures, obdurate toward change, and congregationally independent in relationships with other groups, the

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<sup>14</sup> “Hyper-congregational organization” is a term adopted by Dr. Charles Israel, Auburn University, in an attempt to explain groups such as this that are congregationally independent, while further being resistant to change.

non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ<sup>15</sup> maintained continuity in substantial numbers of adherents in Randolph County. From small beginnings in Randolph County, this group has influenced numerous other congregations of the Church of Christ throughout the nation and the world. This influence reflects the work of many evangelists from the South, specifically from Alabama and Georgia, who, especially over the last 100 years, took the doctrines and teachings from Randolph County to locations elsewhere. Finally, their way of responding to problems within their local congregations, coupled with their development from a distinctly different lineage than the ‘mainstream’ Disciples of Christ or other Churches of Christ, present compelling reasons to analyze and investigate this movement.

### **The Non-Aligned, Non-Class Churches of Christ: A Definition**

Over the years, many names have been used to describe those affiliated with the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ. Although labels such as “Evangelical Christian Conservatives” or “Fundamentalists,” are often used to describe similar groups, such terms do not adequately describe these congregations. Some have said that the pejorative term “anti” is more appropriate, because that word conveys the idea that they are against innovations not specifically mentioned within the scriptures.<sup>16</sup> Accordingly, non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ do not recognize what they call “man-made innovations” such as “located preachers or ministers,<sup>17</sup> Sunday school and women

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<sup>15</sup> This name is used to designate this particular group within the Churches of Christ. Non-aligned indicates that they are not aligned with any person, paper or institution. Non-class means that they do not have Sunday School or Bible Classes.

<sup>16</sup> Roy Deaver, “Divisions Among Us,” *Gospel Advocate*, June-July 1984, 12

<sup>17</sup> This term is used by the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ to designate a paid clergy or minister that is located at a specific congregation.

teachers, missionary societies, and divorce and remarriage.”<sup>18</sup> Most are staunch pacifists and have been for several generations. Their stand on these issues significantly departs from mainline Churches of Christ and most denominations,<sup>19</sup> thereby setting them apart in modern ecclesiasticism.

Some within the Churches of Christ, have gone so far as to label them legalists,<sup>20</sup> implying that they are little more than cultic in their interpretations and strict adherence to the scriptures. To support their claim of legalism, these critics accuse the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ of regarding “their interpretations of certain teachings of the new covenant scriptures as the law of Christ and if you do not conform they withdraw

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<sup>18</sup> Harry Cobb, *Teaching the Master’s Message* (Birmingham, AL: privately printed, 1980), 9. Cobb explains this group’s differences with other groups within the Church of Christ: “Located preachers or ministers refers to those that are paid, by the local congregation to teach, preach, visit the sick, etc. Sunday school refers to the breaking up into groups specifically for studying the Bible prior to Sunday morning services. Women teachers (such as in Sunday School) and preachers are prohibited as per I Corinthians 14:35-36 and I Timothy 2:12. Missionary Societies are representative of a centralized organization which diminishes congregational autonomy.”

<sup>19</sup> “The term *denomination* was innovated in the late seventeenth century by those groups of Christians in England who dissented from the established Church of England, but considered themselves to be entirely loyal to the British state and recognized the monarch as having rights with respect to the Church of England. In 1702, specifically, the Presbyterians, Baptists, and Congregationalists formed “the body of the Dissenting Ministers of the Three Denominations in and about the City of London.” The term was introduced to counter the pejorative term *sect*, which in popular usage had the sense of deviant or undesirable practices. The term is now used in pluralist societies for those forms of organized religious expression that generally support the established social order and are mutually tolerant of each other’s practices.” William H. Swatos, ed., “Denomination/Denominationalism,” *Encyclopedia of Religion and Society* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 1998), 83. Robert H. Brumback offers up a similar definition by contending that the Church of Christ is not a denomination, but is loyal to first century Christian principles by maintaining doctrine, method of worship and even its name (Romans 16:16). Robert H. Brumback, *History of the Church Through the Ages* (St. Louis: Mission Messenger, 1957), 269-275.

<sup>20</sup> J. James Albert, *The isms of Legalism* (Private Printing, 2007), 1.



from you in one form or another.”<sup>21</sup> The non-aligned, non-class congregations, on the other hand, contend that theirs is a religion based on “respect for the authority of God’s written word as they worship Him in spirit and in truth.”<sup>22</sup>

They utilize a very simplistic approach to Biblical interpretation, basing their understanding upon a literal reading of each verse within the immediate context of the passage and its subsequent harmonization with the rest of the Bible. Non-aligned, non-class Church of Christ Evangelist Harry Cobb, in an article entitled “Suggestions for Bible Study,” outlines five principles for interpreting scripture: “1. Observe carefully who is speaking; 2. Observe to whom the Bible is speaking; 3. Determine which dispensation is under consideration; 4. Study the context; and, 5. Determine whether the language is literal or figurative.”<sup>23</sup> This approach has led to a uniform interpretation of basic beliefs of doctrine and understanding within the non-aligned, non-class congregations.

It is hard to place the non-aligned, non-class congregations in any sub-group of the Church of Christ, especially when they are not recognized in any form within the Churches of Christ/Disciples of Christ. The Disciples of Christ Historical Society describes itself as “the primary archives, library, museum, and collective memory for congregations” of the Stone-Campbell movement “throughout the world.”<sup>24</sup> Though this description is accurate to a point, their vast archives and record holdings contain no

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Harry Cobb, *Teaching the Master’s Message*, 13.

<sup>23</sup> Harry Cobb, “Suggestions for Bible Study” (Wedowee: Private Printing, 2002), 1.

<sup>24</sup> “History, Work and Mission,” *The Disciples of Christ Historical Society*. Found on website [www.discipleshistory.org](http://www.discipleshistory.org): accessed on 25 October 2008.

information regarding non-aligned, non-class congregations or their preachers, tracts, books, or other publications. This in no way detracts from the work of the Society but provides further proof of the insular nature of the non-aligned, non-class churches.

Religious historians have also had problems classifying or recognizing this particular movement within the Church of Christ. Many prominent Church of Christ historians have failed to place them in any particular group, often they have been lumped in with others known as non-class.<sup>25</sup> The failure to recognize them as an independent group stems from unfamiliarity with their views and demographic. Other religious historians, such as William R. Glass, Wayne Flynt, and Daniel Stowell, treat the Church of Christ as a single group, not as they truly are, having a variety of divisions, some of which are based upon congregational interpretation of scriptures and/or the following of a specific man, group or religious publication.

One historian, Robert M. Calhoun, acknowledges the difference between elements of the mainstream Churches of Christ, Disciples of Christ, and what he calls Southern Christian Churches, some of which were originally affiliated with James O'Kelly (this avenue will be explored at greater lengths later on). He posits that "early Southern Christians became wedded to a radically Christocentric theology and democratic church polity." This view was manifested in their insistence "that every believer had direct

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<sup>25</sup> Mac Lynn, *Churches of Christ in the United States: Inclusive of Her Commonwealth and Territories* (Nashville, TN: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Christian Publications, 2003), 74. Dennis C. Kelly, *National Directory of the Churches of Christ in the United States, Her Possessions and Canada* (Searcy, AR: Church Data Services, 1998), 14. Lynn and Kelly use NC in their directories to indicate non-class congregations. There are some non-class churches which do not adhere to the same doctrines as the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ. These are aligned with certain "preacher schools," papers or individuals.

access to the ear of the Savior, Jesus literally became “King and Head of the people” in their conception of the church, and “the all sufficiency of a ‘Bible Government’ permeated the sectarian affairs of their church.” This certainly rings true for the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ, but they were never affiliated with the Southern Christian Convention, as Calhoun contends, nor did they utilize any preachers or teachers affiliated with other groups that one day became the United Church of Christ.<sup>26</sup>

It is very difficult to place non-aligned, non-class congregations within any others affiliated with the Church of Christ. With little denominational infrastructure, there is little or no inter-congregational discourse among the various divisions within the Churches of Christ. The little information that is disseminated comes from publications, websites, and church-run organizations, such as Bible colleges, preaching schools, or affiliated universities.

Further exacerbating the situation, some mainline Churches of Christ seek to conflate the non-aligned, non-class Church of Christ within one division or another without consideration of their distinct differences. Bobby Ross, Jr., writing in the on-line publication *The Christian Chronicle*, notes that the Church of Christ can be separated into the following divisions: “1) mainline or the majority of the Churches of Christ; 2) non-institutional or those that do not participate in the funding of orphanages or missionary societies from Church treasuries via a “sponsoring church” or central authority; 3) non-Class or those that do not have Sunday School or “Bible classes;” 4) one-Cup or those that use a single cup or chalice rather than using individual containers to contain the fruit

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<sup>26</sup> Robert M. Calhoun, “Christian Church,” *Encyclopedia of Religion in the South* (2005 ed.), 183 and 184.

of the vine during the communion; 5) mutual edification churches or those that do not have paid ministers, but, instead, use men from within the congregation to do the teaching.”<sup>27</sup> Further, more distinct differences are identified by Ross and others within the article. As an example, he posits that the non-class groups can be further divided as to whether they oppose having located preachers or whether they use unfermented grape juice or wine.<sup>28</sup> Most of these differences are dependent upon fellowship or unity as to whether there is a distinction or not. Non-aligned, non-class congregations do not neatly fit into any of these divisions, but actually embrace several of Ross’ issues of distinction.

Wayne Goforth, in an article entitled “Why I Left the Institutional Position,” states that there are at least two main groups within the “mainline” Church of Christ, “liberals” and “conservatives.”<sup>29</sup> He further comments that those within the mainline often lump the more conservative groups into a single group called “antis.” However, neither Ross nor Goforth acknowledge the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ as separate, distinct movement in the Church of Christ as they do with the one-cup congregations or the non-institutionalists.

Whether liberal, conservative, anti or otherwise, most within the Church of Christ align themselves with certain institutions or movements. The liberals ally themselves with institutions such as Abilene Christian College and Pepperdine University.<sup>30</sup> The

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<sup>27</sup> Bobby Ross, Jr., “Who are we?” *The Christian Chronicle*. Found on website [www.christianchronical.org](http://www.christianchronical.org); accessed on 20 September 2008.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Wayne Goforth, “Why I Left the Institutional Position” *Why I Left Series*, Have Bible Will Preach. Found on website [www.havebiblewillpreach.com](http://www.havebiblewillpreach.com); accessed on 20 September 2008.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas B. Warren and Roy Deaver, “An Open Letter To Abilene Christian

conservatives align themselves with other institutions such as the Memphis School of Preaching and the *Firm Foundation* periodical.<sup>31</sup> The non-institutionalists are often aligned with Florida College.<sup>32</sup> Most of those labeled as non-class maintain strict autonomy and align themselves with no particular group or paper and neither do they have “preachers’ schools.” Granted, there are pockets of congregations within the Church of Christ, some of them almost completely alone, which do not effectively fit into any of these categories. Some may represent parts of each, but these are limited in their numbers and often go unrecognized or remain unknown. Of the ultra-conservative groups, the non-aligned, non-class group and the one-cup congregations<sup>33</sup> appear to be the largest.

Primarily middle-class and white in their make-up,<sup>34</sup> the non-aligned, non-class churches maintain a steady population. Their congregations are small, averaging forty members, and are primarily located within rural areas with very few situated in major metropolitan areas. Having no clergy and remaining fiercely autonomous, each

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University” *Firm Foundation* 8:27 (1993): 1.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Bobby Ross, Jr., “A non-institutional institution” *Articles*, The Christian Chronicle. Found on website [www.christianchronicle.org](http://www.christianchronicle.org); accessed on 20 September 2008.

<sup>33</sup> Greg Gray in his book *Where the Saints Assemble: A Directory of the Churches of Christ 2001-2002* (Citrus Heights, CA: privately published. 2002), 2, defines the one cup group as those “who commune using one loaf of unleavened bread, from which each participant breaks and eats, and one cup, containing the fruit of the vine (grape juice), from which each participant drinks.” He lists, in his directory, over four hundred and fifty one-cup congregations in the United States.

<sup>34</sup> That is not to say that there are no congregations whose makeup is primarily Latino, African-American or Native American; these groups make up less than one percent of the total within this movement of the Church of Christ.

congregation relies on its own congregational leaders for guidance and teaching.<sup>35</sup> The most consistently influential and largest concentration of members and congregations of this movement, over the last century, has been in Randolph County, Alabama. Many preachers, teachers and members have been heavily influenced doctrinally and socially when they have visited in this area.

Randolph County, Alabama, (the location of the Haywood congregation) serves as home to the greatest concentration of this particular group of Churches of Christ in the United States. Further congregations are scattered throughout the South, with substantial concentrations in Texas, Tennessee, Oklahoma, and North Alabama. Of the ten Church of Christ congregations in the county, three have Bible Classes and use a paid minister; one is a one-cup congregation, while six are non-aligned, non-class churches.

Identification of congregations within the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ is either obtained through word-of-mouth or through the use of a directory which has been privately published. Men such as J.A. Dennis and Cecil Abercrombie kept lists of congregations that echoed the beliefs and doctrines of non-aligned, non-class congregations. Evangelists used word-of-mouth to find congregations with similar beliefs and would visit the congregations to confirm their stand on doctrinal issues.

Congregations from Randolph County and the South reciprocated with speakers at the newly located congregations and utilized that opportunity to determine if they could be accepted in fellowship. Within the last 40 years, Harry Cobb has kept these records and

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<sup>35</sup> Although fully accepted as a necessary office within the Church, there are very few elders and deacons. Most congregations rely on older male members to make decisions or they use a form of congregational democracy, where the male members make decisions based upon majority rule.

printed a limited circulation document called “Where the Saints Meet”<sup>36</sup> in order to help travelers find a location to attend worship services. This directory acts as the only method by which congregations within fellowship with one another can be identified.

Non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ adhere strictly to a literal reading of the Bible. Issues of distinction are clear between the non-aligned, non-class groups and others within the Restoration/Stone-Campbell Movement. Again, they do not have located ministers, missionary societies, musical instruments, women’s societies or organizations, or Sunday Schools.<sup>37</sup> In an attempt to maintain continuity with what they perceive as scriptural teaching, they have adopted a pacifistic view of war and conflict. They view marriage as a lifelong commitment without the possibility of divorce and remarriage, departing significantly from the views espoused by most mainline Churches of Christ and denominations.<sup>38</sup>

Granted, there may be some within the Church of Christ that have one or more of these doctrinal beliefs and practices within their fellowship, but not to the extent of non-aligned, non-class congregations. For example, there are some mainline congregations of the Church of Christ that also do not accept remarriage as a viable response to divorce.

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<sup>36</sup> Harry Cobb, *Where the Saints Meet* (Wedowee: Privately Published, 2007).

<sup>37</sup> Things have remained unchanged in almost a century. J. A. Dennis, a non-aligned, non-class evangelist from Atlanta, Georgia, noted in 1915 that there are things that they do not do: “1. We do not have organ music, 2. We do not have the Missionary Society, 3. We do not have the Sunday School, 4. We do not have a pastor, 5. We do not recognize sect baptism as being valid, 6. We are not doing anything for which we can not give chapter and verse, We are following the safe rule on all debatable questions.” J. A. Dennis, “Take the Safe Course,” *Apostolic Way* Nov. 1, 1915: 4.

<sup>38</sup> During the last fifty years several congregations have separated themselves from this movement so as to allow divorced and remarried members the ability to take part in full fellowship.

There are some within the one-cup group that may have the same doctrine except for making the use of one cup a condition for fellowship.

At a time when lines between various denominations, as well as many mainline Churches of Christ,<sup>39</sup> have begun to blur regarding doctrinal issues,<sup>40</sup> many of the congregations of the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ have been reestablishing their strict viewpoints. The reasons for the non-aligned, non-class Churches' of Christ continued doctrinal conservatism and their sustained existence in sizable numbers will be examined within the pages that follow.

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<sup>39</sup> For further information see: Tom Roberts, *Neo-Calvinism In the Church of Christ* (Fairmont, IN: Cogdill Foundation, 1980); Dave Miller, *Piloting the Strait: A Guidebook for Assessing Change in Churches of Christ* (Pulaski, TN: Sain Publications, 1996); *The Restoration: The Winds of Change*, ed. Jim Laws, (Pulaski, TN: Sain Publications, 1993); *Which Direction Shall We Go?* The Spiritual Sword, ed. Alan E. Highers, 35:4. Memphis, TN: Getwell Church of Christ.

<sup>40</sup> The blurring of the lines between denominations can possibly be traced to the increased effectiveness of the media. Television beams the services of a variety of "evangelists" who espouse basically the same thing causing members of different denominations to be influenced by the same teaching, and believing that teaching influence their own churches. Furthermore, the rise of "Christian bookstores" that at one time were representative of the denominations they were tied to (including Church of Christ bookstores), have a variety of books from different doctrinal and denominational backgrounds which then influence the beliefs of their readers. Finally, the Internet has further stimulated many to adopt new ideas and doctrines. Soft doctrinal teaching, a society that presses tolerance, and a membership that no longer strictly follows the specific teachings of their domination, leads to a muddying of the denominational waters.



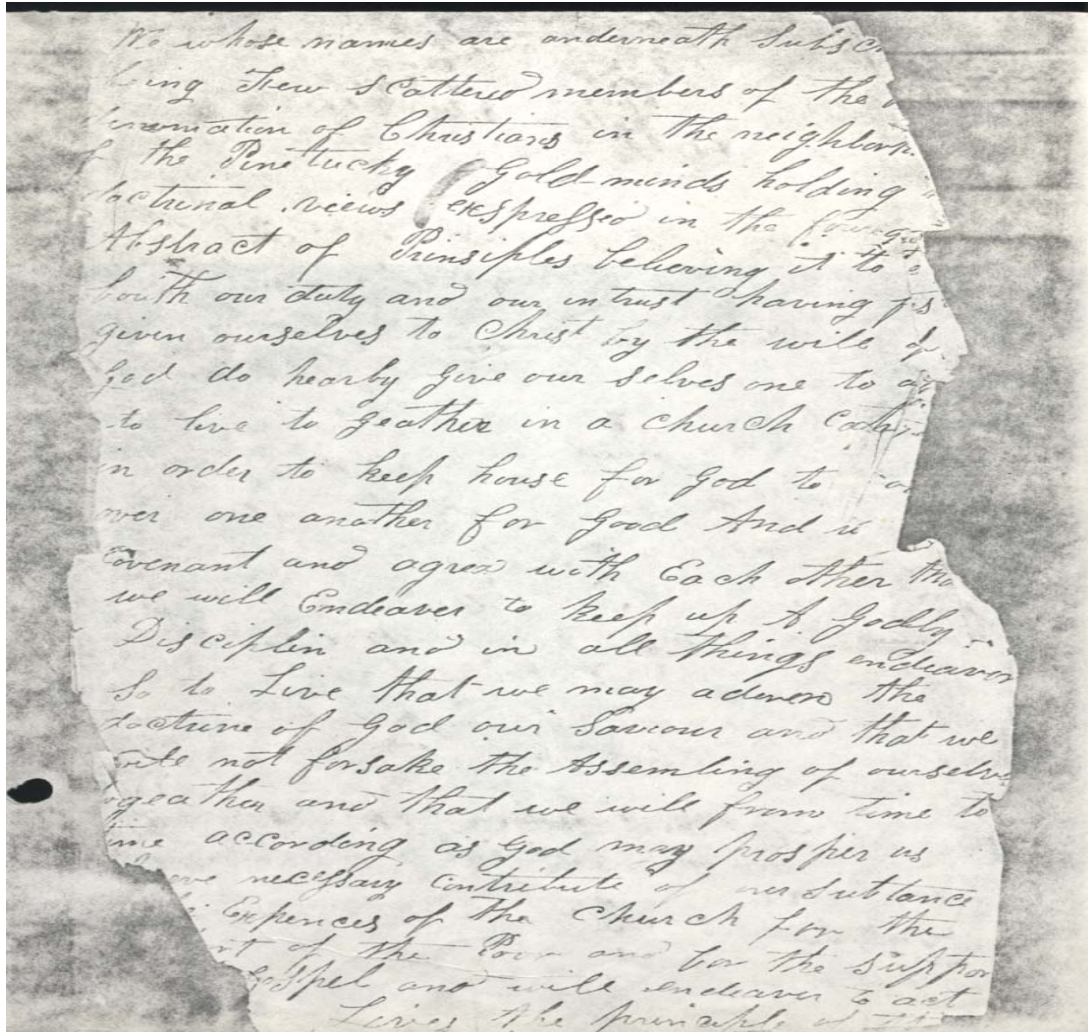


Figure 1. A New Map of Alabama, Creek Territory 1833 showing the area that would one day be Randolph County.<sup>41</sup>

### **Beginnings of the Non-Aligned, Non-Class Churches of Christ in Alabama**

The county in which the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ developed has a rich and diverse history. Randolph County was established on December 18, 1832,<sup>42</sup>

<sup>41</sup> H. S. Tanner, *A New Map of Alabama, 1833* (Philadelphia: H.S. Tanner, 1833; From Tanner's Universal Atlas). See Rucker Agee Map Collection, Birmingham Public Library.

<sup>42</sup> B. F. Weathers, "Early Days in Randolph County," *Historical Records of Randolph County, Alabama (1832-1900)*, ed. Marilyn Davis Barefield, (Easley, South Carolina: Southern Historical Press, 1985), 1.

and was formed from land gained through a treaty of May 2, 1832, with the Creek Indians (fig. 1).<sup>43</sup> This property was a great acquisition for the state of Alabama. J. M. K. Guinn wrote in 1894 that Randolph County was “the red man’s home, the white man’s Eden.”<sup>44</sup> Henry McCalley reported in the mid-1840s that “Randolph County has the purest and coldest freestone water in the world” and that “this accounts for the wonderful health enjoyed there.”<sup>45</sup> Guinn also noted that Randolph County had “rich deposits of gold, copper, iron, and mica” and that its soil was fertile and well-watered, a reflection of the county’s unique geography.<sup>46</sup>

Located in the foothills of the Appalachians, in what is known as the Piedmont, the county has rolling hills with a variety of streams and lakes. Its climate is warm and temperate with a regular annual rainfall of fifty-four inches.<sup>47</sup> Good soil, warm temperatures, plenty of water, and an abundance of other natural resources welcomed the county’s early pioneers who settled the land. Huge forests of lofty hickory, sturdy oak, and magnificent southern pine dominated the hillsides. Guinn records that there were a variety of wild food stuffs such as grapes, chinquapin, walnuts, hazelnuts, acorns,

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<sup>43</sup> Walter J. Bartlett and John B. Stevenson, “A History of Randolph County (1832- 1882),” *The Heritage of Randolph County, Alabama*, Fay Young and others, eds. (Clanton, Alabama: Heritage Publishing Consultants, Inc., 1998), 1.

<sup>44</sup> J. M. K. Guinn, “Randolph County, Alabama, Sixty-Two years Ago: The Red Man’s Home, The White Man’s Eden,” in Marilyn Davis Barefield, ed., *Historical Records of Randolph County, Alabama (1832-1900)* (Easley, South Carolina: Southern Historical Press, Inc., 1985), 11.

<sup>45</sup> Walter J. Bartlett and John B. Stevenson, *History of Randolph County*, 1.

<sup>46</sup> Guinn, “Randolph County,” 11.

<sup>47</sup> National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, *National Weather Service Home Page* <[http://www.srh.noaa.gov/bmx/climate/climate\\_port.html](http://www.srh.noaa.gov/bmx/climate/climate_port.html)> (accessed February 10, 2002).

gooseberries, and whortle.<sup>48</sup> Also found in abundance were a variety of game animals including deer, turkey, squirrels, rabbits, and opossums. The county's fisheries contained a variety of fish in a myriad of types and sizes. It is no wonder that there have been so many Native American sites found throughout the county. All of these factors combined to make Randolph County a desirable place to live for both the original inhabitants and early immigrants from Georgia.

Early settlers acquired their property through land lotteries held in Georgia during the 1830s. Taking its name from Congressman John Randolph of Virginia, the county's original settlers came from the nearby Georgia counties of Carroll, Lee, Coweta, and Troup. The list of land allotments during this period indicates that many of these families originated in Virginia and the Carolinas.<sup>49</sup> Further information indicates that many settlers entered the state of Georgia after the War of 1812 and continued into Alabama and Mississippi. During the early years after settlement, the county's population began to grow quickly.

The 1840 U.S. Census records for Randolph County lists 4,446 whites and 527 blacks, and by 1860 the population consisted of 18,132 whites and 1,927 blacks.<sup>50</sup> With an increase in population of more than 400 percent, Randolph County clearly offered a variety of resources that attracted settlers. On the other hand, the population of Randolph County remained fairly static over the next century.

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<sup>48</sup> Guinn, "Randolph County," 11.

<sup>49</sup> Martha Lou Houston, *Reprint of Official Register of Land Lottery of Georgia 1827* (Baltimore, Maryland: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1967), 2.

<sup>50</sup> US Census Bureau, *Sixth Census of the United States, 1840*, State of Alabama, Randolph County.

These early pioneers were primarily farmers who produced a variety of crops and livestock. The area's relatively long growing season, from late March through September, allowed farmers to grow a variety of cash crops including wheat, corn, oats, potatoes, tobacco, and cotton. Small household gardens provided beans, squash, and peas to supplement the settler's diet. They also raised horses, mules, cattle, sheep, and hogs.<sup>51</sup>

The settlers to Randolph County were indeed pioneers. The new land was raw and wild, best suited for a people that relied on each other in order to survive. Neighbors joined together in large work parties to construct homes, barns, and outbuildings. They often helped each other clear land, plant fields, and harvest crops. Although there were some rascals, most within the county were honest and trustworthy, rarely having to lock their buildings or secure their property (this pattern of trust continued within the county until recent times<sup>52</sup>). This constant interaction and reliance upon each other developed relationships that carried over to work and religion.<sup>53</sup>

The early settlers to Alabama possessed qualities of hardiness and a strong work ethic which developed out of necessity. In this case, it is not their religious beliefs that caused them to work hard, but the need to eat and to survive. This same idea filtered into their religion. These people were strong willed and diligently worked toward building strong congregations. With each passing generation their character was further shaped by their environment filtering over to their religious life, making them strong and

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<sup>51</sup> Guinn, "Randolph County," 11-12.

<sup>52</sup> Sheriff Jeff Fuller interviewed by author, November 7, 2002.

<sup>53</sup> Eugenia E. Smith, "A History of Randolph County" (MS. thesis, Alabama Polytechnic Institute, 1938).

unrelenting to adversity. These same qualities became foundational for the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ which still espouse these same ideals today.

Interestingly, the ties that these settlers had with Georgia and the Carolinas indicate how easily religious and political ideas could be transmitted throughout the frontier. Families naturally kept in touch with one another and any news would travel more quickly along blood lines than through any mail system.<sup>54</sup> What constituted important news? Politics and religion were the major news items throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Many lead stories and headlines of the nation's newspapers during this time reveal their intent was to fulfill the wishes of their readers by dealing with applicable political and religious news. This allowed the ideas of men such as James McGready<sup>55</sup> and others to spread throughout the frontier.

Randolph County, Alabama, seemed somewhat different than the rest of the frontier. Prior to what has been called the Second Great Awakening (1790-1840s), most of the frontier was described as having people that were "totally negligent of religion in their own houses."<sup>56</sup> Some even stated that they "were shocked by the swearing, fighting,

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<sup>54</sup> See: Carolyn Earle Billingsley, *Communities of Kinship: Antebellum Families and the Settlement of the Cotton Frontier* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004).

<sup>55</sup> James McGready is known as the father of revivalism in the American frontier. He used camp meetings in an attempt to bring religion to people west of the Appalachians and east of the Mississippi River. As a result of the work of McGready and others, America experienced a "Second Great Awakening," a period of widespread revival in religious activity. See: James Smith, *History of the Christian Church, From its Origin to the Present Time; Compiled from Various Authors. Including a History of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, Drawn from Authentic Documents* (Nashville, Tenn.: Printed and Published at the Cumberland Presbyterian Office, 1835), 672-673.

<sup>56</sup> William Warren Sweet, *The Story of Religion in America* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1930), 325. Sweet attributes this quote to David Rice, the first settled Presbyterian minister in Kentucky in 1783.

gouging, Sabbath-breaking and general lawlessness which prevailed.”<sup>57</sup> These areas that many considered havens of evil and debauchery were in areas that were more densely and earlier settled than many places in Alabama. Alabama’s main groups of settlers arrived during the 1830s<sup>58</sup> and were probably not as rambunctious and amoral as their predecessors. Benjamin Franklin Riley noted that these “settlers were no aimless adventurers– they were not nomadic fortune-seekers, who drifted with the tide of progressive civilization; they were among the sturdiest and worthiest people of the older states of the South.”<sup>59</sup> He goes on to state that “in them dwelt courage, chivalry, opposition to wrong, unquenchable conviction, and a wide-awake progress.”<sup>60</sup> These religious ideas were no doubt as different as the people that entered the newly formed county. How the various religious groups developed in Randolph County gives us some insight into why the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ maintained their doctrinal fundamentalism<sup>61</sup> and independence.

The first congregations in Randolph County were probably Baptist. Baptist churches have been in Alabama as early 1808 and maybe even earlier. Historian Wayne

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Thomas M. Owen, *History of Alabama and Dictionary of Alabama Biography* 4 vols. 1921.

<sup>59</sup> B.F. Riley, *History of the Baptists of Alabama: From the Time of Their First Occupation of Alabama in 1808, Until 1894* (Birmingham, AL: Roberts and Son, 1895), 19.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Fundamentalism is often defined as a religious point of view characterized by a return to fundamental principles, by rigid adherence to those principles, and often by intolerance of other views and opposition to secularism. See: Joel A. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) and William R. Glass, *Strangers in Zion: Fundamentalists in the South 1900-1950* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2001).

Flynt's study of Alabama Baptists notes the first documented Baptist church in Alabama was the Shiloh or Eight Mile Creek Church in Mobile, established on October 2, 1808.<sup>62</sup> This congregation eventually became a Primitive Baptist church. The oldest continuously operating Baptist church in Alabama is the Huntsville First Baptist church. Originally called West Fork of Flint River Church, or Enon, this congregation began meeting on June 3, 1809. Baptist congregations began to develop throughout Alabama, and by 1823 the state boasted over 120 congregations organized into seven different associations. These organizations supplied a means for mutual support, rotation of preachers, and inter-congregational news. The seven associations in Alabama were divided geographically and were separated into loosely configured areas.<sup>63</sup>

Some would argue that the first Baptist congregation in Randolph County was the High Pine Creek Church near Roanoke, which was started sometime in early 1835. The first documented Baptist church in Randolph County was the Good Hope Baptist Church, organized in 1835. This congregation was originally located near the Georgia state line near the Brockville community (now called Graham). In 1851, this congregation moved to Gold Ridge, approximately two miles from its original location. The reason for the move was practical:

Many members who attended Good Hope at this time had to cross the river to attend the services. When the weather was really bad or the waters of the river would rise, these members could not attend church services.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Wayne Flynt, *Alabama Baptists: Southern Baptists in the Heart of Dixie* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1998), 6.

<sup>63</sup> Wayne Flynt, *Alabama Baptists*, 6.

<sup>64</sup> Dianne S. Herren, *Randolph County, Alabama Church and Cemetery Histories* (Woodland, Alabama: no publisher, 1990), 1 & 30.

The High Pine Creek congregation may have been founded by Jefferson Falkner, who had moved into the county sometime during 1832.<sup>65</sup> Falkner, a self-taught Bible student, served as a judge in Wedowee and preached at every opportunity.<sup>66</sup>

During these years many preachers supported themselves with secular vocations such as farming, mining, politics, and owning businesses. These men received very little financial assistance for their clerical duties. The average time of an appointment as a preacher was one year. This appointment had to be approved by a majority of the members in a local congregation.<sup>67</sup>

Self-supporting preachers appointed by a majority of the members are key points in the development of congregations of the Church of Christ in Randolph County. No doubt, the largest religious group within the county was Baptists,<sup>68</sup> which likewise made up the predominance of members within the newly formed Churches of Christ.<sup>69</sup> Those Baptists that eventually aligned themselves with the Churches of Christ would have been predisposed toward having leaders that were self-sufficient, submitting to the authority of the congregation, no doubt leading to the same sentiments among the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ. Strict congregational autonomy and authority can be seen in the

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<sup>65</sup> Riley, *History of the Baptists of Alabama*, 113.

<sup>66</sup> Wayne Flynt also notes that Falkner was elected to the state senate from Randolph and Tallapoosa Counties. Wayne Flynt, *Alabama Baptists*, 53.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> An examination of Diane Herren's *Randolph County, Alabama Church and Cemetery Histories* (Woodland, Alabama: no publisher, 1990) reveals that the predominance of churches and church cemeteries were Baptist.

<sup>69</sup> A close examination of Baptist church cemeteries and genealogies reveals that most of the current members of the congregations of the Churches of Christ in Randolph County had past relatives who were Baptist.



growth and development of just such a congregation called the Pinetucky Baptist Church of Christ.

In the decades following the settlement of Randolph County, other congregations were quickly established throughout the county. By 1860, almost every community had at least one Baptist congregation. Most of these congregations were affiliated with the East Liberty Association which met in LaFayette in Chambers County, although seven were originally aligned with the Arbacoochee Association in Randolph County. Many of these congregations would provide the members for the Churches of Christ that would soon follow. Their initial development within the county no doubt influenced, through the exchange of members, how the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ would deal with issues during their formative years. The Pinetucky Baptist Church was one of the congregations affiliated with the Arbecoochee Association that would affect and be affected by the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ within the county.<sup>70</sup>

Established sometime prior to August 4, 1854, the Pinetucky Church followed the precedent of many other Baptist Churches in Alabama by drawing up an “Abstract of Principles”<sup>71</sup> which served as the congregation’s founding documents. According to Wayne Flynt these Abstracts of Principles were somewhat like a constitution of the new congregation, but they were never called “a ‘creed,’ which evoked memories of papist autocracy or Anglican hierarchy.”<sup>72</sup> Pinetucky’s abstract (fig. 2) followed this pattern:

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<sup>70</sup> *Journal of the Pinetucky Baptist Church of Christ from 1854-1898*. Only extant copy of this document is in possession of the author.

<sup>71</sup> *Journal of Pinetucky Baptist Church of Christ*, 1.

<sup>72</sup> Wayne Flynt, *Alabama Baptists*, 4.

believing it to be bouth [*sic*] our duty and our in trust having just given ourselves to Christ by the will of God do hearby give our selves one to another to live to geather [*sic*] in a church [unclear word] In order to keep house for God to [unclear] over one another for good and right covenant and agree [*sic*] with each other that we will endeavor to keep a Godly disciplin [*sic*] and in all things endeavor so to live that we may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour [*sic*] and that we will not forsake the assembling [*sic*] of ourselves together and that we will from time to time according as God may prosper us [unclear word] necessary contribute of our substance [unclear word] expences of the church for the [unclear word] Poor and for the suppor[t] of [unclear word] Gospel and will endeavor to act [unclear word] lives and principles ...<sup>73</sup>

This abstract indicates that many early Baptists of Randolph County were biblically conservative.

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<sup>73</sup> Journal of Pinetucky Baptist Church of Christ, 1.

We whose names are underneath subscri  
bing these scattered members of the  
denomination of Christians in the neighbor  
of the Pinetucky Gold minds holding  
doctrinal views expressed in the foregoing  
Abstract of Principles believing it to be  
both our duty and our interest having first  
given ourselves to Christ by the will of  
God do hereby give our selves one to another  
to live together in a Church Covenant  
in order to keep house for God to  
over one another for good And in  
Covenant and agree with each other that  
we will Endeavor to keep up a Godly  
Discipline and in all things endeavor  
So to Live that we may adore the  
doctrine of God our Saviour and that we  
will not forsake the Assembling of ourselves  
together and that we will from time to  
time according as God may prosper us  
make necessary contribute of our substance  
Expences of the Church for the  
relief of the Poor and for the Support  
of the Gospel and will endeavor to act  
Lives the principles of the

Figure 2. Pinetucky Church Abstract of Principles<sup>74</sup>

<sup>74</sup> Journal of Pinetucky Baptist Church of Christ.

Their conservatism was evident in several different aspects of the Pinetucky Church's worship service. Regular attendance at all services was mandatory. Communion and footwashing were observed on a quarterly basis. Although worshippers were admitted to the fellowship without baptism, full membership was confirmed by baptism. Dancing, drinking, lying, and cheating were not tolerated within the congregation. Their independent form of strict and literal adherence to their interpretation of the Bible resulted in factional strife which created problems within the congregation.<sup>75</sup> However, controversy was not tolerated by the membership and was quickly dealt with by majority decision. These practices and beliefs were also instrumental in the development of their associations, or fellowships, and between other congregations within the county, especially the non-aligned, non-class congregations. These fellowships helped maintain continuity of doctrine and prevented perceived error or modern man-made innovations within their congregations. This same attitude was, and continues to be, prevalent within the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ.

During the late 1830s there arose a controversy regarding the use of missionary societies among the different Baptist congregations in Randolph and Chambers Counties. James Roquemore and John Blackmen circulated an anti-missionary pamphlet that had been prepared in New York by a man identified only as "Beebe," reportedly not a member of any church. The pamphlet asserted that money collected for missionary work was actually diverted and used for financial speculation in the North. This infused many Baptists with indignation that their money was not going for its intended use. The more

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid. 2–44.

radical, anti-missionary activists within the county often used desperate and unlawful measures to eject missionary proponents from local congregations. This, no doubt, caused excessive turmoil within the Associations as well, eventually leading to the defeat of the radical elements of the anti-missionary movement by a group headed by Jefferson Falkner.<sup>76</sup> Even though Falkner defeated the radical elements there is nothing to suggest that the counties of Randolph and Chambers did not continue to be a stronghold against “missions and similar work.”<sup>77</sup>

On August 4, 1854, the churches at Pinetucky, Hepsibah, Ceader Creak [*sic*], Liberty, Pine Grove, and Bethel met together at Pinetucky and formally joined themselves together as the Arbecoochee Baptist Association. On the following day, “the newly constituted Church at Union” was received into the association. It is during this time the delegates established “rules of decorum” which were to be observed at each meeting of the Arbecoochee Baptist Association.<sup>78</sup>

Generally, these rules stated that all things were to be done “decently and in order.”<sup>79</sup> Each meeting began with prayer and singing. Visiting brethren were asked to sit in on the meeting and correspondence was read. The doors of the building where the meeting was held were then opened “for the reception of members in gospel order.”<sup>80</sup> Miscellaneous business was conducted, including the handling of internal problems between members. They dealt strictly with any sins or perceived sins. Disobedient

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<sup>76</sup> Riley, *History of the Baptists*, 104–109.

<sup>77</sup> Smith, "A History of Randolph County," 59.

<sup>78</sup> Journal of Pinetucky Baptist Church of Christ, 4–5.

<sup>79</sup> Journal of Pinetucky Baptist Church of Christ, 2.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

members were either “subject to reproof by the moderator” or removed from fellowship (disfellowshipped) with the congregation.<sup>81</sup> Although not unique to Randolph County, the patterns of congregational government and fellowship between congregations within their associations, a strict and literal interpretation of the scriptures, and a decisive method of dealing with actual or perceived error, parallels the methods observed by the non-aligned, non-class congregations. These characteristics and the Churches’ of Christ doctrine would lead to changes within some of the Baptist congregations in the county. Furthermore, these characteristics were no doubt instrumental in the further development of the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ.

Because the inhabitants of Randolph County had few forms of entertainment, many would visit different churches for “singings and preaching.”<sup>82</sup> This would open up avenues of dialogue among the various members of the different religious groups. The exchange of religious ideas often resulted in many becoming susceptible to leaving one group for another. Those Baptists that had become dissatisfied with their local congregation or saw something in groups such as the “Christian Cambellite Churches”<sup>83</sup> that appealed to their sense of strict adherence to the Biblical pattern, would often leave

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Holmes interview. Holmes met his wife, even though she was a member of the non-aligned, non-class congregation at Haywood, at a singing at the Iduma Methodist Church, in Northern Randolph County.

<sup>83</sup> This is a term that was used in Randolph County during the 1800s and early 1900s as a designation of those congregations of the Church of Christ that were not affiliated with the “Christian Elderite Churches (later to become the Disciples of Christ).” See: *Map of Randolph County* (Birmingham, AL: Bethel W. Whitson Organization, ca. 1920).

or convince their local congregations to accept their teachings.<sup>84</sup> As the number of Church of Christ “brush arbor” meetings<sup>85</sup> started to multiply, more and more people became acquainted with their doctrines and teaching. Members came and were converted and would subsequently return to their congregations with the different doctrines that they had heard. Some of these once staunch Baptist churches eventually became affiliated with the Church of Christ, although in some instances the affiliation was brief.

Although this type of cross-fertilization was probably not unusual in rural congregations because of their interaction with one another, those that converted from Baptist congregations would bring beliefs that appealed to the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ. These former Baptist attitudes were grafted into their basic beliefs, leaving them further strengthened in their resolve to maintain their status quo.

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<sup>84</sup> This is evidenced by the change in name and doctrine by both the Pinetucky church and the Big Springs church.

<sup>85</sup> Brush arbor meetings consisted of the building of a structure, often covered with tree branches and vegetation, which served as a cool area for itinerant preachers to teach and preach and for their audience to remain in comfort.

## II. HISTORICAL BEGINNINGS OF THE NON-ALIGNED, NON-CLASS CHURCHES OF CHRIST

Investigations into the historical roots of the Restoration Movement of the Disciples of Christ/Church of Christ during the last few decades have often focused on certain groups such as those associated with specific schools (David Lipscomb, Gunter College, Abilene Christian, and others), periodicals or publications (*Firm Foundation*, *Millennial Harbinger*, *Christian Baptist*, *Lard's Quarterly*, and others), or individuals (Alexander Campbell, Barton Stone, Moses Lard, Raccoon John Smith, and others).

Although the insights provided in these studies<sup>86</sup> have produced a clearer understanding of the various sociological elements involved in the development of these groups within

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<sup>86</sup> Sources for this information: *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, eds. Douglas A. Foster, Paul M. Blowers, Anthony L. Dunnivant, D. Newell Williams (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2004); Earl West, *Search for the Ancient Order* (Vol. I, Nashville: The Gospel Advocate Co., 1949, Vol. II, Indianapolis: Religious Book Service, 1950, Vol. III, Indianapolis: Religious Book Service, 1979, Vol. IV, 1988); Leroy Garrett, *The Stone-Campbell Movement: An Anecdotal History of Three Churches* (Joplin, Mo.: College Press Publishing Co., 1981, rev. 1994); David Edwin Harrell, *Quest For A Christian America: The Disciples Of Christ And American Society To 1866* (Nashville: Disciples of Christ Historical Society, 1966) and *The Social Sources of Division in the Disciples of Christ 1865 to 1900* (Atlanta: Publishing Systems, 1973); Robert E. Hooper, *A Distinct People: A History of Churches of Christ in the Twentieth Century* (Nashville: The Gospel Advocate Company, 1993); Richard T. Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith: The Story of Churches of Christ in America* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), and Thomas H. Olbricht, *Hearing God's Voice: My Life with Scripture in Churches of Christ* (Abilene: Abilene Christian University Press, 1996 (Nashville: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Christian, 2006).



the United States, they are very limited in their scope regarding the influences on lesser known groups such as the non-aligned, non class Churches of Christ.<sup>87</sup>

Most historical writing regarding the development of the Churches of Christ/Disciples of Christ, centers around the “Restoration Movement” (now more commonly called the Stone-Campbell Movement) and those well known and influential individuals that aided in its evolution or diligently sought to maintain its principles. Volumes of information, current and older, can be found about Alexander Campbell, Barton W. Stone, “Raccoon” John Smith, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), The Independent Christian Church, and the Church of Christ. Fringe movements and less known individuals are often relegated to a few paragraphs at most. The latter groups, however, provide us with some insight into those that did not follow the masses, but sought to see things for themselves. In her study of Methodism and its early influence on American history, historian Dee Andrews provides some insight into possibly why these smaller groups have not been so widely studied. Referring to Nathan Hatch’s work *The Puzzle of American Methodism*, Andrews notes:

American historians’ failure to understand Methodism as one of the shaping forces in the new republic may be attributed to a number of factors: the overemphasis of the study of religion as intellectual history; denominational scholar’s tendency to “sanitize” the history of religion by focusing on its respectable aspects to the exclusion of the “enthusiasm” of groups like the

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<sup>87</sup> Many relegate their comments concerning the diffusion of ideas into the United States to high profile religious movements such as the Puritans and Pilgrims or those associated with men such as Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield. There is, though, a growing body of historical evidence that indicates that some of the early Restorationists were heavily influenced by the ideas and theologies of others from Europe, such as the Haldane brothers and Peter Walden. See: Gunnar R. Westin, *The Free Church Through The Ages* (Nashville: Broadman, 1958) and A.C. Watters, *History of the British Churches of Christ* (Indianapolis: The School of Religion, Butler University, 1997).

Methodists; and the stigma borne by Methodism for its lower-middle-class origins.<sup>88</sup>

A similar argument can be made regarding fringe groups in the Church of Christ and with men such as James O’Kelly, Christian Dasher and Shelton C. Dunning. Some were lower-middle-class, others unknown and unspectacular, but all were important in the development of southern religion and culture, especially in rural areas of East-Central Alabama.

The non-aligned, non-class congregations of the Church of Christ developed from a distinctly different lineage than the ‘mainstream’ Disciples of Christ or Churches of Christ. This independent development reveals a relatively unexplored avenue for the advance of a distinct form of ‘primitive Christianity’ within the United States and in particular, within the South. Rather than looking to singular events such as “The Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery,” or to specific religious “reforming streams”<sup>89</sup> led by early Restorationists such as Barton Warren Stone and Alexander Campbell as the defining beginnings of this smaller movement, they trace their genealogy from established religious groups in Austria and from men such as James O’Kelly and Christian Dasher. There is no doubt that this group was aware of the works of Alexander Campbell and Barton W. Stone: many within the movement read Campbell’s *Millennial Harbinger* and *Christian Baptist* and some congregations entertained evangelists closely affiliated with Stone. But the influences upon their doctrines and teachings, that were

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<sup>88</sup> Dee E. Andrews, *The Methodists and Revolutionary America, 1760-1800: The Shaping of an Evangelical Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 5.

<sup>89</sup> David E. Harrell, *Quest For a Christian America: The Disciples of Christ and American Society to 1866* (Nashville, TN: The Disciples of Christ Historical Society, 1966), 4.

predominant in Randolph County, were European in origin and independent from the mainstream.

An examination of the origins of this particular group within the Disciples of Christ/Churches of Christ will provide a distinctly alternative view of the growth of religious primitivism within the United States during a time of religious turmoil and change. This unique group was not part of the Disciples of Christ/Church of Christ Restoration Movement, but emerged in the United States as a fully functional movement with roots in Europe and early Methodism.

### **Early Church in Randolph County**

Apparently, the non-aligned, non-class Church of Christ was not represented in Randolph County until 1845, when Moses Park (fig. 3),<sup>90</sup> a devoted Christian and preacher, moved from Troup County, Georgia to East Alabama.<sup>91</sup> Even though Park and his wife remained the sole representatives of the Churches of Christ within Randolph County for several years, every Sunday afternoon people from the area assembled in the little log schoolhouse where he taught the Bible. Bible study included memorizing whole

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<sup>90</sup> Very little is known about Park, such as his birth date and death date. What information that has been made available was obtained from the records of the Lebanon Christian Church and Bill Prince Sr., a current member of the Taylor's Crossroads congregation, in Roanoke, Alabama. An 1833 Troup County deed notes that Moses Park, then of Harris County, Georgia, purchased land from a William Hicks in northern Troup County. See: Troup Co., Ga. Deed Book C p. 222, William Hicks of Harris Co., Ga. to Moses Park of Harris Co., Ga., 5 January 1833, digitized image at "Deed Search," *Troup County Archives* < <http://www.trouparchives.org/>>citing "[Troup County, Georgia] Deeds ID No.: 10122"; accessed 16 June 2008.

<sup>91</sup> There is some minute evidence that there were individual families of the Church of Christ meeting in their homes before this time. Moses Park and his family are clearly documented. See: Nancy Cordelle Adcock Wooten, *The History of Lebanon Christian Church, Randolph County, Alabama, 1864–1997* (Roanoke, Alabama: no publisher, 1997), 1.

chapters of the Bible. This technique of intense study and memorization of Biblical passages was common among the early members of this movement and several others as well.<sup>92</sup>



Figure 3: Moses Park

The Church of Christ did not begin to grow in Randolph County until A.C. Borden visited with Park and held a meeting that began on August 15, 1864. Park had been baptized several years earlier by Nathan Smith,<sup>93</sup> a pioneer preacher from Georgia who had been affiliated with Barton W. Stone.<sup>94</sup> Riding sixty miles on horseback to Randolph County from Carrollton, Georgia, Borden held a two-week meeting in the schoolhouse belonging to Park. At the close of the August 30 meeting, a new congregation, called Lebanon, was established some two miles northeast of Roanoke.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Mrs. Belt White, "History of Lebanon Christian Church," delivered on the Church's 86<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, August 13, 1950, Disciples of Christ Historical Archives, Nashville, TN.

<sup>94</sup> Nathan W. Smith, "A Sketch of the Beginnings of Georgia Disciples of Christ in Six Letters." to his son in 1879, Disciples of Christ Historical Society Archives, Nashville, TN. Barton W. Stone will be discussed at greater length later in this document.

<sup>95</sup> An inscription placed at the current site of the Lebanon Christian Church and Cemetery states: Founded March 31, 1864 by evangelist Moses Park on four acres of land donated by William Terry Kirby, Sr. and Nancy T. Greer Kirby adjacent to their

Services were held each Saturday and Sunday. The Saturday meeting included a conference where misdemeanors of members were reported. Committees were appointed to visit the guilty members in order to receive their acknowledgment of sin and to request their repentance.<sup>96</sup>

Many of the earliest members of the congregation at Lebanon were from Troup County, Georgia.<sup>97</sup> Migrating frontiersmen from North Carolina and Virginia moved into the western part of Georgia in the late 1790s (many long time residents of Randolph County trace their ancestors through Georgia into North Carolina and Virginia), bringing with them doctrines that were very closely aligned with those of the early Restoration movement.. These doctrines included congregational independence and the use of laymen as preachers. These zealous traveling preachers proclaimed the biblical message and condemned sectarian division.<sup>98</sup> This was not uncommon for the American Revolution

not only broke down political sovereignty, but also aroused the spirit of religious liberty; and much dissatisfaction arose among the sects on account of the iron clad rules and severe exactions concerning the faith and practice of each denomination.<sup>99</sup>

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home for the church site. Services were first conducted at a brush arbor on the property, which later became Lebanon Cemetery. The present building, constructed in 1887, has been in continuous use and remains virtually unaltered. Charter members were: Moses Park, Martha Park, Susan Park, James Adcock, Sarah E. Adcock, David Tittle, Lucinda Kirby, Elizabeth Wheeler, Eliza E. Taylor, Sarah E. Taylor, Amanda Osborne, and Ann Bennett.

<sup>96</sup> Wooten, *History of Lebanon*, 1.

<sup>97</sup> This based on visual inspection of the Lebanon Cemetery by the author.

<sup>98</sup> J. Edward Moseley, *Disciples of Christ in Georgia* (St. Louis, MO: The Bethany Press, 1954), 36-37.

<sup>99</sup> B. O. Miller, "Antioch," *The Mother Church of the Disciples in Georgia* (Atlanta, GA: E.W. Allen and Company, 1904), 5.

All along the American frontier, men and women were seeking more liberty and reform within religious groups.<sup>100</sup> Major advocates of reform within Christian denominations included Abner Jones (1772–1841) and Elias Smith (1769–1846), within the Baptist church; James O’Kelly (1735–1826) and Rice Haggard (1769–1819) of the Methodist Episcopal Church; and Barton Warren Stone (1772–1844) and Thomas Campbell (1763–1854) of the Presbyterian Church. These men sought autonomy for congregations and a move to a form of primitive Christianity based on the New Testament.<sup>101</sup>

Although both James O’Kelly and Barton W. Stone indirectly influenced the non-aligned, non-class congregations in Randolph County, it was O’Kelly that had the greater influence through the work of Nathan Smith followed by Moses Park. It is through their influence that these congregations continued to preserve a very primitive form of Christianity that both men originally desired. This group has continued to maintain relationships with other congregations in Georgia, Tennessee, and Kentucky that were also influenced by O’Kelly, Stone, or their disciples. No doubt, their strict adherence to the scriptures, hyper-congregationalism, resistance to religious change, and large membership within Randolph County has continued to distinguish them from mainline Churches of Christ. Moreover, their independent development based upon the work of

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<sup>100</sup> See: Elmer L. Towns, *Is the Day of the Denomination Dead?* (Nashville, Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1973), 98-100.

<sup>101</sup> See: F.W. Mattox, *The Eternal Kingdom* (Delight, Arkansas: Gospel Light Publishing Company, 1961) and E. M. Borden, *Church History: Showing the Origin of the Church of Christ, and Its History from the Days of the Apostles to Our Time* (Austin: Firm Foundation Publishing House, 1939).

James O’Kelly and his followers (instead of the Stone/Campbell movement alone) makes this group unique among other congregations of the Churches of Christ.

### **The James O’Kelly Connection**

A product of the Second Great Awakening or Great Revival,<sup>102</sup> James O’Kelly (1735?-1826) (fig. 4) has often been considered by many within the Disciples of Christ and Church of Christ as a minor influence<sup>103</sup> on the development of the “Restoration Movement.”<sup>104</sup> Conversely, some have re-examined O’Kelly’s influence, especially on southern churches, and determined that his form of strong conservatism and fundamentalism evolved out of early American Republican political ideals and may have been more influential than first thought.<sup>105</sup> Historian Ellen Eslinger goes so far as to characterize him as the “father of Christian fundamentalism in America.”<sup>106</sup> She notes

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<sup>102</sup> A religious revival beginning in New England during the 1790s. Also known as Revivalism. See: William G. McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings and Reform: An Essay on Religion and Social Change in America, 1607-1977* (University of Chicago Press, 1978).

<sup>103</sup> See, among others: F.W. Mattox, *The Eternal Kingdom* and Robert H. Brumback, *A History of the Church*.

<sup>104</sup> The term "Restoration Movement" has been employed by the Churches of Christ as a means to designate this event in its historical context. It does not appear that the early members of this movement referred to it in such terms. J.W. Shepherd may have been the first to use the term in his book *The Church, The Falling Away, and The Restoration* (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate, 1973). The roots of this movement extend backward to the period after the Revolutionary War in which several Americans with religious interests grew restless over autocratic structures, European control and theology, and denominational boundaries. These pressures energized the mainline churches, but also resulted in independent congregations springing up in various regions. For chronological information see: Brumback, *History of the Church*, 287-305.

<sup>105</sup> MacClenny, in his biography of James O’Kelly, notes that O’Kelly had likely “made the acquaintance of Mr. (Patrick) Henry and Mr. (Thomas) Jefferson,” giving credence to the idea that he had reinforced his religious ideas from conversations with these two great American statesmen. See: Wilbur E. MacClenny, *The Life of Rev. James*



Figure 4: James O'Kelly

that O'Kelly's influence among southern congregations was "an important democratizing trend in American Protestantism."<sup>107</sup> There is no doubt that O'Kelly's influence was important among southern churches in developing their congregations as independent and autonomous from any head or headquarters, but there was much more that came out of the movement. J. F. Burnett says of O'Kelly that he "courageously stood for individual liberty in religious thought and worship,"<sup>108</sup> thereby influencing some Methodist congregations to adopt practices and doctrines that they believed were based primarily on the Bible.

There is some doubt as to the birth date and place of O'Kelly. Some have suggested Virginia and North Carolina, but there is good reason for believing that he was a native of Ireland. Wilbur E. MacClenny, in the most detailed biography of O'Kelly,

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*O'Kelly and the Early History of the Christian Church in the South* (Raleigh, NC: Edwards and Broughton Printing Co., 1910), 16.

<sup>106</sup> Ellen Eslinger, "James O'Kelly: Father of Christian Fundamentalism in America," in *The Human Tradition in the Old South*, ed. James C. Klotter, No. 15, *The Human Tradition in America* (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 2003), 63-79.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.* 65.

<sup>108</sup> J. F. Burnett, *Rev. James O'Kelly: A Champion of Religious Liberty*, Booklet No.2 (Dayton, OH: Christian Publishing Association, 1921), 1.



notes that “in Betham’s *Baronetage of England With General Tables*, Vol. 3 page 124, mention is made of William O’Kelly of the Chetewode family, and on page 126 under twenty-one of the family line we find ‘James, who went to Virginia.’”<sup>109</sup> To this he adds “John Chetewode, James O’Kelly’s maternal grandfather, took Holy Orders and was a Doctor of Divinity, and one of his descendants was later a minister and stationed near Cork, Ireland, while another was a Captain in the Thirty-third regiment, in recent years.”<sup>110</sup> He concludes that “in view of the above facts and the early traditions of the Christians, we come to the conclusions: James O’Kelly was born and educated in Ireland, came to America in early life, seems to have settled near Moring’s Post-office, in Surry County, Virginia, and lived there for some time before he moved to North Carolina.”<sup>111</sup> J. F. Burnett tentatively notes, with some trepidation, in his much smaller biography of O’Kelly, that while “neither the place nor the time of James O’Kelly’s birth can be determined with absolute certainty . . . there is good reason for believing that he was a native of Ireland.”<sup>112</sup>

Be this as it may, he had the faith and the courage of an Irish patriot, and the courtesy and bearing of a Southern gentleman. There is not as much uncertainty as to the, date of his birth as to the name of the place. Appleton’s *Encyclopedia of American Biography* names October as the month, and 1735 as the year of his birth. This date has support in the fact that he died October 16, 1826, in the ninety-second year of his age.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> MacClenny, *The Life of Rev. James O’Kelly*, 14-15.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid. 15. Interestingly, MacClenny does not provide a reference to this important piece of evidence, although he does write authoritatively, as if he had the reference before him.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid. 15.

<sup>112</sup> J. F. Burnett. *Rev. James O’Kelly*, 1.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

O’Kelly married Elizabeth Meeks (possibly of Virginia) sometime in 1759; later in 1760, they settled in Chatham County, North Carolina, placing much of their energies on their farm and raising their two sons John and William. Elizabeth and son William attended a Methodist revival sometime in the early 1770s and were converted. Their conversion appears to have been influential in converting James (possibly in the summer of 1774)<sup>114</sup> who in 1778 started preaching and holding revivals under the auspices of the Methodist Episcopal Church, throughout Virginia and North Carolina. Burnett notes that O’Kelly’s conversion was so powerful that “he consigned the fiddle to the flame, and forever turned his back upon worldliness.”<sup>115</sup> The impact of the Methodist Episcopal Church and its government system would eventually lead O’Kelly to further ideas.

Methodism grew out of an English movement led by John and Charles Wesley. John Wesley was dismayed with the Anglican Church’s coldness and formalism, noting their definite lack of evangelistic fervor. Furthermore, Anglicans were little concerned for the poor. Wesley reacted zealously, taking the message to coal miners and any others that would listen. Long before the shifts changed and the miners went underground, Wesley preached to them. His open air meetings often drew more than 5,000 hearers. He touched thousands with his preaching and the common man responded with equal enthusiasm. Wesley did not seek to start a new church, but sought to reform the existing system.<sup>116</sup>

Once individuals made personal decisions of conversion, Wesley organized them into small societies or spiritual clubs. The clubs encouraged personal growth, following a

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>115</sup> J. F. Burnett. *Rev. James O’Kelly*, 5.

<sup>116</sup> See: Cyril Davey, *John Wesley and the Methodists* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985).

deliberate program at each meeting. They confessed every known sin and the group encouraged each other to defeat Satan's temptations. Since these societies followed a methodical program of study and worship, they became known as Methodists.

Methodist societies came to the American Colonies relatively early. During the Great Awakening of the mid-1700s, George Whitefield preached a Methodist message. At one point, John Wesley journeyed to America in an attempt to establish a mission to the Indians of Georgia. He visited in Charleston and Savannah and met for a short while with his brother Charles, at Christ Church (fig. 5) in St. Simons Island, Georgia<sup>117</sup> before returning home to England.<sup>118</sup>



Figure 5: Christ Church, St. Simon's Island, Georgia

Like other religious movements in Colonial America and the early United States, Methodists suffered due to a lack of qualified leadership. For the most part, Methodist

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<sup>117</sup> The original building that John spoke at is still in use today.

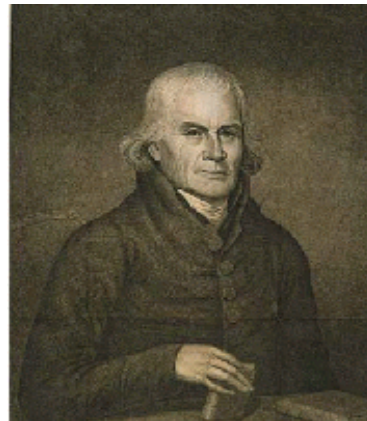
<sup>118</sup> C. T. Winchester, *The Life of John Wesley* (New York: Macmillan, 1934.), 40-50.

societies depended on the Anglican Church for its ministry, particularly for the ordinances. Initially, American Methodists could not perform baptisms nor administer communion. Many independent thinking settlers, however, refused to use Anglicans for baptism, marriage, and burial because of ties to England and the crown.

After the American Revolution, Methodism severed ties with its European roots. Wesley, thinking the American Methodist Church needed supervision and hoping to maintain ties to America, appointed Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury (fig. 6) as



Figure 6:  
Coke and



Thomas  
Francis

Asbury

superintendents. Wesley also provided Richard Whatcoat and Thomas Vasey with letters which allowed them to ordain preachers. Whatcoat, Vasey, and Coke arrived in New York on November 3, 1784. They carried with them a document from Wesley spelling out their privileges and responsibilities.

The conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, often called the Christmas Conference, which occurred in Baltimore in 1784, established American Methodism as an identifiable church and also ordained O’Kelly to the ministry. During this conference, O’Kelly raised questions about the wisdom of having Bishops in the new denomination. During this time, John Wesley had appointed Francis Asbury as General-Assistant for America and given him the general superintendency. Asbury would be in control of the movement in America and yet remain subject to Wesley and the Conference.<sup>119</sup> Furthermore, Wesley had instructed the American church that they were “now at full liberty simply to follow the Scriptures and the primitive church;”<sup>120</sup> yet, he had sent Thomas Coke, Thomas Vasey and Richard Whatcoat with a plan for church government. O’Kelly and his followers saw this as similar to England’s rule over the new independent American states. The dissenters determined that America could not and would not submit to foreign rule of their country or their churches. This produced a problem for American Methodists; they had to adopt a stable government for the church in America, one that did not look to England for guidance.

O’Kelly saw several things in the Christmas Conference which caused him concern. First, he rejected the name of the new church, The Methodist Episcopal Church, because he did not view the term Episcopacy as apostolic. His second concern was due to the conference’s unanimous decision “to submit to John (Wesley) of England in matters

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<sup>119</sup> John J. Tigert, *A Constitutional History of American Episcopal Methodism* (Nashville, TN: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Smith and Lamar, Agents, 1911), 135-136.

<sup>120</sup> James O’Kelly, *The Author’s Apology for Protesting Against the Methodist Episcopal Government* (Hillsboro, NC.: Publisher Unknown, 1829), 9.

of Church Government.”<sup>121</sup> Finally, O’Kelly questioned the appointment of Asbury because the decision was not accomplished through “the suffrage of conference.”<sup>122</sup> Over and over again O’Kelly stated he felt there was just too much English influence in the Methodist system.<sup>123</sup> These important questions indicate O’Kelly’s concern for Biblical precedence, independence and a republican form of church government. Although he continued to submit to the conference, receiving an appointment as an elder in the newly formed denomination,<sup>124</sup> he nonetheless had begun to establish his own thoughts on church government, a church devoid of outside interference and based on biblical principles. Charles Kilgore notes that the “spirit of independence and opposition to rule from above ... was growing; and it was found mainly among the Virginia preachers, with O’Kelly the chief antagonist.”<sup>125</sup>

Asbury soon recognized O’Kelly as his main antagonist. On January 12, 1790, Asbury wrote that O’Kelly “makes heavy complaints of my power, and bids me stop for one year, or he must use his influence against me.”<sup>126</sup> In 1790, with the trend towards Episcopalian government continuing, O’Kelly frankly told Asbury he would oppose him in every possible way if the course didn’t change. O’Kelly found “Asbury’s insistence that the laymen were to ‘pay, pray, and obey’” objectionable thereby increasing the

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<sup>121</sup> Quoted by MacClenny, *The Life of Rev. James O’Kelly*, 52.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Eslinger, *James O’Kelly*, 66.

<sup>124</sup> Tigert, *A Constitutional History*, 248.

<sup>125</sup> Charles Franklin Kilgore, *The James O’Kelly Schism in the Methodist Episcopal Church* (Mexico City, MX: Casa Unida De Publicaciones, 1963), 12.

<sup>126</sup> M. H. Moore, *Sketches of the Pioneers of Methodism in North Carolina and Virginia* (Nashville, TN: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1884), 296.

widening chasm between the two men.<sup>127</sup> Increasingly, the southern churches turned against Asbury. Asbury responded to their antagonisms during the 1790 district conference at Petersburg, Virginia, by removing O’Kelly and his followers from the Methodist fellowship. To this, O’Kelly replied that he was astonished “to find that we were all expelled from the union, by the arbitrary voice of one man: for no offence.”<sup>128</sup> By February, 1792, subsequent letters between Asbury and O’Kelly indicate some sort of reconciliation, at least on Asbury’s part, in which he notes that there was unity between he and those of Virginia.<sup>129</sup> But the damage had been done.

Of greater importance was the General Conference of 1792, during which the Virginia delegation presented a petition for the right of preachers to appeal their appointments. Previous conferences, particularly the Christmas Conference, had determined that only the Superintendent/Bishop could appoint preachers to their churches, but many of the preachers affiliated with James O’Kelly felt that congregations should be able to call their own. Taking an obvious slap at Asbury, O’Kelly moved that the preachers have the right to question their appointments. O’Kelly proposed that:

After the bishop appoints the preachers at the Conference to their several circuits, if any one think himself injured by the appointment, he shall have liberty to appeal to the Conference and state his objections; and if the Conference approve his objections, the bishop shall appoint him to another circuit.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> J. F. Burnett, *Rev. James O’Kelly*, 5

<sup>128</sup> O’Kelly, *Apology*, 20.

<sup>129</sup> Francis Asbury, *The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury*, Vol. III, ed. Elmer T. Clark (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1958), 110.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 297

Asbury then retired from the Conference and turned the leadership over to Thomas Coke. Attendees proceeded to debate O’Kelly’s motion for three days. O’Kelly appealed to the Council that they utilize the New Testament, not some man-made books, such as the *Discipline*, as their guide for determining ecclesiastical forms of government and rule.<sup>131</sup> When the discussion ended, the conference split the motion into two parts: “1. Shall the bishop appoint the preachers to the circuits? 2. Shall a preacher be allowed an appeal?”<sup>132</sup> The Conference then passed the first question with a resounding yes, but the right to appeal went down in defeat. The fact is the Conference leadership simply outmaneuvered O’Kelly. Richard Garrettson noted that “O’Kelly’s distress was so great ... on account of the late decision, that he informed us that he no longer considered himself one of us.”<sup>133</sup> O’Kelly and four other preachers: Rice Haggard, John Allen, John Robertson and William McKendree<sup>134</sup> all withdrew from the conference.<sup>135</sup>

Following the General Conference, O’Kelly called a meeting at Reese Chapel, Charlotte County, Virginia, on November 14, 1792, during which he and his followers discussed their concerns about the Methodists’ doctrines and form of ecclesiastical government. O’Kelly and his followers sent petitions to the Methodists trying to bring

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<sup>131</sup> O’Kelly, *Apology*, 33-34.

<sup>132</sup> Tigert, *A Constitutional History*, 259.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 261.

<sup>134</sup> Interestingly, McKendree returned to the Methodist Episcopal Church and in 1808 became the first American born bishop. In 1830 he lent his support to the Lebanon, Illinois Seminary which eventually adopted his name for the school. “William McKendree”, *Ohio History Central*, July 1, 2005, <http://www.ohiohistorycentral.org/entry.php?rec=264>; accessed on 20 September 2008.

<sup>135</sup> P. J. Kernodle, *Lives of Christian Ministers. Over Two Hundred Memoirs* (Richmond, VA.: Central Publishing Company, 1909), 36.



about reunion. The Methodists rejected every petition although, strangely enough, they allowed the protesters to continue working and preaching among the Methodists.

In August of the following year, O’Kelly and his followers met at Piney Grove, Charlotte County, Virginia, in order to discuss reunification with Asbury and the Methodist Episcopal Church. In a letter prepared by O’Kelly, the dissenters noted that their only request was “that the present form of government might be examined, and tried by the Scripture, and amended according to the Holy Word.”<sup>136</sup> With letter in hand, a delegation was sent to petition Asbury to meet with them in conference to discuss the whole church government issue. Asbury subsequently refused their request, citing in his *Journal*: “I have no time to contend, having better work to do: if we lose some children, God will give us more.”<sup>137</sup>

By the end of the year (1793), at a conference at Manakintown, Virginia, O’Kelly and his followers severed all relationships with the Methodist hierarchy, calling themselves Republican Methodists. This name reveals their stated concern for a democratic form of ecclesiastical government. They noted that “we formed our ministers on an equality; gave the lay-members a balance of power in the legislature; and left the executive business in the church collectively.”<sup>138</sup> It is important to note that although they did not utilize the Methodist form of government, they nonetheless maintained the Methodist form of doctrine and teaching.<sup>139</sup> Prominent Methodist ministers who joined

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<sup>136</sup> MacClenny, *The Life of Rev. James O’Kelly*, 111.

<sup>137</sup> Asbury, *Journal and Letters*, I, 752.

<sup>138</sup> O’Kelly, *Apology*, 45.

<sup>139</sup> Eslinger, *James O’Kelly*, 71.

with O’Kelly included Rice Haggard, John Allen and John Robertson.<sup>140</sup> Estimates place the total membership of the Republican Methodist Churches at this time at about 1,000.

Their affiliation with Methodist doctrine and dogma would be further estranged the following year (August, 1794) at the first meeting of the newly formed Republican Methodist Church was at the Old Lebanon Meeting House, Surry County, Virginia (fig. 7). Prior to this meeting, a seven man committee had been selected by the Republican

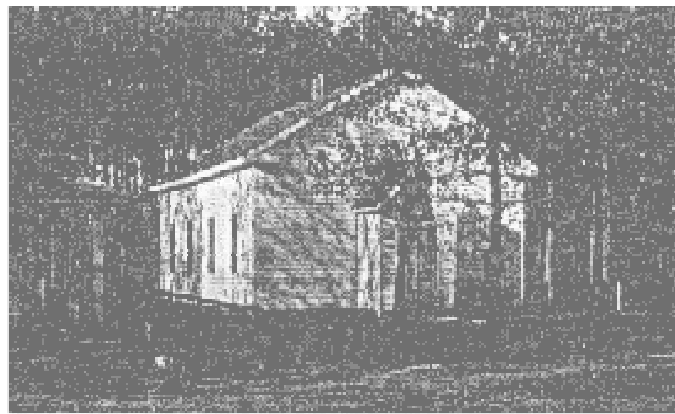


Figure 7: Old Lebanon Meeting House

Methodists to work out a guide for church government. Referring to this plan, Rice Haggard arose at the meeting, holding a Bible in his hand, and emphatically stated:

Brethren, this (the Bible) is a sufficient rule of faith and practice. By it we are told that the disciples were called Christians, and I move that henceforth and forever the followers of Christ be known as Christians simply.<sup>141</sup>

Following Haggard’s comments, A. M. Hafferty, one of the Republican Methodists, arose and moved that “they take the Bible itself as their only creed.”<sup>142</sup> Bearing the newly

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<sup>140</sup> *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1773-1828*, Vol. I (New York, NY: Unknown Publisher, 1840), 49.

<sup>141</sup> Rice Haggard, *An Address to the Different Religious Societies on the Sacred Import of the Christian Name* (Nashville, TN: Disciples of Christ Historical Society, 1954), 13.

accepted name of Christians, those in attendance subsequently devised the “Five Cardinal Principles of the Christian Church”:

1. The Lord Jesus Christ as the only Head of the Church.
2. The name Christian to the exclusion of all party and sectarian names.
3. The Holy Bible, or the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament as our only creed, and sufficient rule of faith and practice.
4. Christian character, or vital piety, the only test of church fellowship and membership.
5. The right of private judgment, and the liberty of conscience, the privilege and duty of all.<sup>143</sup>

At this conference O’Kelly and his followers had reached a zenith in their understanding of the scriptures and their implementation of them in their congregations.

Although O’Kelly’s plea for Biblical authority was genuine he eventually came to decry certain tenets that would alienate his influence from Churches of Christ and from some within his own movement. During his later years he sought for the unity of all believers (which was and still is anathema to the Church of Christ as a whole)<sup>144</sup> and he vehemently preached and wrote against baptism by immersion.<sup>145</sup> His inconsistent theology does not in any way detract from his efforts to instill in and invigorate others with a desire to seek something beyond tradition.

The men who stood with O’Kelly quickly spread throughout the new American nation. William Guirey, one of O’Kelly’s followers, notes in 1808:

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<sup>142</sup> MacClenny, *The Life of Rev. James O’Kelly*, 116-117.

<sup>143</sup> Earl Irvin West, *Search For The Ancient Order*, Vol. I, (Germantown, Tenn.: Religious Book Service, 1990), 7–8.

<sup>144</sup> J. Timothy Allen, “James O’Kelly”, *North Carolina History Project*, <http://www.northcarolinahistory.org/encyclopedia/153/entry>; accessed on 20 September 2008.

<sup>145</sup> James O’Kelly, *The Prospect Before Us* (1824).

After we became a separate people, three points were determined upon. 1<sup>st</sup>. No head over the Church but Christ; 2d. No confession of faith, articles of religion, rubric, canons, creeds, etc., but the New Testament; 3d. No religious name but Christians. For several years I have been a minister in this church and have traveled among the brethren from Philadelphia to the southern frontier of Georgia. We have members in every state south of the Potomac, also a few churches in Pennsylvania; from the best information I can obtain I suppose there are about 20,000 people in the Southern and Western States who call themselves by the Christian name.<sup>146</sup>

In other words, in less than fourteen years from the 1794 meeting at the Old Lebanon Meeting House, there were over 20,000 Christians. Were these converted within a fourteen year period or does this reflect those that were already calling themselves Christians? It is possible that it was the latter rather than the former.

O’Kelly’s evolving views, as compared to the Methodist *Discipline*, resulted in the beginnings of a new base for Christian practice in the South. But, how did he develop his views? Were there outside influences such as the works of George Whitefield, which remained popular through the latter half of the 1700s? Did O’Kelly’s vision for the church arise as the result of patriotic bigotry developed out of a hard fought war against England? There may have been five factors which influenced his religious thinking: 1. O’Kelly’s strict republicanism regarding ecclesiastical hierarchies could have been a result of his friendship with Thomas Jefferson.<sup>147</sup> 2. This could have been magnified further by early sentiments of anti-Catholicism and “popery” as outlined by the works of George Whitefield. 3. Furthermore, the successes and rhetoric of the Revolutionary War may have influenced his feelings about anything that could vaguely be associated with England. 4. It is also likely that he was influenced by their personal research into the

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> MacClenny, *The Life of Rev. James O’Kelly*, 170–173.

scriptures. No doubt biblical study, as a result of defending their stand against Asbury, resulted in them expending more thought on the meaning of the scriptures. 5. And finally, O’Kelly and his followers may have been influenced by Christians who were already maintaining the same principles that the ensuing Restoration Movement would embrace. Whether all or some of these possibilities are correct, men and women were now concentrating on Biblical topics, using Biblical terms and adopting Biblical doctrines in lieu of man-made traditions. O’Kelly’s work did not lay fallow, but the seeds of independent thought and acceptance of Biblical authority were carried on to the frontier by dedicated and enthusiastic adherents.

Nathan Hatch in his book *The Democratization of American Christianity* notes that O’Kelly’s influence diminished “into insignificance,” leaving behind a movement that eventually “came to advocate their own sectarian theology and to defer to the influence and persuasion of a dominant few.”<sup>148</sup> But, this was not the case with those that eventually became known as the non-aligned, non-class Church of Christ in Randolph County, Alabama. They indeed took up the banner of attempting to erect “a primitive church free from theological tradition and authoritarian control”<sup>149</sup> that Hatch contended O’Kelly had failed in accomplishing. O’Kelly’s insight and protest had reached fruition in a people that he would not see, nor hear about.

O’Kelly, at times, appeared arrogant and selfish. However, assuming another person’s feelings or motives suggests possibilities which may no doubt be improper.

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<sup>148</sup> Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 80. Hatch uses the phrase “theological tradition” to differentiate between man-made religious traditions and Biblical doctrine or example.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

O'Kelly may have been so convinced of his beliefs such that they affected his delivery. A man or woman convicted in their beliefs can accomplish a great deal and may indeed appear to be overbearing. In his *Apology*, O'Kelly genuinely appeared concerned with doing what was right. Many described him as kind and affectionate.<sup>150</sup> Furthermore, it is the same attitude of strong conviction and courageous determination which led to the development of the congregations in Randolph County and, also, the movement of several religious groups from Europe to the American Colonies.

### **The Austrian Connection**

Erwin Kessler and Joan Davis have prepared a very interesting document concerning the *History of the Oak Grove Church of Christ: Located in the Town of Rincon, County of Effingham, State of Georgia*<sup>151</sup> in which they provide background information about the founding of one of the oldest congregations in Georgia.<sup>152</sup> This congregation provided a direct link to the congregations established in Randolph County, Alabama.

In the early 1730s, Archbishop Leopold Von Firmian drove approximately 20,000 non-Catholics from Salzburg, Austria. This persecution included followers of John Huss, Waldenses, Lutherans and those that identified themselves as simply Christians.<sup>153</sup> Most

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<sup>150</sup> Kilgore, *The James O'Kelly Schism*, 26-27.

<sup>151</sup> Erwin Kessler and Joan Davis, *History of the Oak Grove Church of Christ: Located in the Town of Rincon, County of Effingham, State of Georgia*, (Rincon, GA: privately published, ca. 1990). Copy in author's possession.

<sup>152</sup> This congregation antedated the one established by Shelton Dunning in Savannah by 22 years. From: A.C. Kessler, *a History of the Oak Grove Church of Christ* (Rincon, GA: Privately Published, ca. 1970), 2. Copy in author's possession.

<sup>153</sup> See: George Fenwick Jones, *Luther's Swan* (The Georgia Salzburger Society, 1949).

settled in southwestern Germany, but some 200 moved to the new colony of Georgia. Aided by an English society called the ‘Society for the Preservation of Christian Knowledge,’ approximately 200 Salzburger, as they were known, traveled to the American colonies under the guise of Lutherans.<sup>154</sup> Settling upriver from Savannah in a community called Ebenezer, these gladly farmed the fertile fields adjacent to the Savannah River. Included among the original settlers from Salzburg was Christian Dasher<sup>155</sup> (1733?–1792), one of 2,500 members of the Church of Christ that left Gastein, Austria, a community in the Defregger Valley near Radstadt, for the American Colonies. An elder and preacher, Dasher and these Christians sought “to impart to others those religious truths which they had derived from the sacred Scriptures.”<sup>156</sup> W. Ralph Wharton, in his book *The Salzburger, Georgia and Christian Herman Dasher* writes that the Salzburger assumed the label of Lutheran in order to escape persecution.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Please see Hans Grimm, *Tradition and History of the Early Churches of Christ in Central Europe*, Translated by H.L. Schug (Bedford, TX: Firm Foundation), for further information on the congregations in Germany during the centuries leading up to this event. Regarding the claim that these came under the guise of Lutherans, Kessler and Davis note that this was the best way for them to leave without causing any problems. W. Ralph Wharton writing in his book *Restoration Movements Around the World* (Moberly, MO: Privately Published, 1980), 79, notes “the church of Luther had official recognition, while the church (sic) of Christ did not. In the granting of permission for the persecuted Salzburger to immigrate to America, it seems to have been assumed—since Lutheranism predominated among the persecuted—that they all were Lutherans.”

<sup>155</sup> “The family name seem to have been originally Teasher, then, in order, Deasher, Dascher, and finally Dasher.” Wharton, *Restoration Movements Around the World*, Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> P.A. Strobel, *The Salzburger and Their Descendents* (1855; reprint, Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1953), 26.

<sup>157</sup> W. Ralph Wharton, *The Salzburger, Georgia and Christian Herman Dasher* (Bogalusa, LA: Earl L. Humphries, 1970), 3. Copy in author’s possession.

Dasher's immediate progeny adopted Lutheranism and continued as such until the elder Dasher's grandson sought to be baptized sometime in 1816.<sup>158</sup> Christian Herman Dasher (1786-1866) (fig. 8) had adopted the views of his grandfather<sup>159</sup> "that baptism should be performed by immersion, not by affusion; that the New Testament examples of baptism were by immersion and often called a 'burial.'"<sup>160</sup> He decided that his own



Figure 8: Christian Herman Dasher

baptism in the Lutheran Church was improper and furthermore, determined that the New Testament, not the writings of Luther, was to be consulted in "all matters of faith and worship."<sup>161</sup> Interestingly, Dasher developed his views when a majority of Salzburger

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<sup>158</sup> See: Pearl Rahn Ghann, *Georgia Salzburger and Allied Families* (Easley, SC: Southern Historical Press, 1983).

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-5.

<sup>160</sup> Kessler and Davis, *History of the Oak Grove Church of Christ*, 2.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.



were leaving the Lutheran Church for other, more “distinctly American,”<sup>162</sup> religious groups.

Dasher’s state of mind regarding religious matters during this period was, no doubt, not concerned with the Lutheran faith. Writing in the *Gospel Advocate*, a Church of Christ periodical, seventeen years after Dasher’s death, J. A. Harding, who had recently moved to South Georgia, noted of Dasher:

When, however, he arrived at manhood, and began to be impressed with the importance of uniting with the church, and of living the Christian life, he was perplexed by the existence of so many churches, and by the publication of so many doctrines. Fortunately instead of becoming an infidel, as so many do, under like circumstances, he turned to the Holy Scriptures for light.<sup>163</sup>

What is interesting, and maybe a telling point regarding his lineage, was Dasher’s adamant stand regarding baptism by immersion. This required some Biblical exegesis that would allow him to discern between affusion and immersion. How did he reach that conclusion without instruction from a teacher? Furthermore, Harding notes that Dasher “could not go with the Baptists, as he could not tell the experience which they required.” All he sought was to be immersed based upon his confession “that Jesus is the Son of God, the Savior of sinners.” Where did he receive instruction regarding the errancy of the Baptist doctrine and the need for confession as a pre-requisite for baptism (a model that continues to be used by the Church of Christ today)? No doubt he was influenced by his family and their ancestral stand though he was at that time unsure of “the doctrine of baptism for the remission.”<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> John F. Hurst, “The Salzburger Exiles in Georgia,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, August 1892, 397.

<sup>163</sup> J.A. Harding, “The Church of God at Valdosta, Ga.,” *Gospel Advocate* 25 (15 February 1883): 104.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*

He sought every opportunity to discuss his views, eventually meeting a Mrs. Sarah (?) Threadcraft from Savannah<sup>165</sup> who advised him to seek out Shelton C. Dunning (1780–1858), a minister in the Baptist Church that maintained views similar to his own. Shortly thereafter, Dunning “baptized Dasher into Christ, upon his simple expression of faith in Christ.”<sup>166</sup> Dunning apparently met in his home where it is said that he met with any that would, sitting around the parlor singing hymns, saying prayers, having “Scripture reading, expositions and exhortations, followed by the sacred supper.”<sup>167</sup>

Dasher returned to his home in the Goshen community and in 1819, baptized his wife, sister-in-law and her husband, Christian Gotlib Wisenbaker. This constituted the first congregation of the Church of Christ in Georgia. They met weekly in the home of Dasher in order to worship and observe the Lord’s Supper.<sup>168</sup> Dasher and Wisenbaker’s children would likewise “obey the gospel” as they “became of accountable age.”<sup>169</sup> Furthermore, Dunning remained actively involved in the lives of Dasher and the Christians at Goshen.

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<sup>165</sup> Moseley, *Disciples of Christ in Georgia*, 65.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 4. See: The 1976 Bicentennial Committee, *History of Effingham County, Georgia 1733–1976* (Charleston, SC: Walker, Evans, and Cogswell Company, 1976), 3–72, for further information on Dasher’s meeting with Dunning.

<sup>167</sup> John T. Brown, *Churches of Christ* (Louisville, KY: John P. Morton and Co., 1904), 214. For a good biography of Dunning, see: John Mills, “Religious Influences in the Life of Christian Herman Dasher,” (MA thesis, Alabama Christian School of Religion, 1979).

<sup>168</sup> J.W. Shepherd. *The Church, The Falling Away, And The Restoration* (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate, 1948), 249.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.* To “obey the Gospel” means to repent, confess you faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and as the Son of God, be baptized by immersion. Only candidates that had reached an “age of accountability,” or were able to discern right and wrong, were accepted for baptism.

It is certainly interesting that Christian Dasher had determined these important doctrines without the influence of either of the mighty Restorationists, such as O'Kelly, Campbell or Stone. J. W. Shepherd, in his book *The Church, The Falling Away, And The Restoration* notes "It was many years after the baptism of Mr. Dasher before he knew that there were any others in any place contending for the 'truth as is in Jesus,' as he and those associated with him were doing."<sup>170</sup> He had no doubt listened to his grandfather, Christian Dasher, and determined on his own, that the scriptures should be accepted for doctrine and practice.

Dasher, his family and a few other members from the Savannah area eventually moved to Lowndes County, Georgia, where the city of Valdosta now stands. He continued teaching and preaching, while they met for a while in his residence. Dasher's progeny, along with the Rahns and Kesslers, were and have continued to meet with the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ for decades, especially the congregation at Rincon, Georgia, near the original homestead of the Dasher family.

It may be arrogant to assume that the Restoration Movement developed only among the more visual groups, when the evidence constrains us to assume otherwise. Accordingly, the Restoration Movement started among the silent few, such as the early colonists from England and the Salzburgers, was adopted by the more bold and erudite preachers and teachers and spread to other areas in an unprecedented revival unseen since the early centuries of the Christian church.

### **The Barton W. Stone Connection**

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<sup>170</sup> J.W. Shepherd. *The Church*, 250.

Much has been written on the works of Thomas and Alexander Campbell and their influence on the restoration movement. No doubt many Christians read Alexander Campbell's *Christian Baptist* and *Millennial Harbinger*, verifying their own doctrines and practices. These men were well educated and had funding to back such enterprises. Many were also probably familiar with other Restorationists such as Abner Jones and Elias Smith who had founded several "free" Christian churches around 1800, addressing concerns of some distressed New England Baptists over denominational labels and emphasis on doctrine. Furthermore, in 1808, O'Kelly, Jones, and Stone encountered one another and shared with each other their mutual concerns. By 1820, these men convened a national gathering to bring their three groups together into the United General Conference of Christians. These well publicized events are seen as milestones within the Restoration Movement. But the real milestones consist of when these men changed their religious points of view.

In 1804, Barton W. Stone (1772–1844) (fig. 9) led a movement away from a Presbyterian style of organization in frontier Kentucky with a document entitled 'The Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery.' This was indeed a watershed event, bringing together frontier dissatisfaction with existing religious doctrines and the

Figure 9: Barton W. Stone



“practices associated with the Great Revival in the West (the “exercises” of falling, jerking, etc. and “disorderly” forms of worship).”<sup>171</sup>

This document sought to dissolve the Springfield Presbytery “into union with the Body of Christ at large.”<sup>172</sup> Furthermore, this document stressed the institution of scriptural practices, the Bible as sole authority, the universal Church with Christ as the head of the Church, utilizing the name Christian, the autonomy of congregations and the banning of the use of the title “Reverend.” But how and where did Stone develop his doctrinal ideas? There is no doubt that Rice Haggard and his brother David had some influence on Stone. As early as 1803 or 1804, Rice Haggard, who had been a collaborator with James O’Kelly and one of the ministers who went out with him, had visited in

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<sup>171</sup> D. Newell Williams, *The Separation of the Springfield Presbytery from the Synod of Kentucky: Predestination or The Revival?*, 2. Paper given at the 2003 meeting of the Society of American Historians (an affiliate of the American Historical Association) in Louisville, Kentucky, See also: Paul K. Conkin, *American Originals: Homemade Varieties of Christianity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997) and Richard T. Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith: The Story of Churches of Christ in America* (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996).

<sup>172</sup> Barton W. Stone and John Rogers, *The Biography of Eld. Barton Warren Stone*, written by himself with additions and reflections (Cincinnati: J. A. & U. P. James, 1847; reprint by Joplin: College Press, 1986), 51.

Kentucky and was present at the meeting of the Springfield Presbytery in 1804.<sup>173</sup>

Furthermore, Elder Samuel Rodgers says it was Haggard who first suggested to Stone the propriety of taking the name “Christian” as that divinely given at Antioch. But, it is quite possible that Stone developed his ideas much earlier.

An American frontiersman, Barton Warren Stone was born in 1772 near Port Tobacco, Maryland, and was educated at David Caldwell’s Academy of North Carolina. He enrolled with the intention of pursuing a career in law, but changed his mind and entered the Christian ministry. Stone exhibited a sincere desire, when in 1790 under the preaching of James McGready, he “resolved ... to seek religion at the sacrifice of every earthly good.”<sup>174</sup>

While waiting for his license as a Presbyterian minister, Stone began to accumulate large debts. Leaving Guilford County, N.C. in 1795, with fifteen dollars in his pocket, he traveled to see his brothers Matthew and Thomas who lived in Georgia. It was in Georgia that Stone’s interest in religious matters substantially increased.

Employed as a language teacher at Succoth Academy, in Wilkes County approximately three and one half miles from the town of Washington, Stone developed a friendship with John Springer (1745?–1798) an assistant to the school’s principal Hope Hull. Interestingly, Hull attended services at Georgia’s first Methodist church in Washington at which Francis Asbury would often preach. Furthermore, Hull attended the Baltimore Conference of 1792 and sided with O’Kelly in his protest against

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<sup>173</sup> Bill Humble, *The Story of the Restoration* (Indianapolis, IN: Faith and Facts Press, unknown), 10.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

autocratic power by Methodist bishops. Hull did not follow O’Kelly and neither did he leave the Methodist fellowship, but he was no doubt influenced by O’Kelly’s teaching.<sup>175</sup>

During this period as a teacher at Succoth Academy, Stone was tempted in several ways to forsake his religious concerns. He was committed to deny himself “of these fascinating pleasures, and determined to live more devoted to God.”<sup>176</sup> Stone was further influenced by John Springer (1745?-1798)<sup>177</sup> who became a close friend and confidant, prompting C.C. Ware to write that “the influence of John Springer on Barton Stone was decisive.”<sup>178</sup> Stone and Springer spent a great amount of time discussing scriptural matters, with Springer eventually influencing Stone to rekindle his desire “to preach the Gospel.”<sup>179</sup> Stone became a ministerial candidate at the Orange Presbytery in North Carolina, but external factors and theological study left him depressed such that he soon returned to Georgia.

Stone was no doubt introduced to the O’Kelly debate when he accompanied Hull to a Methodist Conference at Charleston, South Carolina in 1795-96. After returning from this conference, he taught at the school until the spring and departed for the spring meeting of the Orange Presbytery where he was licensed to preach. Stone must have been

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<sup>175</sup> Biographical information taken from: Stone and Rogers, *Biography*, 12–14

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>177</sup> John Springer was the first Presbyterian minister to be ordained in Georgia in 1790. A graduate of Princeton University in 1776, Springer was a schoolmaster living five miles outside of Washington, Georgia for several years during the 1790s. Moseley, *Disciples of Christ in Georgia*, 40. For further information see: Addison W. Simpson, *Life and Service of Reverend John Springer Including Some Early History of the Presbyterian Church of Northeast Georgia* (Washington, GA: N.P., July, 1941).

<sup>178</sup> Charles Crossfield Ware, *Barton Warren Stone: Pathfinder of Christian Union, A Story of His Life and Times* (St. Louis, MO: Bethany Press, 1932), 42.

<sup>179</sup> Stone and Rogers, *Biography*, 14.

impressed with the meeting and found something that pushed his resolve to preach to fruition. Could it have been the intense fervor of the southern Methodists, which had in turn been influenced by O’Kelly? It seems possible that with Hull knowing O’Kelly and attending the Methodist Conference held in South Carolina, Stone may have begun here to develop his ideas, that would so closely parallel O’Kelly’s, about the restoration of a more primitive form of Christianity.

Stone returned to Georgia, after preaching in Kentucky for a year, due to what he cryptically called “some unsettled business.”<sup>180</sup> He also utilized this time to visit his mother in Virginia and solicit funds in Charleston, South Carolina, for the building of a college in Kentucky. He further notes that during his journey, from Georgia to South Carolina, he “preached throughout the country for several weeks.”<sup>181</sup> He established contacts that would later be useful for the Christians in Georgia and South Carolina. Possibly, during this time, he traveled the one hundred and fifty five miles from Washington to Rincon, Georgia, and met some of the Christians in Rincon, if not it is possible that he heard about them.

The O’Kelly group would further “exert a powerful influence on the Stone movement and provide a base and impetus for its growth,” when several preachers crossed into Kentucky and Tennessee.<sup>182</sup> James Haws and Benjamin Ogden, Methodist missionaries that had embraced the O’Kelly churches in 1794–1795, preached throughout Middle Tennessee and South Central Kentucky. David Haggard (1755–1850), who had

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>182</sup> J. W. Roberts and R. L. Roberts, Jr., “Like Fire in Dry Stubble—The Stone Movement 1804-1832 (Part 1),” *Restoration Quarterly*, Vol. 7, No. 3: 2.



associated himself with the O'Kelly group in the early 1790s,<sup>183</sup> moved to Little Renox Creek, north of Burkesville, Kentucky, in 1799 and began to preach throughout the area. It was noted of Haggard, upon his marriage to Lucy in 1800, that he “produced satisfactory proof of his being in regular communion with the society called the Christian Church.”<sup>184</sup> David's brother Rice settled in Kentucky close to his brother in 1803 or 1804 and is said “to have attended the meeting of the Springfield presbytery of Stone's group in June of 1804.”<sup>185</sup>

Stone considered Rice Haggard, along with Clement Nance and James Read, one of “three valuable elders who had a few years before separated with James O'Kelly from the Methodist connection.”<sup>186</sup> Haggard's value to the Stone movement was his stand for the use of Bible names and Biblical doctrines in lieu of man-made names and doctrines. Haggard's six point platform for Christian Unity through restoration, originally published in 1809 by Elias Smith his periodical called the *Herald of Gospel Liberty*,” provided a program similar to that established by Thomas Campbell in his *Declaration and Address*.<sup>187</sup>

Rice Haggard probably moved to Kentucky because of his brother, but the relationship that he had with Stone grew out of their mutual admiration for the Bible and

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<sup>183</sup> A. H. Redford, *The History of Methodism in Kentucky* (Nashville Souther Methodist Pub. House, 1868), 74.

<sup>184</sup> J. W. Wells, *History of Cumberland County* (Louisville, Standard Printing Co., 1947), 61. Also, see: Alonzo Willard Fortune, *The Disciples in Kentucky* (Lexington, KY: Convention of Christian Churches in Kentucky, 1932), 67.

<sup>185</sup> Joe Berkley Green, *The Herald of Gospel Liberty*, June 29, 1905. Quoted in J. P. Barrett, *The Centennial of Religious Journalism* (Dayton, OH: 1908), 278.

<sup>186</sup> *Christian Messenger*, Vol. 1, No. 11 (Sept. 25, 1827): 243.

<sup>187</sup> Roberts and Roberts, “Like Fire in Dry Stubble, 4.

Haggard's perception of similarities between Stone and O'Kelly. It is possible that Haggard moved to Kentucky having been aware of Stone's ideas through mutual acquaintances. Furthermore, because of Stone's familiarity with the "O'Kelly Schism," through Asbury and Hull, he would have heard about Rice Haggard's determination to have the new group called Christians. There are just too many coincidences between O'Kelly, Stone, and Haggard for them not to have been aware of each other at an earlier time than 1800.

### **The Final Connection**

As already noted, the congregations in Randolph County, from which the non-aligned, non-class churches grew and prospered, were originally started by Christians that left Western Georgia for the new lands of Alabama. These early pioneers were heavily affected by the teachings of James O'Kelly and his followers. They sought congregational autonomy and worshiped according to a primitive form of Christianity. Is it a coincidence then that the first congregation of this group in Randolph County was called Lebanon (fig. 10) in commemoration of the meeting at the Old Lebanon Meeting House by O'Kelly and his followers in 1794? Wayne Flynt suggests that churches were often named after geographical features, doctrinal beliefs or Biblical sites, as was the case with Lebanon.<sup>188</sup> The direct tie between Lebanon and James O'Kelly goes further than just the name of the congregation in Lebanon.

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<sup>188</sup> Flynt, *Alabama Baptists*, 6.



Figure 10:

Lebanon

### Church

Note how similar this building looks to the Old Lebanon Meeting House.

In 1807 a group of O’Kelly’s followers founded a congregation called Old Republican Church in southern Clarke County near Watkinsville, Georgia.<sup>189</sup> So intent were these men and women to reveal “the light which was so obscured by the clouds of sectarian teachings” that they “very earnestly studied the Bible and were led by their research to drop some of their former methods.”<sup>190</sup> According to Mrs. B. O. Miller, in her history of the Antioch Christian Church,<sup>191</sup> Nathan W. Smith was baptized in 1832 at a camp meeting, at Old Republican Church, by the preacher Arthur Dupree. Smith eagerly accepted the congregation’s stand of teaching “the Bible alone” and became their fulltime preacher sometime in 1842. Under Smith’s leadership, the congregation’s name changed from “Old Republican” to “Antioch” because “the Disciples were called Christians first

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<sup>189</sup> Billy B. Lavender, *A Pioneer Church In The Oconee Territory: A Historical Synopsis Of Antioch Christian Church* (Bloomington, IN: Iuniverse, Inc., 2005), 2.

<sup>190</sup> B.O. Miller, *Antioch Christian Church: The Mother Church of the Christian Churches, Disciples of Christ in Georgia* (Atlanta, GA: Private, 1904), 2.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

at Antioch.”<sup>192</sup> Later, sometime early in 1843, Smith was introduced to the teachings of Stone and Campbell by a James Shannon, of Bacon College, Kentucky; but, as Kernodle notes: continued to stand “firm upon the principles of the Christian Church as established by” O’Kelly.<sup>193</sup> Smith was subsequently sent out in 1843 “to preach the gospel to other eager ones, and to teach them also the simple biblical plan of Salvation.” Sometime before 1845, Moses Park, was baptized by Nathan Smith.

Interestingly, many preachers from the Rincon area, particularly those named Kessler, Rahn and Dasher visited and worked with the Christians from Randolph County during the latter part of the 1800s and into the 1900s.<sup>194</sup> The Kessler and Rahn families<sup>195</sup> (see photograph in Appendix B) have been actively preaching and teaching among this group for generations. Angus Kessler, was a well known and highly respected preacher who stressed pacifism, with his son and grandson following him as conscientious objectors. Likewise, Amos Rahn and L.W. Rahn, from the Ebenezer congregation in Rincon, were opposed to all types of “man made innovations”<sup>196</sup> and advocated a

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<sup>192</sup> Ibid., 3. Scripture reference is Acts 11:26.

<sup>193</sup> Kernodle, *Lives of Christian Ministers*, 201.

<sup>194</sup> Bryant Wilson. Age 84. Interviewed by author, August, 23, 2002.

<sup>195</sup> The Kesslers were of German/Austrian descent, lived in the same community in the Rincon area and attended the same congregation of the Church of Christ with some of the Rahn and Dasher families for over one hundred years.

<sup>196</sup> Harry Cobb notes that this is a term used by the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ to designate the class system, pastor system, divorce and remarriage, musical instruments and other items which separate them from other religious groups. Harry Cobb interview.

primitive form of New Testament Christianity as they taught and preached in various locations.<sup>197</sup>

Furthermore, some of the Kessler family eventually moved to Randolph County, settling near the county seat of Wedowee. A number of the Dashers (see photograph in Appendix B) moved to other congregations in Georgia that remained affiliated with those in Randolph County.<sup>198</sup> Other connections between those of Randolph County and the Rincon area include family marriages and business partnerships. These relationships have remained strong over several generations.<sup>199</sup>

These are not coincidences but the result of continuous relationships with each other, relationships that abide within the non-aligned, non-class congregations of the Church of Christ. Moreover, they maintained these relationships without giving up their congregational autonomy. These groups eschewed modern innovations and maintained many traditions they had inherited from earlier congregations. Interestingly, many men within these congregations prayed using the language of the King James Version of the Bible. ‘Thee’ and ‘thou’ can still be heard in almost every congregation, at any given service, with many preachers admonishing the use of this language by new Christians. Although used by other religious groups, the King James Version was, and continues to be, exclusively used by southern non-aligned, non-class congregations with some

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<sup>197</sup> Kessler, *A History of the Oak Grove Church of Christ*, 3.

<sup>198</sup> Faye Cook Wisenbaker, in her privately published article, “Dasher and Lake Park Georgia,” obtained from Carl and Cassie Kessler, January 18, 2003, notes that several Dasher’s settled in Lowndes County, Georgia, while some remained in the Rincon area.

<sup>199</sup> Carl and Cassie Kessler Interview, by the author, in their home near Lineville, Alabama, January 18, 2003. Tapes are in the possession of the author.

Western congregations using the New King James Version or the New International Version. The southern congregations, specifically those in Randolph County, desired to continue to echo the “early church of Acts chapter two”<sup>200</sup> by using the same version of the scriptures that O’Kelly and his followers used, even though the King James Version was actually translated in 1611.

The O’Kelly, Dasher and Dunning movements influenced the congregations in Randolph County to remain fiercely autonomous and strongly dedicated to the ideas of primitive Christianity espoused by many within the early Restoration Movement. Conversely, they were not a part of the mainstream Restoration movement. These Christians opposed what they deemed as “man-made” or “digressive” innovations in an attempt to maintain purity of doctrine. Like mainstream Churches of Christ, they observe the Lord’s Supper on a weekly basis, practice baptism by immersion in water for the remission of sins, sing without the accompaniment of musical instruments (a cappella) and maintain congregational autonomy. Unlike the mainstream Churches of Christ, they do not have located ministers or pastors, they do not fund or advocate preachers schools/colleges/ seminaries, Sunday Schools and women teachers were/are not permitted, nor do they have missionary societies. Furthermore, most members are pacifists and believe that marriage is a lifelong commitment with no opportunity for remarriage upon divorce. Although some would try to bring these into use among the congregations in Randolph County, they would fail simply because, as Onward Holmes of the Haywood, and later the West Broad Street, congregation vehemently interjected

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<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

“we never had them and we don’t need them.”<sup>201</sup> Subsequently, the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ would develop a scriptural defense against these things out of necessity for a response. Their influence would nonetheless, be felt throughout the South and beyond. Their stand would appeal to others either individually or congregationally.

Over the decades, beginning in the late 1800s, preachers and teachers from various areas in the South and West moved through Randolph County, receiving instruction and instructing. Many would become influenced by the congregations there and would carry their doctrine home with them. A few papers such as the *Apostolic Way*, early *Firm Foundation* and the *Church Messenger* brought articles about doctrine and practice to individual members, but never did they set precedence among the congregations. These monthly publications were originally newsletters which provided readers a vehicle for discussion and reflection. Members were aware of the problems these periodicals discussed, but they were not problems they faced in Randolph County. Clarence Teurman warned the readers of the *Apostolic Way* “the congregations of the part of Eastern Alabama (where resided the congregation at Napoleon, ed.) are indeed different from the rest of us (namely those from Texas, etc., ed.).”<sup>202</sup> How were they so different? Because they, in the spirit of James O’Kelly, rejected any authority but the Bible and any governing head of the church but Christ, they sought to be called simply Christians.

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<sup>201</sup> Holmes interview.

<sup>202</sup> *Apostolic Way*, (January 17, 1915): 1.

### III. THE CHURCH OF CHRIST IN ALABAMA

Alabama became the twenty-second state in the Union on December 14, 1819. In 1805, a post road from Knoxville, Tennessee, to New Orleans was opened through the territory of Alabama, which allowed for more settlers to enter in 1807. Located near the post road and the community of Antioch, the first congregation of the Church of Christ was established in 1811 at Rocky Springs, Jackson County, Alabama, (fig. 11).<sup>203</sup> Rocky Springs Church of Christ began through the efforts of William J. Price, his wife and a slave named Moses. These first members worshiped “as one body, calling themselves Christians and calling the church only the Church of Christ.” This congregation makes the claim that it “is the oldest continuous New Testament congregation in the world.”<sup>204</sup> Though they note that their founding members came from Tennessee, nothing further is known of their history.

Although there is no further direct evidence of congregations this old in Alabama, there is some indication that there were many such congregations when Alexander Campbell passed through the state in 1838 on his journey along the Federal Road from Augusta, Georgia, to New Orleans. At one of his stops in Alabama, Campbell preached in

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<sup>203</sup> This congregation is not affiliated with the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ.

<sup>204</sup> Dabney Phillips, *A History of the Church of Christ in Alabama* (Montgomery, Alabama: publisher unknown, publication date unknown), 2.





Figure 11: Rocky Springs Church of Christ

a building built by William Hendrix near present day Marion, a community located about 80 miles south of Birmingham.<sup>205</sup>

Barton W. Stone's influence was further felt in Alabama in 1824, when Ephraim D. Moore (fig. 12), a disciple of Stone, established the Republican congregation some seven miles north of Florence in Lauderdale County.<sup>206</sup> Using camp meetings to spread the gospel, there were over two hundred baptized members at Republican by 1826. Upon Moore's death in 1859, Tolbert Fanning, an influential Restoration preacher from Nashville, Tennessee, who was baptized at Republican in 1828, wrote:

We are more indebted to our deceased Brother, E.D. Moore, for our early religious instructions and impressions than to any other man, dead or alive. Our candid judgement is, that we never saw anyone so careful to teach, particularly

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<sup>205</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>206</sup> Ephraim D. Moore is accredited with establishing the first congregation of the Church in Tennessee. This congregation is still in existence at Post Oak Springs, Roane County, TN. Harry C. Wagner, *East Tennessee Historical Publications*, No. 20, 1948, 52.

young persons in the Christian religion.... As a teacher of dignity, and elevation of style, we are not sure we ever saw superior. In affections and tenderness of heart, he more favorably impressed us than any man we ever saw; and as a lover of the truth, he had no superior.<sup>207</sup>

Moore's love of the truth manifested itself in many works, one of which was the church at Republican.



Figure 12: Ephraim D. Moore (1782–1859)

By 1829, there were two stronger, growing congregations in Sheffield and Tuscumbia. And in 1830, a resolution was adopted by the Muscle Shoals Association of Baptists which reflected the strong influence of Alexander Campbell's views over North Alabama:

Through Campbellism we see the divine operation of the Holy Spirit either disavowed or so obscurely avowed, as to amount to disavowal. We see experimental religion ridiculed and reprobated. We see the apostolic mode of ordaining ministers, by the laying on of hands of the presbytery, ridiculed and condemned. We therein see baptism presented as producing a change of heart and pardon of sins, when the Holy Spirit can alone produce and bring about a change, while baptism shows our faith, satisfies our conscience, adopts us into His church and makes us one with Him, by thus fulfilling all righteousness, a change of heart being previously affected by the Holy Spirit. We therein see, as we awfully fear, an effort by man to pull down the old order of faith and practice taught by our

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<sup>207</sup> Tolbert Fanning, "Obituary," *Gospel Advocate* (January 1860): 32.

Lord and His apostles, and establish on their ruins a new order and a new name styled Campbellism.<sup>208</sup>

From this time forward the Muscle Shoals area, especially the Republican congregation, faced stiff opposition from the Baptists. By the beginning of the Civil War there were over fifty known congregations of the Church of Christ throughout Alabama.

Further South, in Montgomery County, Jacob Johnston, from North Alabama, and William McGaughy, from Georgia, began preaching and holding meetings throughout the area in 1825. Three small congregations began in the late 1820s through the work of Johnston, McGaughy and Ishmael Davis. Interestingly, during the mid-1800s, there were several congregations which developed throughout southern Alabama from existing denominational churches, in particular from the Baptists, who eventually developed an aggressive posture against the Church of Christ.

The Civil War proved disastrous for congregations of the Church of Christ in Alabama. Many male members were killed, leaving widows and orphans for the congregation to maintain. Some congregations saw their buildings burned and their members scattered. Poor transportation and mail delivery isolated many congregations from each other. Furthermore, the rigors of war left many people “destitute by the end of the hostilities.”<sup>209</sup> Other congregations discontinued services during the war due to the lack of male members to conduct the services.<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> Riley, *History of the Baptists*, 79.

<sup>209</sup> Watson, George H. And Mildred B. *History of the Christian Churches in the Alabama Area* (St. Louis, Missouri: The Bethany Press, 1965), 50.

<sup>210</sup> Congregations of the Church of Christ believe that the scriptures prohibit women from speaking in the church, either through preaching, prayer or in any other capacity where it may be construed that she is occupying a role of leadership and authority.

After the Civil War, differences, going back to the beginning of the Restoration Movement, created ruptures in the unity of the congregations in Alabama. Regional differences and embitterments over the war and reconstruction led to further problems. Nationally, the liberal leaders in the movement gained the upper hand in the mission societies, prompting the conservatives in former Confederate states to withdraw and grow increasingly critical of the societies.<sup>211</sup> Furthermore, southern congregations felt that those in the North were compromising their “restoration primitivism with social contentment” gained through increased success and wealth.<sup>212</sup> By the 1890s, David Lipscomb, conservative editor of the *Gospel Advocate* published in Nashville, Tennessee, became a staunch bulwark against what he called the “Loose, rationalistic and semi-infidel teachings” that he contended “were prevailing in some churches of the Disciples in Northern states.”<sup>213</sup> Lipscomb further exemplified the developing schisms by stating that Southern conservatives sought converts, while Northern Disciples wanted to build “a strong and respectable denomination.”<sup>214</sup> It is in that environment that the congregations developed in Randolph County.<sup>215</sup>

The early part of the Twentieth century saw a dramatic increase in the number of congregations throughout the state. Due in part to the work of teachers and preachers

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<sup>211</sup> Thomas H. Olbricht, “Who are the Churches of Christ?” *The Restoration Movement*, <http://www.mun.ca/rels/restmov/who.html>; accessed 20 September 2008.

<sup>212</sup> Richard Thomas Hughes, *The Primitive Church in the Modern World* (Chicago: The University of Illinois Press, 1995), 116.

<sup>213</sup> David Lipscomb, “Should Women Preach Publicly,” *Gospel Advocate*, 33(August 5, 1891): 486.

<sup>214</sup> David Lipscomb, “The Churches across the Mountains,” *Gospel Advocate* 39(January 7, 1897), 4.

<sup>215</sup> George H. And Mildred B. Watson, *History of the Christian Churches*, 50–55.

from Tennessee and graduates from Mars Hill College (1871–87) in Florence, tent meetings and debates became abundant throughout North Alabama, eventually spreading to the rest of the state. During this time, the congregations of the non-aligned, non-class Church of Christ had coalesced into a strong and dynamic religious movement within East Central Alabama.

### **The Church of Christ in Randolph County**

Through the 1830s and 1840s there was a great deal of interest in the spreading of the Gospel in Western Georgia. Pendleton Cheek, a preacher in Campbell County, Georgia, wrote in 1845 that “if our good and wealthy brethren of the west knew of such a place as Georgia, and what a vast missionary field is here open to their zeal, their wealth, and their religious enterprise” then they would immediately send gospel preachers into the fields.<sup>216</sup> Nathan Smith entered the mission field from his home congregation at Antioch in Georgia and worked for three years as an evangelist, establishing “many of the early churches of Georgia.”<sup>217</sup> Documenting these congregations is rather difficult due to their using either homes or the buildings of other groups in order to meet and worship. It is possible that other congregations were started through the efforts of Dunning, Dasher and other followers of O’Kelly.

There is no doubt that A.C. Borden and Moses Park had heard of the doctrines of O’Kelly, Stone and Campbell and instituted their teachings at Lebanon. Not only did A. C. Borden help to start the congregation at Lebanon, he was also instrumental in starting other congregations in Troup County, Georgia. He wrote in the February 11, 1869 issue

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<sup>216</sup> J. Edward Mosely, *Disciples of Christ in Georgia* (St. Louis, MO: Bethany Press, 1954), 163.

<sup>217</sup> Epps, *Antioch Christian Church*, 1.

of the *Gospel Advocate*<sup>218</sup> that “since June, 1861, I have preached twenty-five hundred discourses, organized seven new congregations, and had six hundred ninety-five additions.”<sup>219</sup> Of these “new” congregations, one (and probably more) was originally a Baptist church.<sup>220</sup>

In 1859, Patrick G. Bailey and Dorthy Shelnutt (fig. 13) were married in Randolph County, moved to the Haywood Community and built a home. After serving in the Civil War, Patrick returned home and built a community store which included a



Figure 13: Patrick G. and Dorthy Shelnutt Bailey

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<sup>218</sup> The *Gospel Advocate*, started in Nashville, Tennessee, was originally published in 1855 by Tolbert Fanning and then by David Lipscomb. These two men traveled and preached throughout Tennessee, Kentucky and North Alabama.

<sup>219</sup> *Gospel Advocate* (February 11, 1869): 135.

<sup>220</sup> Moseley, *Disciples in Georgia*, 221.



Figure 14: Haywood Church of Christ

Post Office. Sometime during the year of 1865, they started holding religious services in their home.

The Baileys were affiliated with the Church of Christ and the congregation in their home eventually grew to include a large portion of the surrounding community in the services. Each of their eleven children were baptized believers.<sup>221</sup> Sometime during the early 1870s, Bailey and some of the members meeting in his home built a building in order to accommodate the growing congregation, called Haywood Church of Christ (fig. 14).

During the 1870s, other congregations of the Church of Christ started to develop in Randolph County. In September of 1874, the Church at Pinetucky officially designated itself as the Church of Christ at Pinetucky. In its revised “Abstract of Faith and Practice” the congregation outlined its new statement of doctrine. The new abstract reflects a mixture of Calvinism and Church of Christ doctrine. In articles three, four, five and seven

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<sup>221</sup> Lois M. Daniel, interview by author, Carrollton, Georgia, February 22, 2002.

they are decidedly Calvinistic regarding the doctrines of original sin and eternal security.<sup>222</sup> In the other articles, they embrace Church of Christ doctrine especially regarding the sufficiency of the scriptures, baptism, and the Lord's Supper. In article number two they deny the use of man made creeds and dogmas by stating:

We believe that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the Word of God and the only true rule of faith and practice.<sup>223</sup>

Pinetucky's people were resilient, hardworking and conservative and it was no wonder that they would be drawn to a doctrine and group that mirrored their own feelings.

Pinetucky was not the only Baptist congregation to adopt some or all of the doctrines of the Church of Christ. Big Springs Church, located near the Georgia line, had on December 9, 1850, aligned itself with the Church of Christ. It is unclear whether A. C. Borden or any of the other early Restoration preachers had converted either Pinetucky or Big Springs, but it is possible that some from these congregations heard them preach in their camp meetings.<sup>224</sup> Another interesting point is that the congregations at Big Springs and Pinetucky were located in the Arbacoochee District of the Baptist Church and both adopted the name of Church of Christ.<sup>225</sup> Big Springs, like Pinetucky, reverted back to the name and doctrine of the Baptist church about the same time during the late 1800s or early 1900s. It is possible that influential members from both congregations had heard, at different times, Church of Christ doctrine preached at a brush arbor or camp meeting.

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<sup>222</sup> Eternal security is the doctrine that once a person is saved he or she can never fall from grace.

<sup>223</sup> Journal of Pinetucky Baptist Church of Christ, 55.

<sup>224</sup> Otis Bowen. Interviewed by author, September 6, 2003.

<sup>225</sup> Shirley Bowen Elder, *My Bowen, Barton, Harris, Scott, Hendon, Cranford Family Connections* (Raleigh, NC: Shirley Bowen Elder, 1994), 53.



Those in attendance returned to their congregations and dispersed the information, thereby converting some from the Baptist doctrine. Without follow up from Church of Christ preachers, the congregations at Big Springs and Pinetucky reverted to Baptist congregations within a couple of generations, probably after the deaths of those members who originally heard Church of Christ doctrine preached.

The latter part of the 1800s was tumultuous for the Church of Christ in Randolph County as well as the rest of the nation. Two divisive movements were causing congregations to separate into four distinct groups. These two movements involved the use of the Sunday School, or class arrangement, as a method of teaching the young in addition to the regular worship service and the use of musical instruments as an aid to the worship service. The latter became an issue of distinction among both the non-aligned, non-class and one-cup churches. The four distinct groups that would arise from these controversies within the county, and which are present at this time, were the Christian Church, the liberal Churches of Christ and the conservative non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ and the one-cup congregations.

The introduction of Sunday Schools, or Bible classes, posed a real and persistent problem in the Churches of Christ during the turn of the century. Although the Sunday School's origin has been identified with the work of Englishman Robert Raikes in 1780, few early preachers of the Restoration movement opposed its institution, finding it useful in the worship service for instruction and congregational growth. In the April 1847 issue of the *Millennial Harbinger*, Alexander Campbell wrote:

The Sunday-school system is one of transcendent importance, having claims upon every friend of God and man in the whole community.... Next to the Bible

society, the Sunday school institution stands pre-eminently deserving the attention and co-operation of all good men.<sup>226</sup>

Barton Stone's view was somewhat similar, except that he opposed the Sunday school as an institution. Regarding its use for teaching the Bible he wrote:

Let us not neglect to meet every Lord's day for worship.... Let a part of the day be devoted to the instruction of our children in the Scriptures. Choose one or more pious and intelligent men, who shall preside over the class of children; let them previously assign the Scripture to be read, and labor to make them understand it.<sup>227</sup>

Although these prominent preachers and writers had acknowledged their acceptance of this innovation, there were many during the 1880s that rejected it as a man-made addition to the Church.<sup>228</sup>

Dr. George Averill Trott and N. L Clark (fig. 15), editors of the *Firm Foundation*,<sup>229</sup> a conservative, religious periodical of the Church of Christ which was first published in Austin, Texas in 1884, wrote adamantly against the Sunday School "where the students were divided into classes, used so-called Sunday-school literature, had lady teachers, and in which several teachers were giving their instructions at the same

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<sup>226</sup> *Millennial Harbinger*, IV (April, 1847): 198-99.

<sup>227</sup> *Christian Messenger*, II (February, 1828): 72.

<sup>228</sup> See Larry Hart, "A Brief History of a Minor Restorationist Group (The Non-Sunday-School Churches of Christ)" *Restoration Quarterly* 22, no 4 (Fourth Quarter 1979): 211-232.

<sup>229</sup> The *Firm Foundation* was conceived by Austin McGary, in Texas. His reason for publishing the paper was because "we realized the sad fact that many innovations upon apostolic Christians were being ushered in upon us" and their paper was intended "to oppose everything in the work and worship of the church for which there was not a command or an apostolic example or a necessary scriptural inference." *Firm Foundation*, V (September 5, 1889): 4. The paper became a stalwart of the conservative mainline Church of Christ to the present.

time.”<sup>230</sup> Clark was very strong in his belief, writing: “I regard the Sunday-school as an innovation ... I can’t see it in any other light.”<sup>231</sup> They continued this teaching along with W. J. Rice in the *Apostolic Way*, a paper originally published in Dallas, Texas, that started in 1913. They eventually wrote:

They speak where the Bible is silent, and they force their opinions upon the churches. Division has been the result. One innovation has quickly followed another; and they have aped the “sister denominations” with their ... “Sunday-school,” ... and the what-not.<sup>232</sup>

In 1916, Clarence Teurman (fig. 16), of Union City, Georgia, became publisher of the *Apostolic Way*. A student of N. L. Clark’s and writer for the *Firm Foundation*, Clarence Teurman spoke throughout the South and in particular in Randolph County



Figure 15: Dr. G. A. Trott and N. L. Clark

against the use of the Sunday School arrangement for teaching.<sup>233</sup> He provided issues and ideas for thought among the brethren in Randolph County prompting individual members

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<sup>230</sup> *Firm Foundation*, XXVII (March 7, 1911): 6.

<sup>231</sup> *Firm Foundation*, XXIII (January 29, 1907): 4.

<sup>232</sup> *Apostolic Way*, (September, 1915): 1.

<sup>233</sup> Estelle Wilson, interviewed by Harry Cobb, Napoleon, Alabama, June 23, 1984.

to meet collectively in each others homes, “Bibles in hand,” where they weighed his proposals, and determined that the class method of teaching was not acceptable.<sup>234</sup> Others “opposed it because it was not mentioned specifically in the Bible.” Therefore, the Sunday School never developed as a divisive element in the maturing of the non-aligned, non-class congregations in Randolph County.<sup>235</sup>



Figure 16: Clarence Teurman

The use of instruments of music proved to be a much deeper problem. Alexander Campbell voiced his opposition to the use of musical instruments when he noted that a church organ “would be as a cow bell in a concert.”<sup>236</sup> In other words, just as the unsure sound of a cow’s bell in an orchestra was unacceptable, so was an organ in the worship service. J. W. McGarvey later wrote in the *Millennial Harbinger* that if instrumental music was taught in the Bible and if God approved its use, then where are the scriptures

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<sup>234</sup> Bryant Wilson, interviewed by author, August 12, 2003.

<sup>235</sup> For an indepth discussion of the Sunday School controversy, see: Murphy, *The Glory of an Imperfect People*. This book deals with the debate among the congregations in Texas, it nonetheless offers insight into some of the problems that arose.

<sup>236</sup> *Millennial Harbinger* (October, 1851): 582.

that so teach?<sup>237</sup> The editors of the *Apostolic Way* were similarly opposed to the use of musical instruments in the worship service. Even though men such as N. L. Clark and Clarence Teurman taught against these things, they could not keep the issue from dividing some congregations.

Haywood congregation and the Church at Lebanon, in Randolph County, were eventually divided over the issue of using pianos during the worship service. On April 11, 1897, J. A. Grant, Jim D. Taylor, J. H. Barsh, Jim Waldrep and Jeb Stowell withdrew from the congregation at Lebanon and started Taylor's Crossroads Church of Christ. This new congregation was located only a few miles northeast of Lebanon. The reason for this division was in response to the efforts of many of the members at Lebanon to install a piano for use in the public worship.<sup>238</sup> The dissenters felt that the use of musical instruments in the worship service was a departure from the Biblical mandate against such things. Citing passages such as Revelation 22:18-19, which places a curse on those that add to or take away from God's word, as the basis for their dissent, they noted that the piano was an addition to God's word and was therefore, unacceptable.<sup>239</sup> The congregation at Taylor's Crossroads (fig. 17) eventually contacted Clarence Teurman and

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<sup>237</sup> J. H. Garrison, *The Reformation of the Nineteenth Century* (St. Louis: Christian Publishing Co., 1901), 282.

<sup>238</sup> From notebook of J. J. Waldrop. Notebook is in possession of Bill Prince, Sr., Roanoke, Alabama, copied March 5, 2002.

<sup>239</sup> Revelation 22:18–19 says: “For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things that are written in this book.” Although this passage has application primarily for the book of Revelation, the non-aligned, non-class churches have always used it to apply to the rest of the Bible as well. These comments



Figure 17: Taylor's Crossroad's Church of Christ.

the *Apostolic Way*, providing support for them and other evangelists over the next few years. Teurman eventually preached at the congregation before his death in July of 1923.<sup>240</sup>

The congregation at Haywood likewise went through a period of turmoil over the use of the piano in the service. In 1932, George Washington attempted “to install instruments of music and Sunday school in the worship service. Brother Tom Bailey of the Haywood congregation endeavored to keep these man-made innovations out of the congregation.”<sup>241</sup> Complaints were filed in Wedowee (the county seat of Randolph County) and the court ruled that one group would meet in the morning and the other in

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taken from interview with Joseph Onward Holmes, interviewed by the author, June 12, 1998.

<sup>240</sup> Ronny F. Wade, *The Sun Will Shine Again, Someday* (Springfield, MO: Yesterday's Treasures, 1986), 41.

<sup>241</sup> Onward Holmes, interview by author, June, 1986.

the afternoon. This arrangement continued for a while, with the non-instrumentalists leaving to form another congregation, meeting for a time in the house of Alvin and Pearl Bailey. By 1947, they started meeting in their new building, calling themselves Peace Church of Christ or Oak Grove (fig. 18). Located approximately seven miles east of Wedowee, this congregation maintained a close relationship with the congregation at Taylor's Crossroads.



Figure 18: Oak Grove Church of Christ.

Clarence Teurman, evangelist and eventual editor of the *Apostolic Way* was certainly instrumental in helping to build the New Church or East Napoleon Church of Christ. Located at Napoleon, Alabama, some ten miles east of Wedowee, this congregation was initially established through the efforts of “a brother Spencer Reynolds who came through preaching in the late 1800s.”<sup>242</sup> They originally met in a log cabin

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<sup>242</sup> Wilson interview.

which collapsed prompting the church to meet in a school house (fig. 19) across the road.<sup>243</sup> Assisted by Teurman, the congregation moved to its present location in 1915.<sup>244</sup>

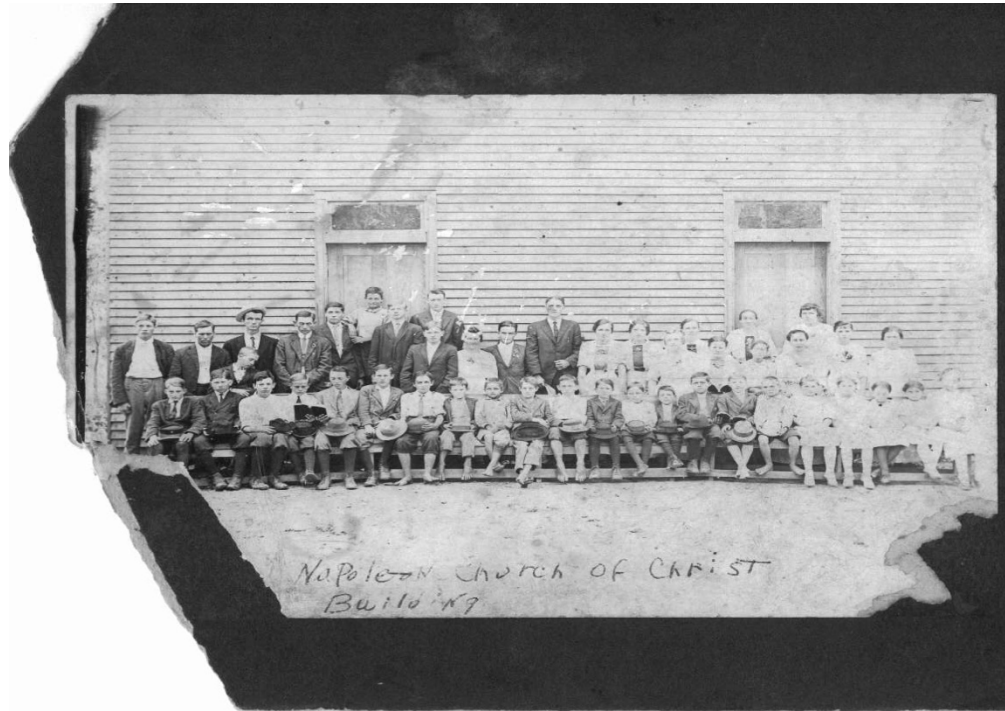


Figure 19: Old Napoleon School House.

In 1947, Ervin Watters was asked to preach at The New Church. His sermon included instructions on maintaining the use of one cup during the communion as a matter of practice and congregational law. Some of the congregations in Randolph County had used one container during the communion, but changed when their numbers grew so large that it was not feasible to continue and therefore added another. The use of one container by these congregations was an expediency and not viewed as a matter of Biblical law. Those pressing for the use of one container contended that there were three

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<sup>243</sup> The old building was probably located near the present day “One Cup” congregation, then moving to the school house which was located across the street.

<sup>244</sup> Wilson interview.



important parts to the communion or Lord's Supper; they were the fruit of the vine, unleavened bread and the cup itself.<sup>245</sup> The argument was that the scriptures indicate only one cup was used in the institution of the Lord's Supper by Jesus Christ in each of the Gospel accounts and First Corinthians and that was the pattern that should be followed.

As with many other issues facing the congregations in Randolph County, the one-cup became an issue only after someone came in and expressed a view that had not been considered before. Prior to this time, members had seen the cup simply as an instrument through which the fruit of the vine was to be taken.

The debate among Churches of Christ regarding the use of one cup during the Lord's Supper arose in the latter part of the 1920s. This conflict was especially perpetuated with the development of *The Truth* (1928–1931) by H.C. Harper (1874–1936). This paper was primarily utilized to resolve issues facing congregations in Texas, such as the rise of the Sunday School and it advocated the use of one-cup as the only scriptural method of taking the fruit of the vine during communion. *The Truth* ran for three years and then ownership was taken over by J. D. Phillips (1904–1981) and Homer L. King (1892–1983) who changed the name to *Old Paths Advocate*.<sup>246</sup>

These papers promulgated the idea of “pattern theology” which stresses the enforcing of Biblical examples as if they were patterns of law for all Christians in all ages. Ronny Wade explains: “if Moses was commanded by God to ‘to make all things according to the pattern’ (Hebrews 8:5) are not we bound by the same obligation? Either there is a pattern for the observance of the communion or there is none.”<sup>247</sup> The

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<sup>245</sup> Tim Prince, interview by author, March 20, 2002.

<sup>246</sup> Wade, *The Sun Will Shine Again*, 104–106. See also: Ronny F. Wade, “Looking Back to the Future,” *Old Paths Advocate* LXVII (January 1995): 1.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

application of “pattern theology” to the communion, specifically the cup, was clarified in the *Old Paths Advocate*:

We are concerned with things we hear about the subject of fellowship. . . . Why do we worship with one-cup? Answer: because we read it plainly in Matthew 26:27; Mark 14:23; Luke 22:17, 20; 1 Corinthians 10:16; 11:25–28. Is it wrong, sinful to use more than one? Answer: yes, because more than one-cup violates the example given in these verses, it violates the command for us to do as Jesus did.... Listen, brethren: we believe it is wrong to use more than one-cup. We believe people are going to be lost for using more than one-cup. Surely, we believe that! If people are not going to be lost for using more than one, then let’s give up the fight and heal the division caused by those who have insisted on using more than one.... Individual cups are a sinful violation of the Bible pattern....<sup>248</sup>

But, this does not relate the entire argument against multiple cups used in the Lord’s Supper. Adherents to the one-cup persuasion also rely upon secular history to substantiate their position concerning the use of one-cup.

There is common agreement, verified by the Thomas Communion Service Company, that the use of individual communion cups was introduced in a Congregational Church in Putnam Co., Ohio in 1893 by J. G. Thomas, who was both a physician and minister.<sup>249</sup> The following year he was granted a patent on his invention.<sup>250</sup> Although there was some initial opposition to the use of multiple cups among the Churches of Christ by men such as J.W. McGarvey, David Lipscomb (who later changed their minds)<sup>251</sup> and others, the majority of the non-aligned, non-class congregations of Randolph County readily accepted their use, siding with men such as N.L. Clark and

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<sup>248</sup> Don L. King, "Proper Perspective," editorial, *Old Paths Advocate* LXVII (September 1995): 2.

<sup>249</sup> A photographic copy of this letter is in Dallas Burdette's collection of books in Southern Christian University Library, 1200 Taylor Rd., Montgomery, AL 36117, phone 334-277-2277. This copy was given to Dallas Burdette by his uncle, E. H. Miller.

<sup>250</sup> Wade, *The Sun Will Shine Again*, 60.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

Clarence Teurman.<sup>252</sup> Only the New Church at Napoleon suffered problems due to this issue.

Members of the congregation sent in 1947 a letter to Noah Langley, one of the brethren pressing the “cup issue,” outlining the congregation’s intent to refrain from using other “one container preachers” and to maintain separate services from the other group which would use one cup for the Lord’s Supper. Within a few weeks, the “One Cup” brethren had been “padlocked” out of the church building “by those advocating the use of more than one cup.”<sup>253</sup> They subsequently met in the Napoleon School and built a permanent meeting place in 1950 on land donated by Noah Langley and located in the middle of town. This congregation was designated Napoleon Church of Christ (fig. 20) and the New Church was called East Napoleon Church of Christ (fig. 21).



Figure 20: Napoleon Church of Christ

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<sup>252</sup> N. L. Clark, *Apostolic Way* (15 December 1925); quoted in Wade, *The Sun Will Shine again*, 71.

<sup>253</sup> Letter to Noah Langley, 1947, copy in possession of author.



Figure 21: East Napoleon Church of Christ.



Figure 22: Mt. Carmel Church of Christ

The church at Mount Carmel (fig. 22) began in the spring of 1922 through the efforts of the Brown, Spradlin and Daniel families that lived in the immediate area and was probably an outgrowth of the work at Napoleon, which was located only 5 miles away. Current church rolls indicate intermarriage between members of the congregations.

Close family ties are also seen with Oak Grove and Taylor's Crossroads. The assemblies at Mount Carmel were originally held in a school building with the first church building constructed in 1941. This building was added onto in the early 1960s. They used many of the same preachers as the other congregations. Men such as J. W. Moore, Cecil Abercombrie, Gillis Prince, Noah Holt, Walt Shelnut, J. A. Dennis, and Ed Marshall (see Appendix A for photographs) maintained the conservative nature of these congregations.<sup>254</sup>

Liberty Church of Christ (fig. 23) also had early beginnings within the county. Robert Cofield, of Lineville, Clay County, Alabama, writes that this congregation began in August, 1869 when Mary Ann Moore gave four acres of land to the Liberty Christian Church. It is unknown how long or whether this congregation was meeting in a home up until the giving of this land and the subsequent construction of the building. Cofield does note that there was a cemetery already established on the property, with the earliest grave belonging to Jeremiah Nix who died on December 15, 1857. This may indicate that there was an established congregation meeting in someone's home, possibly the Moores, as early as 1857. Other graves within the graveyard indicate that the early congregation was primarily made up of the Moore family.<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>254</sup> T.V. and R. Z. Bailey, interviewed by the author, August 16, 2003. See also: Harry Cobb, *Church of Christ Directory, 1996* (Wedowee, AL: Privately published, 1996).

<sup>255</sup> Letter from Robert Cofield, March 13, 2002. Original in possession of the author.



Figure 23: Liberty Church of Christ

Interestingly, until 1887 this congregation was identified as an “Elderite church” and there after called a Church of Christ.<sup>256</sup> The term, “Elderite,” is a difficult one to pin down, at least among current Church of Christ scholarship. A map of Randolph County, circa 1920 (fig. 24),<sup>257</sup> shows two distinct groups of Christian churches within the county. The first is identified as “Christian Cambellite Churches,” which are clearly identified with the Church of Christ.<sup>258</sup> The other group called the “Christian Elderite Churches (fig. 25)” can clearly be identified with the Independent Christian churches within the county.<sup>259</sup> The use of these designations is apparently regional with groups outside of Randolph and Clay Counties not designated in this manner.

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<sup>256</sup> Ibid.

<sup>257</sup> *Map of Randolph County* (Birmingham, AL: Bethel W. Whitson Organization). The map is undated but shows many structures that were built in the late 1910s and yet, does not show the main road from Roanoke to Wadley which was constructed in 1923-24. For this reason the map is dated within the first part of the 1920s.

<sup>258</sup> All of the extant congregations of the Church of Christ mentioned in this document were labeled on the map as “Christian Cambellite Churches.”

<sup>259</sup> Current Christian churches in the county (these are identified with the Independent Christian Church and not with the Disciples of Christ) were likewise identified as “Christian Elderite Churches” on the map.

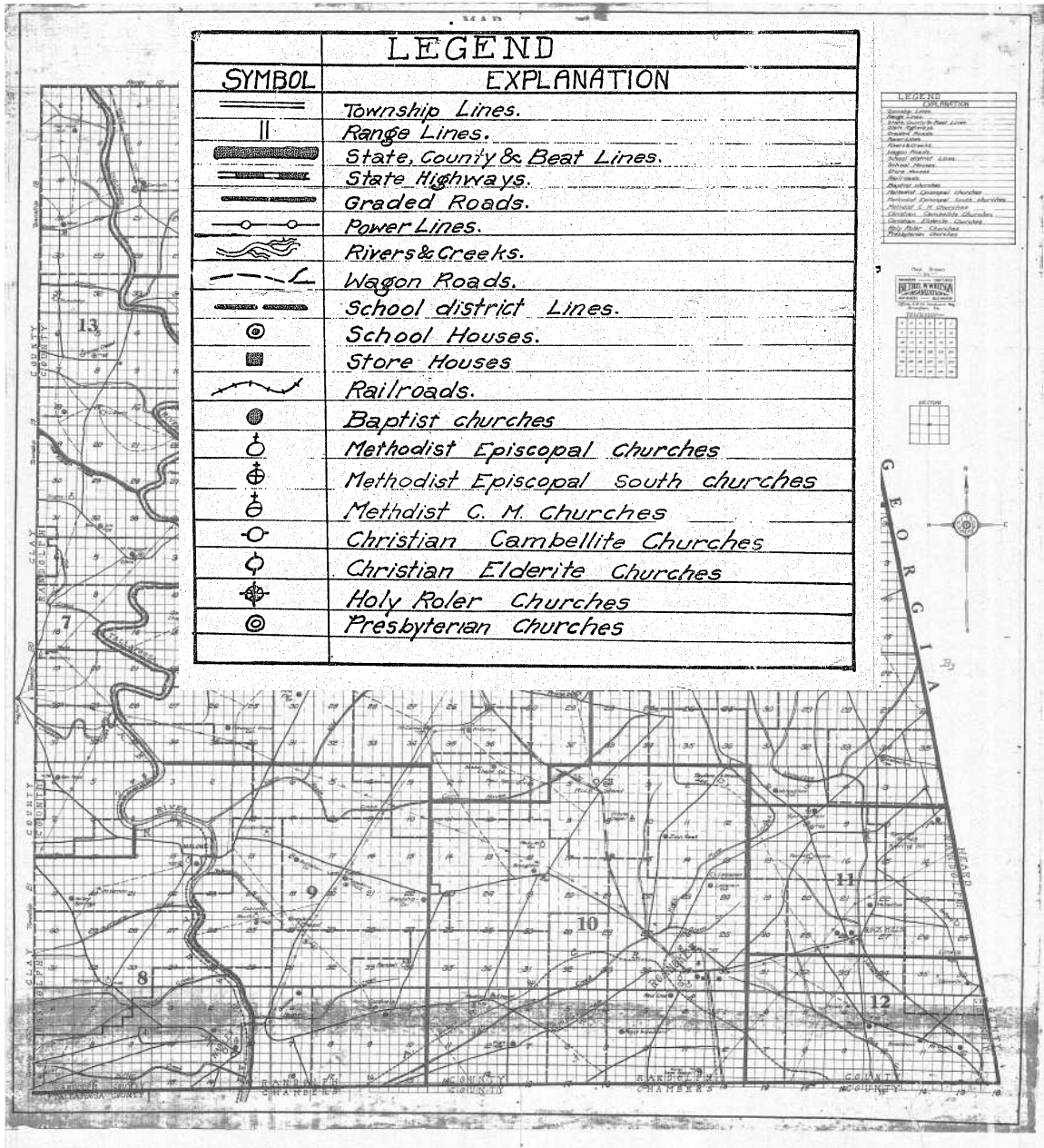


Figure 24: Ca. 1920s Map of Randolph County Alabama<sup>260</sup>

<sup>260</sup> Copy in possession of the author.

Figure 25: Legend from ca. 1920s Map of Randolph County

Vista Vitura Strickland, in her manuscript entitled *Shinbone Valley: Stricklands and Elders* claims that the term “Elderite” was “so-called because my great grandfather, Wych Elder, established” the congregation at Shinbone Valley as a Christian church. She goes on to note that Elder, born on October 5, 1809 and died in Roanoke on February 2, 1884, was influential in starting an early congregation of the Christian church at Lanett, Alabama<sup>261</sup> where there is a marker in tribute to him “for his life so consecrated by God, his fellowman and Alabama.” With the church at Liberty, a congregation some 20 miles south of Shinbone Valley, called “Elderite” prior to 1887, it appears that this term was in widespread use, within at least a two county area, just before the turn of the century. Interestingly, this indicates that there was a clear demarcation between the Churches of Christ and the Christian church within the latter part of the 1880s and some 26 years before the recognized split of the two groups by the United States Census.<sup>262</sup>

Robert Cofield then notes that there were a variety of brethren involved in holding revivals at the Liberty congregation throughout the 1930s and 1940s. Men such as Noah Holt, Walt Shelnut and Zeke Murphy,<sup>263</sup> all evangelists that preached at other congregations of the Church of Christ in Randolph County, were influential in

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<sup>261</sup> This congregation still exists.

<sup>262</sup> In 1906 the *Church of Christ* split from the *Disciples of Christ* over many issues that ran back to the Campbell-Stone Union in 1824. Actually, it is more correct to say that a split which had been brewing for decades was formalized in 1906, when it was agreed that the religious census which was in that era conducted by the U.S. would list the groups separately. See: Moseley, *Disciples of Christ in Georgia*, 277.

<sup>263</sup> See Appendix A.



maintaining the congregation at Liberty. He further states that their numbers dwindled, especially after World War I, when property was bought up by Alabama Power, lumber companies and other individuals, causing the locals to move to other areas. Regular attendance during the 1940s had declined to sometimes 3 or 4 members on Sunday mornings. He attributes some of the problem to the movement of the children of members to other locations in search of work, where they would often join denominations. But the bulk of the problem, Cofield asserts, seems to have stemmed from the fact that “their education in the Bible and Christianity was very minimal.” As proof, he says that only one brother did much of the work in the church during his entire childhood, up until 1958 when this brother died. He characterizes this brother’s teaching as “talks . . . not sermons, but lessons from the Bible.” This led to the children not being firmly grounded in the doctrine of the church, causing them to readily accept denominational teaching. This eventually led to the congregation hiring a regular preacher during the late 1950s.<sup>264</sup>

Liberty would eventually accept many of the ideas and “man made innovations” of more liberal groups that the other congregations within the county had vigorously kept out. This can be attributed to other reasons. Most of the congregations within the county are located in the South-Central and Eastern portion of the county. These congregations visited among one another and were able to maintain strong ties throughout the years. Liberty was located in the far Western corner of the county, across the Big Tallapoosa River, and was very difficult to get to. Even though they did use many of the evangelists that the others used, they used them for short periods and on an inconsistent basis.

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<sup>264</sup> Cofield letter.

Furthermore, there was very little interaction with their brethren in other areas of the county.

The interaction between congregations in the lower part of the county allowed for a mingling of ideas, which kept the congregations from becoming stagnant from repetitive teaching. Members could become revitalized through fresh approaches to old topics; keeping their interest level high. Even though they intermingled socially and religiously, these congregations maintained their congregational independence, testing what they were taught by continuously searching their Bibles for verification. They were challenged to become better Bible students by their fellow congregations which were doing the same thing. This made them stronger, able to provide a strong defense against any “false doctrines .”<sup>265</sup> Liberty did not develop these strong ties, nor were they challenged like the other congregations within the county, and therefore, they lost their affiliation with the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ, eventually siding completely with the mainstream Churches of Christ sometime during the late 1970s.

The problems Liberty had were minor compared to those of Friendship. There are actually two congregations called Friendship (fig. 26) as shown on the circa 1920 map of Randolph County. The first, and by far the shortest lived of the two, was located some three miles northeast of Liberty. Its beginnings lost to time, its subsequent downfall and destruction, on the other hand, remains strong in the memory of 90 year old Brewer Fuller. Fuller explains that prior to 1924, Friendship was affiliated with the congregation at Liberty. They were almost an exact mirror in doctrine and intent as the other congregations of the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ in the county during the

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<sup>265</sup> Onward Holmes Interview.



turn of the century. But it was during the year 1922 or 23 that the congregation became a “holiness church” practicing snake handling and other things which the young “men would come to see for some entertainment.” He specifically remembers one man from the congregation picking up a hot coal from the heater, noting “you could smell the meat frying.” The reasons for the drastic change from a loyal congregation of the Church of Christ to holiness may never be known; though, a hint was possibly given when Mr. Fuller stated that before they became a holiness church “people came from all around” with “many fights” taking place at that building. Who these people were and where they came from remains a mystery, but no doubt they changed the internal dynamics of the congregation. Original members could have been forced out with new people taking the

Figure 26: Area where Friendship was located.

leadership. Some few years after the drastic change in doctrine came about “someone shot into a man’s house” which was located a few hundred yards south of the church building and shortly thereafter the building burned and the members dispersed.<sup>266</sup>

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<sup>266</sup> Brewer Fuller. Interviewed by the author, September 12, 2004.



The second congregation referred to as Friendship (fig. 27) was located approximately half way between Wedowee and the congregation at Taylor’s Crossroads. Begun sometime in the late 1880s, this congregation utilized J. C. Hunt as an evangelist during several revivals during the 1930s. A small, “family church,” this congregation became affiliated with the other Christian churches in the county sometime during the early 1940s.<sup>267</sup> Family dominated congregations were often not open to interference from other groups and this congregation was not known for visiting with the other congregations within the county.<sup>268</sup>

Figure 27: Friendship Christian Church

The final congregation to develop in the county was in Wedowee. As the county seat and the crossroads of two major highways (U.S. 48 going East-West and U.S. 431 going North-South), it was imperative that a congregation be established there. The

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<sup>267</sup> Luree Benefield. Interviewed by the author, September 19, 2004.

<sup>268</sup> Bryant Wilson. Interviewed by author, November 9, 2002.

*Randolph Star* noted that a Walter McMurray of Wedowee conducted a meeting at the Napoleon Church of Christ in May of 1915.<sup>269</sup> The *Apostolic Way* further published a series of articles from McMurray in 1916.<sup>270</sup> Teurman and other editors of the paper would publish the author's name and his home congregation for ease of identification. This indicates that there was a congregation meeting in the home of McMurray during this time. Naaman Wilson recalls that his father mentioned McMurray preaching at Haywood during the early 1920s. Later, sometime during the late 1930s, there was a congregation meeting in a shed, or log building, owned by Grover Williams. The congregation, located adjacent to Williams' garage in Wedowee, was strong and very conservative. Its membership included some that had ties to the congregations at Taylor's Crossroad's and Haywood.

Sometime during 1948, the congregation moved to property located about two miles south of Wedowee in what was known as the Midway community (fig. 28).<sup>271</sup> Many of those who preached at Taylor's Crossroads and Napoleon would visit this small congregation. In April 1975, some who had been meeting at Oak Grove and those who were meeting at Midway purchased a building originally used by the First Baptist Church. This congregation is known as the West Broad Street Church of Christ (fig. 29).

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<sup>269</sup> *Randolph Star* (May 6, 1915): 1.

<sup>270</sup> *Apostolic Way* (January 1916): 8.

<sup>271</sup> Lovvorn Holmes, interview by author, March 2, 2002.

Figure 28: Old Wedowee Church of Christ





Figure 29: West Broad Street Church of Christ

The early map of Randolph County, circa 1920, showed a congregation located in Roanoke that it labeled as “Christian Cambellite Church.” Although, as already pointed out, this usually refers to the Churches of Christ in Randolph County, it actually refers to the Christian/Disciples of Christ congregation that existed in Roanoke. This group had no affiliation with the non-aligned, non-class congregations in the county. This congregation was started by those classified as liberals, from Lagrange, Georgia and made no attempt to join themselves with the others.

The congregations of the non-aligned, non-class Church of Christ seek congregational autonomy within a fellowship limited by their interpretation of the Bible. There may be minute differences between congregations, such as whether the communion bread is broken before or after prayer or whether/when the offering is included in the worship service.<sup>272</sup> Each congregation chooses its own speaker for regular

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<sup>272</sup> Harry Cobb’s directory, *Where the Saints Meet*, lists a variety of differences

worship services, usually a different speaker each Sunday of the month, and for revivals or weekend meetings. Funds are used at the congregation's own discretion without direction from an organization or individual, although they may contact an evangelist for his recommendation. Yet, they meet together at yearly camp meetings for purposes of fellowship and discussion and they frequently suspend their regular evening services, so that their members will be free to attend a neighboring congregation's meeting.<sup>273</sup>

There are three other congregations of the Church of Christ in Randolph County; all are classified as liberal by the non-aligned, non-class congregations. These congregations are the Main Street Church of Christ in Roanoke, the Pinehill Church of Christ located in the Northeastern part of the county and the African American congregation called Weather's Heights located in Wedowee.

Currently there are six congregations of the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ located within Randolph County.<sup>274</sup> The memberships of Taylor's Crossroads, West Broad Street, Oak Grove, Napoleon and Mount Carmel, total approximately 350 members. The other congregation is made up of Latinos and is the result of mission work from the West Broad Street congregation. These congregations represent the single largest number of members of this group of the Church of Christ, in a single county, within the United States. Fiercely autonomous and consistently conservative, their

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among the various congregations but none are issues of fellowship.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid.

<sup>274</sup> This includes the Latin American congregation that currently meets within the building in Wedowee, but is autonomous from the English speaking congregation which also meets there. This congregation, begun as an outreach of the West Broad Street Church of Christ, is similar to the other congregations with the single exception that they conduct their services in Spanish.



evangelistic efforts have reached to over six hundred congregations world wide, totaling almost twenty thousand members.

No doubt questions will arise as to how quickly the evangelizing of the rest of the nation took and what were the catalysts that led to the increase in numbers of congregations within the fellowship of the non-aligned, non-class Church of Christ. Harry Cobb's listing of the non-aligned, non-class congregations reveals that their congregations had not substantially increased in number until the inclusion of Western and Northern congregations over the last 40-50 years. Prior to the 1950s, most of the congregations (about 150) that adopted the doctrines and positions of the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ were located in the South and were the outcome of strong evangelistic work from men such Cecil Abercrombie, J.A. Dennis, Walt Shelnuttt and others. Western and Northern congregations that had similar leanings were subsequently identified, usually by word of mouth, by men such as Harry Cobb and Sam Dick. Correspondence with these congregations often led to successful dialogue and fellowship.

Current evangelical efforts include the nations of Malawi, Nigeria, Mozambique, Mexico, Belize, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, the Philippines, the island of Malta, England and Germany. Each one of the congregations, in which evangelistic efforts are conducted, are encouraged to "fulfill their own responsibilities to God and man, using the Bible as their guide in faith and practice, and working out each doctrinal issue by intensive collective Bible study, discussion and prayer."<sup>275</sup>

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<sup>275</sup> Cobb interview.

#### IV. THE NON-ALIGNED, NON-CLASS CHURCHES OF CHRIST AND DIVORCE

“He beat me.” Kaye Oldheart’s hands trembled as she recalled her marriage to David.<sup>276</sup> She continued, “He never touched the kids; but, he never provided for them either. He was always gone, leaving us with very little money for the necessities of life.” Her married life of seventeen years had been rocked with lies, deceit and infidelity. She rose to pour another cup of coffee and recalled, “He seemed to have had a lot of friends, girl friends, I mean.” There was no anger or animosity in her voice, just a sadness that permeated every aspect of her countenance. She then smiled weakly and said, “I did love him; still do, but, I love God more.” With these words Oldheart began to tell her story of abuse, neglect and terror during her marriage to David.

A devout Christian, Oldheart was baptized at twelve and married David, her college sweetheart, at twenty two. During her married years, she faithfully attended services at the local congregation of the Church of Christ, usually without her husband. Within two years they had a son and within three more years another. Employed as a social worker, Oldheart was intimately familiar with spousal abuse and the consequences of remaining in such a marriage. She finally divorced David after finding him in their own bed with a family friend.

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<sup>276</sup> Oldheart, interview by author, November 9, 2002. Oldheart wishes to remain anonymous.

Her divorce was painful for her and her sons, leaving them in an impoverished state for over five years. Her credit ruined, her job providing minimal support, Oldheart maintained her family “as best as she could.”<sup>277</sup> She never remarried. When probed for her reasons for remaining single, she replied “the Bible teaches that when a man and woman marry, they marry for life.”<sup>278</sup> She reiterated that she had plenty of opportunities to leave during the marriage, but “her faith demanded otherwise.” She then rapidly quoted from memory Genesis 2:24: “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.”<sup>279</sup> Oldheart explained that to “cleave means to become so tightly joined together that nothing, but God, can divide a relationship or marriage.” She continued by stating that the New Testament does not sanction divorce and remarriage. She confidently quoted Romans 7:3&4:

For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from the law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man.

When asked about her own divorce, she replied “although God still recognizes my marriage to David, I am allowed to leave him, but I must remain unmarried.” She concluded her comments by quoting from First Corinthians 7:15: “But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace.” She had obviously considered these scriptures for a very long

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<sup>277</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>279</sup> Oldheart quotes from the King James Version of the Holy Bible. This convention will be maintained throughout this paper.

time, going on to say she had been taught these verses by her parents and had heard them all of her life “in Church.”

Oldheart’s determination to maintain her family and, when faced with no other alternative, to divorce her spouse and remain unmarried, were both significantly shaped by her affiliation with the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ. This view of lifelong marriage without divorce and remarriage is one of the main issues of distinction advocated by the congregations in Randolph County. The religious fortitude of Oldheart, under extremely difficult circumstances, provides a valuable perspective on the shaping of personal behavior by religious belief—in this case, the predominant doctrinal values held by the members of this group. What kind of teaching prompts this kind of resolve in a person? Do all members of this group maintain such strict views regarding marriage, divorce and remarriage? How are prominent trends, espoused by influential thinkers within the mainstream Churches of Christ, adopted or rejected by local congregations? Answering these questions might also provide us with some further insight into how doctrinal changes occurred within this group.

The deeply conservative mores of this belief system shaped the religious atmosphere of Oldheart’s upbringing. She spoke of a “loveless, bitter marriage that had no chance of reconciliation without her husband going through a life changing experience.” During those bitter years of marriage, Oldheart hoped and prayed that he would “obey the gospel and fulfill his role as husband and father.” Her sons, equally miserable with the situation at home, sought solace with other family members, sometimes spending substantial amounts of time away from home. Through it all she

remained steadfastly convinced of her need to maintain “spiritual balance” by living with her husband and enduring her hardships as an outcome of her “growth toward spiritual maturity.”<sup>280</sup>

Citing several Old and New Testament passages, to reinforce their case, the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ view remarriage as a man made device, unsanctioned by God. These doctrinal standards are maintained through a variety of ways. Preachers from local congregations reinforce the teachings of parents, grandparents and extended families. These preachers are monitored by the members of the local congregation in order to determine if they are truly speaking “as the oracles of God.”<sup>281</sup> This monitoring procedure is based on the Biblical principle of searching “the scriptures daily” in order to determine “whether those things were so.”<sup>282</sup> Visiting preachers and evangelists are likewise subject to this same type of close scrutiny.<sup>283</sup>

Divorce, such as in the case of Oldheart, is viewed by members of this group as having to do with the secular world. However, they sometimes utilize ‘worldly laws’ in order to alleviate problems within the family allowing them to reach some stability rather than being rendered ineffective by marital strife and violence.<sup>284</sup> Until the late 1970s, the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ recognized divorce only in the secular sense,

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<sup>280</sup> Oldheart interview.

<sup>281</sup> 1 Peter 4:11.

<sup>282</sup> Acts 17:11.

<sup>283</sup> Harry Cobb, *Teaching the Master’s Message*, (Birmingham, AL: privately printed, 1980), 12.

<sup>284</sup> Gene Frost and Lloyd Moyer, *Frost-Moyer Exchange on Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage* (Cullman, AL: PS Printing Service, 1966), 7.

not religiously.<sup>285</sup> Oldheart, realizing she had to protect herself and her sons, availed herself of the secular law of divorce. However, she demonstrated her belief in the spiritual law of marriage, dissolvable only by death, by choosing not to remarry.

When Oldheart divorced in 1987, she added to the total number of divorces occurring within the United States during the last few decades. Statistically, the picture of marriage in America has not been very good. According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census, “the fastest growing marital status category from 1970 to 1994 was divorced persons.”<sup>286</sup> In fact, the numbers are quite staggering. The number of divorced adults quadrupled from 4.3 million in 1970 to 17.4 million in 1994. In 1970, 3% of all people over 18 years of age were divorced. In 1994, that number had climbed to 9%.<sup>287</sup> Furthermore, studies show that in 1994 the United States had the lowest percentage of married adults (58 percent) in its history.<sup>288</sup> The percentage of men in their thirties who have never married has tripled since 1970, largely because many couples elect to live together outside of the marriage bond.<sup>289</sup> Sadly, of first marriages ending in divorce,

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<sup>285</sup> Harry Cobb, *Excerpt From a Letter Regarding Fellowship of Those in Digression* (Wedowee, AL: Privately Published, 1981), 2.

<sup>286</sup> Arlene Saluter, ‘Marital Status and Living Arrangements: March 1994,’ *U.S. Bureau of the Census*, March 1996; series P20\_484, p. vi..

<sup>287</sup> *Ibid.*, table A\_1

<sup>288</sup> Paul A. Nakonezny, Robert D. Schull and Joseph Lee Rodgers, "The Effect of No Fault Divorce Law on the Divorce Rate Across the 50 States and Its Relation to Income, Education and Religiosity," *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, (1995), 57:477-488.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*

many ended in the first 3 to 5 years.<sup>290</sup> Census information indicates that for first marriages ending in divorce among women aged 25 to 29, the median length of marriage before divorce in 1990 was 3.4 years.<sup>291</sup>

Divorce rates are even more startling when broken down sectionally. The Associated Press computed divorce statistics from data supplied by the U.S. Census Bureau and the National Center for Health. They showed that the highest divorce rates were found in the Bible Belt with "Tennessee, Arkansas, Alabama and Oklahoma" in "the Top Five in frequency of divorce."<sup>292</sup> They further noted that "the divorce rates in these conservative states are roughly 50 percent above the national average" of 4.2 divorces per 1000 people.<sup>293</sup> Nine southern states including Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina and Texas averaged 5.1 divorces per 1000 people. This compares to nine states in the Northeast (Connecticut, Massachusetts, Maine, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and Vermont) which averaged only 3.5 divorces per 1000 people.<sup>294</sup> Some of the proposed factors that contribute to a high divorce rate in the Bible Belt, relative to Northeastern states are:

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<sup>290</sup> U. S. Bureau of the Census-1992, "Marriage, divorce, and remarriage in the 1990s" *Current Population Reports* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1992), 4.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid. 5.

<sup>292</sup> "Bible belt has nation's worse divorce rate," CNN.com, 1999\_NOV\_12. Online at: <http://www.cnn.com/US/9911/12/divorce.belt.states.ap/> (Cache copy as of 2000\_FEB\_11. The page has since expired.) Also, for current data see: "Births, Marriages, Divorces and Deaths: Provisional Data for 2005," *CDC National Vital Statistics Reports*, 54:20, July 21, 2006.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid.

More couples enter their first marriage at a younger age. Average household incomes are lower (OK and AR rate 46th and 47th in the U.S.) They have a lower percentage of Roman Catholics, a denomination that does not recognize divorce.<sup>295</sup>

Although these numbers are quite alarming, they do not reflect the very low percentages of divorce among the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ in Randolph County. Likewise, most members of this group do not marry early and are often from the middle class.<sup>296</sup>

Another reason for the increase in divorces from 1970 to 1994 was the institution of new divorce laws. Laws written during the 1960s, such as the no-fault divorce, allowed the marriage contract to be voided with the affirmation by one party that the marriage was “irreconcilable.” In 1969, California was the first to adopt no-fault divorce and within four years at least thirty-six states had made it an option.<sup>297</sup> By 1985, each of the remaining states had adopted some type of statute allowing for divorce on grounds of incompatibility. These new laws created a situation where divorce was very convenient.

The issue of divorce and remarriage did not become a concern for the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ until 1935,<sup>298</sup> when divorce was becoming more common throughout the country. Up until 1931, “divorces were generally difficult to

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<sup>295</sup> David Crary, "Deep in the Bible Belt, a counterattack on the nation's worst divorce rate," Detroit News, 1999\_NOV\_11, at: <http://detnews.com/1999/religion/>

<sup>296</sup> Harry Cobb interview.

<sup>297</sup> Nancy F. Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 205.

<sup>298</sup> Sermons and articles (such as in the *Apostolic Way*) extolled the virtue of marrying for life, but offered little discussion about divorce and no discussion about remarriage. See: *Apostolic Way* (May 1, 1914), unsigned letter.



acquire.”<sup>299</sup> It was at that time “the Reno divorce<sup>300</sup> became a national institution,” allowing “a person to obtain a divorce after residing in the state for six weeks.”<sup>301</sup>

Among the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ, the primary concern was not so much with secular divorce, because many realized it might prove necessary to divorce in order to protect a spouse and/or children; rather, the issue was whether one or both within the estranged relationship could scripturally remarry someone else. According to the beliefs of this group, remarriage would put them into an adulterous relationship.<sup>302</sup>

Other religious groups in the United States, such as the Catholic Church, saw the 1920s and 30s as a period of “relaxed sexual mores—broken homes, illegitimacy, single-parent families, delinquency and runaway sexual disease” and divorce became the “catalyst for the growth of these problems.”<sup>303</sup> Many fundamentalists echoed these views, which they felt were “more important . . . than their theological differences with, and nativist prejudices against, Roman Catholics.”<sup>304</sup> But the conservative views of the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ were more concerned with “who could marry” rather than “could a couple divorce.”<sup>305</sup>

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<sup>299</sup> L. Brent Bozell III, ‘Divorce as History in Reno,’ CNSNEWS, 2002-May-14.

<sup>300</sup> Named after its place of origin, Reno, Nevada. *Ibid.*

<sup>301</sup> *Ibid.* See also: Patricia Leigh Brown, “Some in Reno Say Do Not Put Asunder Artifacts of Divorce,” *New York Times*, 22 April 2002.

<sup>302</sup> Philip E. Keen, *What God Hath Joined Together . . .* (Prescott, AZ: Privately Published, 1988), 8.

<sup>303</sup> Charles R. Morris, *American Catholic: The Saints and Sinners Who Built America’s Most Powerful Church* (New York: Random House, 1997), 154.

<sup>304</sup> Betty A. DeBerg, *Ungodly Women: Gender and the First Wave of American Fundamentalism* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2000), 71.

<sup>305</sup> Keen, *What God Hath Joined Together*, 10.

The mainline Churches of Christ's historical perspective on this topic differed drastically from that of the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ. Oldheart's mother told her that the "preachers of her time" had taught that some within the Restoration Movement "differed with them on divorce and remarriage."<sup>306</sup> Oldheart had heard of some of the earlier founders of the Restoration Movement and had concluded, in conjunction with many others, that the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ did not have the same religious values as men such as Alexander Campbell and Walter Scott.<sup>307</sup>

The divorce and remarriage debate began rather early in the Restoration Movement. In a letter entitled "Divorces," Alexander Campbell was asked his opinion about a man that "had obtained a divorce, and married again."<sup>308</sup> The man in question was a believer and his first wife was not. She left him and he married again. They needed a quick reply "that we may have the action of your opinion upon the minds of the brethren before it becomes unavoidable, under the circumstances, for the church to act."<sup>309</sup> The letter's authors required a swift answer before the church withdrew<sup>310</sup> from the man in question. Campbell's reply was that he was "free from the marriage bond and could scripturally remarry."<sup>311</sup> Campbell noted in his postscript that Walter Scott

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<sup>306</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>307</sup> These issues included divorce and remarriage, missionary societies, Bible colleges and located preachers.

<sup>308</sup> "Divorces," *Millennial Harbinger*, 1834.

<sup>309</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>310</sup> Withdrawn or disfellowshipped means to be placed in a situation where the unrepentant sinner is refused the opportunity to publically partake of any of the work in the church. They cannot preach, teach or occupy any role of authority. The guilty person is not accepted back into the church without repentance.

<sup>311</sup> "Reply," *Millennial Harbinger*, 1834.

concurrent “in the judgement expressed in the remarks, both on the case submitted and on the decision of such cases by our great Apostle Paul.”<sup>312</sup> Campbell’s stand on the subject of divorce and remarriage has also been acknowledged as accepted doctrine among many in the mainline Churches of Christ.<sup>313</sup>

Barton W. Stone was not as succinct as Campbell regarding issues on divorce and remarriage, noting in his *Address to the Churches of Christ*: “It is of course appropriate for each of us to follow his own conviction in reference to any of these, but it is not all right to make a creed out of them.” Stone makes a plea for unity among those within the Restoration movement that “Christians may differ without dividing.” By de-emphasizing such issues as divorce and remarriage, instrumental music and Sunday School, Stone emphasized diversity of doctrine stating: “We who profess to stand upon the Bible alone, and contend that opinions of truth should not be made terms of fellowship—shall we be intolerant towards each other because we may differ in our opinions? Forbid it, Heaven!”<sup>314</sup> Stone would write little else regarding his views on this subject.

Throughout the years, since the 1850s, the mainline Churches of Christ supported the idea of not allowing members to divorce and remarry unless the divorce was for adultery or, in some cases, abandonment by a non-believing spouse. Infrequently, there would arise one or another that would propose some differing view, most kept to the status quo. In 1955, two prominent mainline Church of Christ preachers, E.C. Fuqua and

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<sup>312</sup> Ibid.

<sup>313</sup> James D. Bales, *Shall We Splinter* (Searcy, AR: Watertown Publishers, 1989), 2-5.

<sup>314</sup> Mathes, James M., ed. *Works of Elder B. W. Stone to Which is Added a Few Discourses and Sermons* (Cincinnati: Moore, Wilstach, Keys & Co., 1859; reprint, Rosemead, Calif.: Old Paths Book Club, 1953), 158-159.

Thomas B. Warren debated on the subject of Divorce and Remarriage with Fuqua contending “that all non-Christians are amenable to civil law only and are not under the law of Christ. As a result non-Christians are not under the marriage or divorce laws of Jesus.” Warren, on the other hand, disputed this position, upholding the principle that all are under “God’s marriage laws.”<sup>315</sup> Most stood with Warren and the issue did not become too divisive until later.

It was not until the 1980s when controversies regarding divorce and remarriage would arise to cause divisions within many congregations of the Churches of Christ. In 1988, problems arose in the newly established congregation at Belen, New Mexico. One of the members had come forward concerned with her current marital status. She claimed that her husband had been married twice before and was divorced for a cause other than fornication. Seeking clarification regarding God’s marriage laws from Homer Hailey and Ron Holbrook, the congregation asked them both to present their views and it was at that time that Hailey revealed similar views as Fuqua regarding non-Christians and marriage. Calling his views the “Law of the Gentile,” Hailey defended his views in the *Guardian of Truth*<sup>316</sup> periodical as well as writing a widely read book entitled *The Divorced And Remarried Who Would Come To God*.<sup>317</sup> Holbrook on the other hand presented a dissenting view which was then championed by the *Guardian of Truth* and other periodicals. Although differences continue on this subject among mainline Churches of

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<sup>315</sup> Thomas B. Warren & E. C. Fuqua, *The Warren-Fuqua Debate* (Fort Worth, TX: J. E. Snelson Printing Co., 1954), 2.

<sup>316</sup> *Guardian of Truth*, November 17, 1988.

<sup>317</sup> Homer Hailey, *The Divorced And Remarried Who Would Come To God* (Las Vegas, NV: Nevada Publications, 1991).

Christ and among some members within the non-aligned, non-class congregations in the West and North, none of these debates affected the non-aligned, non-class congregations in Randolph County.

Prior to the mid-1930s, the issue of divorce and remarriage apparently did not generate much discussion or division in the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ. Until 1936, sermons and articles appearing in a variety of periodicals such as the *White Horse*, *The Apostolic Way* and *The Church Messenger* are devoid of many references on this topic. In fact, all information points to them maintaining a strict adherence to no remarriage for any cause and remaining uniform in their treatment of the issue.

The question posed by many within the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ, during the 1930s was: “What is it that makes a person ready for marriage?”<sup>318</sup> Can a man or woman remarry after they have been already married? The primary answer given by the leadership of these congregations was that “the presence of one wife or one husband prevents readiness to marry.”<sup>319</sup> Their literal interpretation of the Bible held “that the death of a wife or husband is the only basis for remarriage.”<sup>320</sup> Hence, the only people eligible for marriage were those that “had never married or were widows.”<sup>321</sup> These questions fermented until a Gospel meeting in Oklahoma brought them into the open.

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<sup>318</sup> W. S. Smith, *A Christian Looks at Divorce* (Purcell, OK: Privately Published, 1936), 6.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid.

<sup>321</sup> Sermon given by Herbert Hallet at East Lake Non-aligned, noChurch of Christ, 1957. Copy in author’s possession.

In 1935, Evangelist J. A. Dennis of Union City, Georgia began conducting a well attended series of meetings<sup>322</sup> in Oklahoma. Dennis was a “good preacher having a strong delivery and a quick mind.”<sup>323</sup> At the conclusion of the meeting, Brother Dennis enthusiastically encouraged everyone to attend another series of meetings beginning at a sister congregation located a short distance down the road.<sup>324</sup> This meeting was to be conducted by Brother Paul S. Knight of Booneville, Arkansas, whom Brother Dennis announced “taught the same truths . . . from God’s Holy Word” as he.<sup>325</sup> Homer Holland<sup>326</sup> described Brother Knight as “very intelligent, a dynamic speaker with a fiery temperament.”<sup>327</sup> Brother Dennis departed and those that attended the other meeting were quickly assured by Brother Knight that “**he did not**”<sup>328</sup> teach the same doctrine as Brother Dennis.”<sup>329</sup> Brother Knight then explained that they primarily differed over “divorce and

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<sup>322</sup> A ‘meeting’ consists of either a full week or weekend of night time church services in which an evangelist or preacher from another congregation teaches or preaches before the entire congregation.

<sup>323</sup> Luree Benefield, Wedowee, Alabama, interviewed by author, October 5, 2002.

<sup>324</sup> Members of the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ will often travel great distances “in order to visit and listen to a preacher.” This allows the membership of different congregations to maintain a close-knit relationship. Distances traveled can include several hundred miles. Harry Cobb, *Excerpt From a Letter*, 12-14.

<sup>325</sup> Harry Cobb, *Remembrances On Issue Of Divorce And Remarriage* (Wedowee, AL: Privately Published, 2002), 1.

<sup>326</sup> Homer Holland, preacher from Selma, Alabama. Holland was a close friend to Paul Knight and to J. A. Dennis.

<sup>327</sup> Homer Holland, interviewed by author, October 6, 2002.

<sup>328</sup> Emphasis is the speaker’s.

<sup>329</sup> Holland, interview.

remarriage” which he “considered to be unscriptural in all cases.”<sup>330</sup> Thus began the debate over this issue that spanned and affected the “entire brotherhood.”<sup>331</sup>

Bryant Wilson, age 81, remembers that prior to an oral debate held at the Napoleon Church of Christ, Randolph County, Alabama, all the “old time preachers like Uncle Jim Langley, Brother Walt Shelnut and Brother Bill Spradlin taught that there was one man, one woman for life.”<sup>332</sup> He noted that these brethren held their position, never wavering “from the truth, even after the debate.”<sup>333</sup> The debate referred to by Wilson was between J. A. Dennis and J. P. Watson held May 17<sup>th</sup> through May 21<sup>st</sup>, 1936, in response to the earlier debate in Oklahoma. Their debate centered around the proposition that

The Scriptures teach that under the gospel dispensation whosoever (husband or wife) puts away his or her companion, and marries another while the first companion lives, commits adultery, and that such alien must repent of this, even as other sins, to be a scriptural subject for baptism.<sup>334</sup>

In other words, in order for someone to be “a scriptural subject for baptism,” they had to renounce their second marriage. J. A. Dennis and J. P. Watson’s debate was applicable to both the Christian and non Christian. The non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ maintained (and still do) that God recognizes the marriages of all whether Christian or non-Christian.

Watson contended that the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ have long held that both sinner and saint are equally responsible for the vows they make to God.

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<sup>330</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>331</sup> J. A. Dennis, “Watson-Dennis Debate,” *The Church Messenger*, April 1936, 5. ‘Brotherhood’ is a scriptural term (1 Peter 2:17) used to describe the Church as a whole.

<sup>332</sup> Bryant Wilson, interviewed by author, November 2, 2002.

<sup>333</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>334</sup> Dennis, “Watson-Dennis Debate.”

Watson cited the events surrounding the death of John the Baptist as proof that God recognized the marriage between a man and woman who were not “God’s people.” He noted that in Mark, chapter six, verses seventeen and eighteen, there is an allusion to just such an event:

17 For Herod himself had sent forth and laid hold upon John, and bound him in prison for Herodias’ sake, his brother Philip’s wife: for he had married her.  
18 For John had said unto Herod, It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother’s wife.

Herod Antipas, an Idumaeen (not of Jewish descent),<sup>335</sup> had married his brother’s (Herod Philip I) wife, while his brother was still living. John the Baptist condemned Herod Antipas, and was executed. The key to this passage is the fact that all of those involved in these marriages were not Jewish; they were Gentiles.<sup>336</sup> Gentiles during this period were not bound under the law of Moses as were the Jews. John the Baptist, a Jew, condemned Herod Antipas, a Gentile, of a crime that was not just Jewish but seen as applicable for all mankind.

The second passage Watson<sup>337</sup> used to defend his position is found in Paul’s First letter to the Corinthian Church, chapter six verses nine through eleven:

9 Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind,  
10 Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.  
11 And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.

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<sup>335</sup> William Smith, *Smith’s Dictionary of the Bible* ( Nashville, TN: The Southwestern Company, 1966), 237.

<sup>336</sup> Gentiles is defined as non-Jewish.

<sup>337</sup> Harry Cobb, *Excerpt from a Letter*, 3.



In this passage, Paul writes that the unrighteous include fornicators and adulterers, both of which are “sexual sins.”<sup>338</sup> In particular, adultery refers to sexual intercourse between two, one or both of which must be married.<sup>339</sup> Therefore, Paul reasons that “some of you were in these positions . . . , but now you are forgiven” after your obedience to the Gospel.<sup>340</sup> This list was exclusive, including only those that were non Christians. Watson further argued that obedience to the Gospel included repentance or the changing of one’s “mind regarding the course they have been pursuing and the attitudes and dispositions formerly characterizing them.”<sup>341</sup> In other words, they had to leave their adulterous relationship in order to be forgiven.<sup>342</sup>

Wilson clearly remembers that the debate between Dennis and Watson failed to “sway any of the brethren in attendance toward accepting divorce and remarriage,” the position held by J. A. Dennis.<sup>343</sup> These brethren, with their literal Biblical views, had a far-reaching influence, traveling great distances to teach and hold gospel meetings or revivals. Those in attendance and other prominent preachers such as Clarence Teurman, editor of the *Apostolic Way*, Charles Thomas of Liberty, Kentucky, Dewey Shaw of Texas and M. E. Busby of Thomaston, Georgia regularly traveled among the non-aligned,

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<sup>338</sup> P. W. Stonestreet, “Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage,” *Gospel Advocate*, June 14, 1945, 315.

<sup>339</sup> Philip E. Keen, *What God Hath Joined Together*, 22.

<sup>340</sup> Sermon given by Sam Dick of Cave City, Kentucky, at West Broad Street Non-aligned, non-class Church of Christ, Wedowee, Alabama March 24, 1986. Copy in the author’s possession.

<sup>341</sup> Guy N. Woods, *Questions and Answers, Vol. II* (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Co., 1986), 228.

<sup>342</sup> Sermon by Sam Dick.

<sup>343</sup> Bryant Wilson interview.

non-class Churches of Christ, teaching that men and women should “think hard about your lives together in the Lord.”<sup>344</sup> These men were enthusiastically accepted among these congregations and encouraged many young men to continue teaching the same things they taught. Even though these men were highly respected, they were nonetheless stringently examined by each congregation in order to determine their stand on doctrinal issues like divorce and remarriage. Each autonomous congregation had specific information they wanted to know about each speaker. This was done in order to “try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.”<sup>345</sup> If these evangelists failed to meet the Biblical standards held by the congregation, they were not permitted to teach from the pulpit. Many men, who had either changed or softened their stand on the subject, like J. A. Dennis, Cecil Abercrombie and others, often referred to as ‘digressives’,<sup>346</sup> were informed that they would not be called upon to speak or perform any other activity at the local congregation because of the “liberal stand that they took on divorce and remarriage.”<sup>347</sup> Because these men held the position that a person could scripturally remarry, they were refused fellowship by the congregation from that point forward.

Although Oldheart had never heard of men such as Dewey, Thomas, Busby and Shelnutt, she nonetheless felt their influence in the teaching she received from her

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<sup>344</sup> Ibid.

<sup>345</sup> First John 4:1.

<sup>346</sup> ‘Digressives’ is a name given to those that have turned away from many of the doctrines of the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ. This group is relatively small, maintaining about forty congregations under their influence.

<sup>347</sup> Harry Cobb, *Remembrances*, 3.

grandparents, parents and fellow church members.<sup>348</sup> These men had visited her congregation, whose beginning dated to the 1880s, and had taught on “many hard and meaty subjects.”<sup>349</sup> But congregations did not accept what these men taught as the “Gospel, without first checking to see if what they taught corresponded with the scriptures.”<sup>350</sup>

Oldheart and those she affiliated with independently developed their own interpretations of the scriptures. They were literalists in their interpretations, preferring to “go against the grain” even if it meant losing some of their best known preachers.

Oldheart and others like her were constantly reminded “to obey God rather than men.”<sup>351</sup>

They sang songs such as “How Firm a Foundation” which in the first verse says:

How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,  
Is laid for your faith in His excellent  
Word! What more can He say, than to you He hath said,  
To you who for refuge to  
Jesus have fled?<sup>352</sup>

Songs such as these reinforced their beliefs in the Bible as the supreme standard upon which they should base their hopes and lives. From the pulpit, they were constantly reminded to

Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be  
ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.<sup>353</sup>

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<sup>348</sup> Oldheart’s mother, interviewed by author, November 9, 2002.

<sup>349</sup> Ibid.

<sup>350</sup> Oldheart interview.

<sup>351</sup> Acts 5:29.

<sup>352</sup> George Keith, “How Firm a Foundation,” in Ellis J. Crum, editor, *Sacred Selections for the Church* (Kendallville, Indiana: Sacred Selections, 1960), no. 214.

<sup>353</sup> 2 Timothy 2:15.

All these things reinforced their determination to closely adhere to the scriptures. Oldheart's resolve to maintain her single status was a result of the teaching she received from her family and the local congregation, constant reminders from the pulpit and in song and the determination and resolve that historically affected each of the local congregations.

Another aspect of the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ was their continued appeal for equality among the sexes. Long before the "Women's Liberation Movement," congregations of this group had held to the Biblical principal that "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."<sup>354</sup> All congregations in this group promoted the independence of women within the constraints of scripture in the same manner in which men are limited in what they can and cannot do based on the scriptures. All viewed the Biblical restrictions on divorce and remarriage as equally stringent on both male and female. Neither sex received special consideration above the other. This no doubt empowered women, such as Oldheart, to stand firm in their convictions, content in the knowledge that they are just as important as men in "God's scheme of things." They viewed women in both the Old and New Testament as examples of people who stood up for the things they believed in.

But, situations connected to the divorce and remarriage debate continued to affect Oldheart's congregation. During the 1950s and 60s, schisms began to form within the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ. During this time, there arose those that

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<sup>354</sup> Galatians 3:28.

allowed remarriage if one partner was guilty of fornication or sexual immorality. This group appealed to a specific passage in Matthew in defense of their position:

And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.<sup>355</sup>

They contended that Jesus Christ had advocated an ‘exception’ for divorce and subsequent remarriage based on the sin of fornication.<sup>356</sup> The definition for the word ‘fornication’ flared in many further debates among those advocating divorce and remarriage. Some defined it as any kind of sexual immorality or sin,<sup>357</sup> some saw it specifically relating to adultery,<sup>358</sup> and some proclaimed that it should be defined as sexual relations between a man and woman that have never been married.<sup>359</sup> Further debates erupted as to whether Jesus meant that there was an exception only for those who found out early in marriage that their spouse had sexual relations before marriage or whether this “exception” was intended for sexual immorality throughout the marriage. These schisms in theological ideologies resulted in many congregations “disfellowshipping” or withdrawing fellowship from each other.

Oldheart’s congregation, in conjunction with many others, rejected these ideas. Reiterating their stance of equality under New Testament Law, these congregations required that all participants in the marriage bond remain married until death. Fierce

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<sup>355</sup> Matthew 19:9.

<sup>356</sup> J. A. Dennis, *The Dennis-Smith Debate on Divorce and Remarriage* (Atlanta, GA: Privately Published, 1953), 2.

<sup>357</sup> Ibid.

<sup>358</sup> “The Truth,” *The Church Messenger*, July, 1954.

<sup>359</sup> W. S. Smith, *Except For Fornication* (Purcell, OK: Privately Published, 1956), 1.

debates arose throughout the Brotherhood with one congregation after another siding with a particular preacher and holding to their beliefs. These schisms were no better exemplified than the debate between Paul Knight and the “congregations of the South.”<sup>360</sup>

Interestingly, men such as Paul S. Knight, who within a few years after his debate with J. A. Dennis had a radical departure from his earlier position, eventually abandoned their views on divorce and remarriage and pleaded for the “exception.” Knight then went further with his views, promoting a system of withdrawing from other congregations, according to their acceptance or rejection of his teaching of the “exception clause.”<sup>361</sup> Utilizing his paper, *The Church Messenger*, during the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, as a vehicle to push his agenda, Knight succeeded in alienating over seventy congregations from the brotherhood with his views on divorce and remarriage. With only a little over one hundred and fifty congregations within the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ, this represented a substantial number. Interestingly, most of the congregations siding with Knight and his teachings were located on the western side of the Mississippi River, prompting many brethren to look at this as a split between the East and West. Although his divisive teachings went beyond the divorce and remarriage debate, Knight’s appeal to many congregations was his exception clause. Within a short while “after the

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<sup>360</sup> A term used by Paul Knight and others to designate his primary antagonists. Harry Cobb Interview.

<sup>361</sup> The exception clause refers to the view that Jesus taught, during a sermon recorded in Matthew 19:9, an exception to lifelong marriage based upon marital infidelity. The offending spouse would then be allowed to remarry whomever they wanted.

disfellowshipping began,”<sup>362</sup> very little propaganda from Paul Knight reached the Eastern congregations and “what little that did, failed to sway the opinions of the congregations”<sup>363</sup> with which Oldheart affiliated.

Preachers and teachers within the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ began to respond with a torrent of pamphlets, sermons and letters expounding their position on this “important subject.”<sup>364</sup> Most taught that Matthew chapter nineteen was not applicable today. They reasoned that Jesus lived and died under the Old Testament and that he was responding to questions asked by the Jews. In this case, all passages applied to the Jews living under the laws of the Old Testament and did not have anything to do with the laws of the New Testament.<sup>365</sup> Men such as Charlie Shelnutt, Onward Holmes, Alvin Williams and others traveled great distances teaching the same message they had always taught, but with appended comments on Matthew chapter nineteen. These men approached their responsibility with the concern that they “may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour: Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts.”<sup>366</sup> Their intent was to “speak rather plainly ... so that those old enough to understand will be able to understand.”<sup>367</sup>

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<sup>362</sup> Harry Cobb, *Remembrances*, 4.

<sup>363</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>364</sup> Sermon given by Carmen Watson of Houston, Texas, at Taylor’s Crossroads Non-aligned, noChurch of Christ, Wedowee, Alabama, June 18, 1966. Copy in the author’s possession.

<sup>365</sup> W. S. Smith, *Is It Lawful?* (Purcell, OK: Privately Published, 1962), 1.

<sup>366</sup> II Peter 3:2-3.

<sup>367</sup> Herbert Hallett sermon, circa 1960s.

Divorce rates among the non-aligned, non-class congregations have remained low. In fact, during a recent discussion, it was determined that from 1970 to 2000 there had been approximately one divorce per congregation every 15 years.<sup>368</sup> That equates to a divorce rate of .02 per 1000 members per year. This is an amazing number when compared to a divorce rate of 5.1 divorces per 1000 per year in Alabama. Harry Cobb, an evangelist among the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ, posits that those divorces that occurred within the congregations often represented unions where one of the spouses was an un-believer. Those that were members often stayed in the congregation after the split. Rarely did any leave the congregation before they divorced.<sup>369</sup>

Furthermore, upon Paul Knight's death in the late 1980s, "many of the congregations affiliated with him, returned to fellowship with their brethren from the east."<sup>370</sup> Preachers and teachers that continued to maintain the 'exception clause' began to create their own congregations.<sup>371</sup> Those congregations were never recognized or fellowshipped by the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ. Others that advocated divorce and remarriage, such as J. A. Dennis, responded to the determination of the Southern non-aligned, non-class congregations by questioning and debating their

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<sup>368</sup> Evangelist Harry Cobb keeps very detailed records of congregations within the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ. His unpublished (copy in author's possession) "*Where the Saints Meet*" lists congregations and many members, with their families. This is continuously updated, providing a listing of those that are within fellowship. Furthermore, this figure based upon discussion with evangelists (such as Harry Cobb, Sam Dick, Danny Abercrombie and others) traveling within the brotherhood for the last 20 years. Interviewed by author from October 6 to November 10, 2002.

<sup>369</sup> Harry Cobb interview.

<sup>370</sup> Homer Holland interview.

<sup>371</sup> Ibid.



positions. Shortly after his death, J. A. Dennis' widow told Brother Charlie Shelnett that Dennis had questioned "what if I was wrong? What if I have led all of those people astray?"<sup>372</sup>

The fears of Brother Dennis were equally important to many other preachers and teachers. These men did not receive a weekly stipend or paycheck for their work in the church. They did receive expense money to cover their travel or reimbursement for missing work in order to hold meetings. These men deemed it their responsibility to teach. Therefore, they were not unduly influenced by a congregation to teach things popular with the members. However, they did have to explain, counsel, and teach on the subject when families were affected by the divorce of a family member or friend that was a non-member. Reasons for divorce and remarriage had to be examined and discussed among the non-aligned, non-class congregations in order to satisfactorily answer the members' needs.

There are many theories to explain the reasons why many seek to obtain divorces today. People may divorce because of incompatibility, "they just don't get along." They may divorce because of economics, "I can have a lot more money because of the settlement." They may divorce because of lust, "I have found someone new." Or they may divorce, "because he beat me." These reasons have been examined by sociologists, psychologists, anthropologists and historians for many years, but one question has failed to be adequately answered, "Why do people stay together?"

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<sup>372</sup> Charlie Shelnett, *Divorce and Remarriage* (Atlanta, GA: Privately Published, 1972), 3.

Recent literature by prominent sociologists and historians has attempted to provide secular reasons for maintaining marriages. Two authors, Linda Waite of the University of Chicago and Norval Glenn of the University of Texas, note that “both men and women ... experience substantial benefits from the average marriage, living longer, healthier, wealthier, and happier lives as a result. Neither remarriage nor cohabitation appears to offer the same benefits.”<sup>373</sup> What really packs a punch, though, are their findings concerning the young. “Children raised by their own two married parents,” write Waite and Glenn, “are less likely to drop out of school, commit crimes or suffer from child abuse. They are more likely to attend selective colleges and achieve higher-status jobs. Children whose parents stay married have lower rates of infant mortality and childhood illness, and actually have significantly longer life expectancies than children whose parents do not get and stay married. For children, coming from an intact marriage is associated with reduced rates of mental illness, suicide, depression, alcohol abuse and illegal drug use.”<sup>374</sup> No doubt, these conclusions seem controversial and maybe radical, but, these conclusions are verified by a number of other pertinent studies.<sup>375</sup> Marriage, divorce and remarriage as a social phenomena, has exploded as a matter of distinct immediate concern.

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<sup>373</sup> Linda Waite, Norval Glenn and Others, *Why Marriage Matters: Twenty-One Conclusions From the Social Sciences* (New York: Institute for American Values, 2002), 2.

<sup>374</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>375</sup> See: Kristin Anderson Moore, et al., 2002. “Marriage from a Child’s Perspective: How Does Family Structure Affect Children and What Can We Do About It?”, *Child Trends Research Brief* (Washington, DC: Child Trends) (June): 1 (available at <http://www.childtrends.org/PDF/MarriageRB602.pdf>) and Matthew D. Bramlett & William D. Mosher, 2001. “First Marriage Dissolution, Divorce, and Remarriage: United States,” *CDC Advance Data* no. 323 (May 31): 1.

Oldheart's reply to the question 'why do people stay together?' was just as distinct, "because we teach that marriage is for life and it should not be taken lightly. Men and women should choose someone that they truly love and someone with the same values and commitment to God and His word." She then noted, "I failed in my marriage, because I did not approach it with the right commitment. I loved David. But, I did not listen to my parents or my grandmother and marry someone in the church." She then quoted from Second Corinthians chapter six, verses fourteen through sixteen:

Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Oldheart looked up from her cup of coffee and concluded that she "would teach her children and grandchildren the importance of putting God first in your life."<sup>376</sup> It is this concern and teaching from mother and father to child and grandchild that has kept the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ dogmatically committed to the sanctity of marriage.

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<sup>376</sup> Oldheart interview.

## V. THE NON-ALIGNED, NON-CLASS CHURCHES OF CHRIST AND PACIFISM

... I think we must first inquire whether military service is proper at all for Christians ... Shall it be held lawful to make an occupation of the sword when the Lord proclaims that he who makes use of the sword shall perish by the sword?  
Tertullian<sup>377</sup>

Carl Kessler, now eighty four and suffering from Parkinson's disease, sat up in his bed with a broad smile and happy countenance. It had been several weeks since we had last visited, and he was eager for someone to talk to other than his wife Cassie (fig. 30). His body, wracked by the disease that now kept him bed ridden, was not representative of his mind. His voice still resonated with a bass that in his younger days could easily be heard throughout a noisy crowd. He knew that I had come to interview him about "the War," and he was prepared to give me his story.<sup>378</sup> It is a story that is representative of many members within the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ. And it continues to resonate today with its commentary against war, its revelation of heroism in the many internment camps, and its proclamation that love of God and love of country can go hand in hand. This view of war and pacifism is but one more issue of distinction among the non-aligned, non-class congregations.

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<sup>377</sup> Everett Ferguson, *Early Christians Speak: Faith and Life in the First Three Centuries* (Abilene, Texas: ACU Press, 1981), 219.

<sup>378</sup> Carl and Cassie Kessler Interview, by the author, in their home near Lineville, Alabama, January 18, 2003. Tapes are in the possession of the author.



Figure 30: Carl and Cassie Kessler

Kessler’s story actually begins one generation earlier. His father had been “a conscientious objector in the first World War” and suffered greatly because of it. Angus Kessler, nonetheless, taught his son “not to kill, because Jesus taught us a different way, a way of peace and love.”<sup>379</sup> Angus Kessler, a preacher with the non-aligned, non-class Church of Christ, had taught this doctrine throughout the South from the late 1890s through the 1940s. It was a doctrine that was well received and practiced by this smaller movement of the Church of Christ.

The Kessler family came to Georgia from Germany in the late 1700s. The Kesslers were farmers and craftsmen who came seeking to escape religious persecution. Carl notes that his ancestors settled near the town of Rincon, not far from the Savannah River, due to its fertile and well watered soil. Soon they established the Oak Grove congregation, which was affiliated with the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ by the 1850s. Doctrinally conservative, this congregation would produce several preachers

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<sup>379</sup> Ibid.

within the following decades, with Angus becoming well known and respected for his teaching and dedication, and particularly for his stand as a pacifist.<sup>380</sup>

Angus Kessler was not alone as many other preachers from this group taught that “Christians must not engage in carnal warfare.”<sup>381</sup> Men such as J.A. Dennis, Cecil Abercombrie, Charlie Shelnutt, Walt Shelnutt (see Appendix C) and Harry Cobb reached out to people over the generations with their ideas and concepts of pacifism and non-violent resistance. These men were not university trained and did not have local preaching assignments to provide them with a living. Instead, they often worked at middle class jobs, preaching on Sundays and during meetings when they were off from work. They based their ideas on Biblical principles that were “studied out, on their own.”<sup>382</sup>

What, then, separates these men and their doctrines from the other “peace churches” such as the Quakers and Mennonites? Did their stand differ that much from the mainline Churches of Christ? Was this a minority movement among the non-aligned churches? Answers to these questions will provide us some insight into a group of people who see themselves as “unique among all other religious movements, because of who we are, where we came from and what we believe.”<sup>383</sup> Carl Kessler noted that they were not following tradition or another man’s ideas regarding their pacifism, but had determined their doctrine from basic Biblical principles.<sup>384</sup>

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<sup>380</sup> Harry Cobb interview.

<sup>381</sup> J. A. Dennis, *Who Can Answer?* (Atlanta: privately published, ca. 1930s), 2.

<sup>382</sup> Kessler Interview.

<sup>383</sup> Dennis, *Who Can Answer?*, 3.

<sup>384</sup> Kessler Interview.

In order to understand the issues surrounding the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ and pacifism, terms must be defined. A conscientious objector refers to someone who, for conscience sake, objects to war and its contingent components, such as killing, maiming or the like, based on moral or religious principles. The word pacifist is from a Latin word meaning “peace maker.”<sup>385</sup> A. M. George, writing in the May, 1916 edition of *The Apostolic Way*, notes that a peace maker can have nothing to do with war.<sup>386</sup> A non-violent resister is anyone who resists a government decree or law in a peaceful and orderly manner. The non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ further define a non-violent resister as one who would not go against governmental laws unless those laws went against God’s law.<sup>387</sup>

Modern historians have attempted to understand the mechanics behind the pacifist and non-violent resistance movements. Some see the individual and their relationship to the state as the core motive behind conscientious objection. Historians Charles C. Moskos and John Whiteclay Chambers have postulated in their book, *The New Conscientious Objection: From Sacred to Secular Resistance*, that the conscientious objector challenges

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<sup>385</sup> *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Eleventh Edition* (2003), s.v. “pacifist.”

<sup>386</sup> A.M. George in an article entitled “Sword of the Spirit or Sword of Steel, Which? (*The Apostolic Way* (May 1916) 1&2) writes: “You may search the New Testament in vain for a single instance of Christians resorting to politics or an kind of carnal weapons to accomplish any good work. The gospel was their only weapon, and they and we are forbidden to use any other.”

<sup>387</sup> Harry Cobb writes in the pamphlet, *The Christian and Secular Powers* (Wedowee, AL: Privately Published, 1985): “It is clearly enjoined upon Christians to render obedience to those in secular power- but such obedience is to be restricted to those matters which do not conflict with other divine instructions. This was recognized by the apostles when they said to those who would oppose their mission,... We ought to obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29),” page 1.

a citizen's most basic of civil responsibilities, to serve and defend one's country. The debate between citizen and government over the acceptance and obedience to that responsibility has resulted in a changing viewpoint held by the government in democratic societies allowing people to become conscientious objectors. The authors propose three stages in which a society evolves to accept pacifism so that, eventually, religion is no longer the sole determining factor. In other words, the religious doctrines and beliefs of individuals have now been "augmented and largely superseded by secular motives."<sup>388</sup> This is simply not the case among the traditional peace churches nor within the non-aligned Churches of Christ.

Somewhat similar to Moskos and Chambers, Lawrence S. Wittner proposes that after World War II traditional pacifism, based on religious ideals and principles, split into two separate groups; one that he calls "nuclear pacifism" and the other called "non-violent resistance." Those affiliated with nuclear pacifism were often led by scientists and global federalists, while the non-violent resisters and "radical pacifists" were born out of the Civilian Public Service camps.<sup>389</sup> Although correct in his assumption regarding pre World War II sentiments, the author errs by lumping all groups in the post World War II

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<sup>388</sup> Charles C. Moskos and John Whiteclay Chambers II, editors, *The New Conscientious Objection: From Sacred to Secular Resistance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), vii.

<sup>389</sup> The Civilian Public Service (CPS) provided conscientious objectors in the United States an alternative to military service during World War II. These men worked in 152 CPS camps throughout the United States and Puerto Rico in areas such as soil conservation, forestry, fire fighting, agriculture, social services and mental health. See: Albert N. Keim, *The CPS Story: An Illustrated History of Civilian Public Service* (Intercourse, Pennsylvania: Good Books, 1990).



era into either one or the other of his proposed groups, often failing to admit that there are many who still adhere to the traditionalist view of pacifism and non-violent resistance.<sup>390</sup>

Others, such as Cynthia Eller, seek to classify and systemize the arguments made by those who refuse to take up arms. Eller utilizes two distinct categories in order to examine the moral reasoning of the conscientious objector. The “consequentialist” category evaluates whether an action is right according to the results produced by the action. The second category, called “deontological,” seeks to analyze an action based on its component characteristics. She determines that “pacifists are deeply concerned with securing good consequences, but differ with non-pacifists as to what good consequences are and how they can most effectively be reached.”<sup>391</sup> No doubt to the conscientious objector not having to kill is a good consequence. But, Eller in her conclusion notes that pacifists “value the democratic freedoms they enjoy in the U.S. but have no love of the principle of democracy itself.”<sup>392</sup> Each congregation within the non-aligned Churches of Christ that espouses pacifism is well aware of its rights and understands completely what democracy is. This awareness of democratic principles and ideas is revealed in their use of such in defense of their positions. They actively use their right to free speech, freedom of religion and the right to freely assemble.

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<sup>390</sup> Lawrence S. Wittner, *Rebels against War: The American Peace Movement, 1933-1983* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1983), 202–213.

<sup>391</sup> Cynthia Eller, *Conscientious Objectors and the Second World War: Moral and Religious Arguments in Support of Pacifism* (New York: Praeger, 1991), 4.

<sup>392</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

The traditional peace churches, such as the Mennonites, have been recognized as pacifists for over three hundred years.<sup>393</sup> Guy Franklin Hershberger, a professor of history and sociology at Goshen College, notes that pacifism and nonresistance are “a way of life, espoused by the Mennonites from the beginning of their history.”<sup>394</sup> The Mennonite view emphasizes a covenant theology which recognized a permission for war under the covenant of the Old Testament but which forbids war under the New Testament. He further notes that, for all pacifists (including Quakers and Brethren), the term “nonresistance” describes the faith of those who refuse, on these grounds, to take any part in warfare and who renounce all coercion, even nonviolent coercion.<sup>395</sup>

The Quakers, or Friends, are a Christian group that began in 17<sup>th</sup> century England and quickly moved to the American colonies. Founded by George Fox, their basic tenets included that “God is in every man.”<sup>396</sup> This idea precluded their engagement in war or any other form of violence. If God is in every man, then killing any person would be taking something from God that belonged to Him. They maintained a form of non-violent resistance throughout the Revolutionary War, which continues even today.<sup>397</sup>

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<sup>393</sup> The Mennonites trace their origins to the 16<sup>th</sup> century Anabaptists, particularly under Menno Simons (from whom their name is derived) who consolidated and institutionalized their doctrine. See: Cornelius J. Dyck, *An Introduction to Mennonite History: A Popular History of the Anabaptists and the Mennonites* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1993), 34–46.

<sup>394</sup> Guy Franklin Hershberger, *War, Peace, and Nonresistance* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1944), 2.

<sup>395</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>396</sup> Daisy Newman, *A Procession of Friends: Quakers in America* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1972), 4.

<sup>397</sup> Ormerod Greenwood, *The Quaker Tapestry* (Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill Publishing, 1990), 135.

Mennonites and Quakers (and, also the group known as Brethren) have maintained their staunch religious objections to military service and actively proclaim their doctrines in a variety of ways. They have, though, affiliated themselves with organizations that promote peace, such as the National Inter-religious Service Board for Conscientious Objectors and the American Friends Service Committee, but which also incorporate secular as well as religious viewpoints. These types of affiliations promote peace throughout the world, and, these organizations regularly accept donations to prepare books and pamphlets, develop local societies and committees, and provide assistance to those seeking to avoid war, regardless of religious affiliation.

Non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ do not participate in any organizations, although some individual members may. They do not forward any money from their treasuries to specific groups nor do they use it in combination with other religious, or non-religious organizations, for the specific purpose of publishing literature, organizing committees or teaching others specifically about pacifism.<sup>398</sup> So, unlike the traditional peace churches, the non-aligned, non-class congregations promote their doctrine primarily through individual teaching or preaching. What few pamphlets or articles have been published, outside of early issues of the *Apostolic Way*, such as Harry Cobb's (fig. 31) *The Christian and Secular Powers* (first published in 1969 and later revised)<sup>399</sup> and L.R. Gambill's "Needed Information in Time of War" (published in the January 1, 1942

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<sup>398</sup> Harry Cobb, *The Contribution and the Church Treasury* (Wedowee, AL: Privately Published, 1993), 3.

<sup>399</sup> Harry Cobb, *The Christian and Secular Powers*.

issue of *The Church Messenger*),<sup>400</sup> have been without broad circulation. Word of mouth, week-long meetings (by traveling evangelists) and Sunday services, using teachers and preachers from other congregations, are usually the ways that ideas and concepts are passed from one congregation to another.



Figure 31: Harry Cobb, Wedowee, Alabama

Early in the history of the restoration movement of the Churches of Christ, Alexander Campbell delivered his *Address on War* (Wheeling, Virginia, 1848), which was subsequently printed in the United States Congressional Record in November 1937 at the request of Honorable Joseph B. Shannon of Missouri.<sup>401</sup> During that stirring presentation, Campbell noted that “a Christian man can never of right be compelled to do that for the state, in defense of state rights, which he cannot of right do for himself in defense of his personal rights.” Another prominent leader of the restoration movement,

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<sup>400</sup> L.R. Gambill, “Needed Information In Time of War,” in *The Church Messenger*, January 1, 1942, (Booneville, Arkansas, Paul S. Knight, Publisher), 4-8.

<sup>401</sup> Alexander Campbell, *Address on War* (Murfreesboro, Tennessee: Dehoff Publications, 1953), 2.

Barton W. Stone, wrote that “war and slavery” were the “greatest evils in the world.”<sup>402</sup> But, any sense of early unity on the subject of pacifism would change with the Civil War.

Church of Christ historian, David E. Harrell, emphatically states that “twentieth-century Churches of Christ mainline congregations did not inherit a clear-cut pacifist legacy from the nineteenth-century restoration movement.”<sup>403</sup> He notes that prior to the Civil War “the disciples reacted chaotically to the subject of war and service. There were theoretical pacifists, practical neutralists, and militant Northern and Southern war hawks within the church.”<sup>404</sup> This resulted in a sectional split so that by the late 1800s the South was primarily pacifist while the North was essentially nationalistic and more hawkish.

Throughout the first and second World Wars there were pacifists among the mainline Churches of Christ. David Lipscomb, founder of David Lipscomb College, was an ardent pacifist, taking every opportunity to teach that the Christian’s citizenship is in a heavenly kingdom and not an earthly one.<sup>405</sup> In 1889, Lipscomb’s views were published in a book entitled, *Civil Government: Its Origin, Mission and Destiny, and the Christian’s Relation to It*, which was widely read and reprinted several times.<sup>406</sup> And yet,

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<sup>402</sup> Barton W. Stone, “Queries Proposed for Investigation by a Worthy Brother,” *Christian Messenger*, II (Dec., 1827), 36.

<sup>403</sup> David E. Harrell, *The Churches of Christ In the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: Homer Hailey’s Personal Journey of Faith* (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 2000), 51.

<sup>404</sup> David E. Harrell, *Quest For a Christian America: The Disciples of Christ and American Society to 1866* (Nashville, TN: The Disciples of Christ Historical Society, 1966), 147.

<sup>405</sup> Robert E. Hooper, *Crying in the Wilderness: A Biography of David Lipscomb* (Nashville: David Lipscomb College, 1977), 313.

<sup>406</sup> David Lipscomb, *Civil Government: Its Origin, Mission and Destiny, and the Christian’s Relation to It* (Reprint; Nashville: Gospel Advocate Co., 1957).

even this did not keep many young men from mainline Churches of Christ from volunteering for service during World War I.

The period leading up to World War II saw men in the mainline Churches of Christ, such as H. Leo Boles and Foy E. Wallace, boldly speak out against war. Wallace wrote in the *Firm Foundation* that Christians should “follow Christ and the apostles even to prison and martyrdom” rather than accepting “militarism, war and hell.”<sup>407</sup> Others, like Boles, distributed information to young men on how to file for conscientious objector status with the government. But this likewise failed with “a majority of the members of the Churches of Christ once again” joining “the patriotic stampede as their sons volunteered or were drafted into service.”<sup>408</sup> Harrell notes that “during World War II, the number of members of the Churches of Christ who applied for conscientious objector status was relatively small.”<sup>409</sup> He concludes that “after the close of World War II pacifism was little discussed in Churches of Christ.”<sup>410</sup> Furthermore, by the time of the Korean Conflict, many within the mainline churches had embraced the idea that participation was not forbidden by the scriptures. These comments, though, do not hold true with the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ.

Although the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ had already been established during the 1840s in Randolph County, Alabama, they were too small and the members too old to play an active part in the Civil War debate mentioned by Harrell.

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<sup>407</sup> Foy E. Wallace, Jr., “The Mind of the Brethren on the War Subject,” *Firm Foundation*, May 1, 1934, 4.

<sup>408</sup> Harrell, *The Churches of Christ In the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, 54.

<sup>409</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>410</sup> *Ibid.*, 338.

What is interesting is that prior to the Civil War, there was an active peace movement within the county. In fact, the first peace paper published in Alabama was produced in Wedowee, the county seat.<sup>411</sup> Furthermore, the county aligned itself with the Union, although not formally, and was rewarded with the first Republican Governor after the war came to an end.<sup>412</sup> The continually growing movement of the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ within the county, clearly came down on the side of pacifism early in the twentieth century.

*The Apostolic Way*, originally published in Union City, Georgia by Clarence Teurman, was a harbinger of pacifism among the non-aligned Churches of Christ in the early part of the twentieth century.<sup>413</sup> A student of N. L. Clark's, of the *Firm Foundation*, Teurman used the paper to voice his opposition to Christians participating in any form of military service. Teurman's paper was widely distributed and he was an active worker at both the Napoleon and Taylor's Crossroads congregations in Randolph County. His views closely paralleled members from these congregations. He was not though aligned with any one particular group, preferring to teach "for all to learn and know the truth."<sup>414</sup>

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<sup>411</sup> Walter J. Bartlett and John B. Stevenson, "A History of Randolph County (1832–1882)," *The Heritage of Randolph County, Alabama*, Fay Young and others, eds. (Clanton, Alabama: Heritage Publishing Consultants, Inc., 1998), 2. Note: the paper soon moved to Jacksonville.

<sup>412</sup> Some of Governor Smith's family still lives in Randolph County.

<sup>413</sup> Originally published, in 1913, in Corpus Christi, Texas by editor G.A. Trott as a response to the mounting liberalism that he and others had seen in the mainline Churches of Christ. Due to illness, editor W.J. Rice moved the paper to Union City, Georgia where it enjoyed several years as a paper among the Churches of Christ. Furthermore, at this time the non-aligned Churches of Christ and the One Cup movement were seen as one. It would not be for at least thirty more years before they would split into separate entities.

<sup>414</sup> *The Apostolic Way* (March 1916):3.

Congregations at Rincon, Randolph County, Atlanta and other areas accepted his teaching because it was as they saw it. Bryant Wilson remembers his father talking about how conservative Teurman was on many things.<sup>415</sup> Many names are tossed about by others stating that Teurman was with this group or that group, when in fact there were clear lines of demarcation between him and some others, especially in his latter years.

Following Teurman, R. F. Duckworth, the new editor of *The Apostolic Way*, published in the June 1925 issue announcements of meetings in Hastings, Oklahoma, and Whitesboro, Texas, in order “to discuss the principles of pure Christianity as they relate to the work now engaged by us. The war question is to have special attention.”<sup>416</sup> The following year, Duckworth published a pamphlet explaining the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ’s reasons for opposing “carnal warfare.”<sup>417</sup> These documents (see Appendix E), which appeared in *The Apostolic Way* in 1926, were specifically prepared for “members of the non-aligned, non-class Church of Christ” that they may know of “that peace taught by our Lord.”<sup>418</sup> Duckworth further noted in the same issue that

In the World War [World War I] the conscientious objector found the weight of the church so far as it effected the public mind opposed to him. In the next war we want him to have the benefit, of, at least, a greater part of the church’s influence.<sup>419</sup>

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<sup>415</sup> Bryant Wilson interview.

<sup>416</sup> R. F. Duckworth, *The Apostolic Way*, June 15, 1925.

<sup>417</sup> The term “carnal warfare” is used by the non-aligned Churches of Christ to differentiate from “spiritual warfare.” Carnal is defined as fleshly or having to do with things of the physical world. See: Cobb, *The Christian and Secular Powers*.

<sup>418</sup> R. O. Conner, “Are You For Peace or For War?,” *The Apostolic Way*, March 1, 1926.

<sup>419</sup> R. F. Duckworth, “Reasons For War Campaign,” *The Apostolic Way*, March 1, 1926.



They sought to accomplish the ongoing practice of claiming to be conscientious objectors through registering their position with state and federal Governments. Furthermore, in the same issue, G. A. Trott condemned the mainline Churches of Christ for not following the path of peace. He proclaimed that

Preachers and editors, who knew the gospel, teaching to love our enemies; to render to no man evil for evil; to suffer wrong rather than to do a wrong; turned traitor to the Lord under the pressure of the popular, frenzied clamor of a nation gone mad with the war lust and are largely responsible for the shedding of the blood of Christians and their loved ones upon the battle fields of Europe.<sup>420</sup>

For the next two years, Duckworth continued his push for recognition by the federal government of members of the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ as conscientious objectors. On January 26, 1928, Duckworth sent to the Secretary of War a document entitled *Attitude of the Church of Christ Relative to Its Members Engaging in Carnal War* (see Appendix F). This document claimed to be endorsed by over ninety percent of the members of the non-aligned, non-class church. Signed by Duckworth and notarized in Dallas County, Texas, it was received and acknowledged on February 1, 1928.

The fight for recognition, by state and federal government, of the non-aligned Churches of Christ as pacifists was continued throughout the next decade. On July 10, 1940, the 17<sup>th</sup> Avenue congregation in Lubbock, Texas, placed in public record with the state government a resolution outlining their desires to be considered conscientious objectors (see Appendix G). They began their resolution by referencing Duckworth's original document and concluded by appealing to scripture and the First Amendment to

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<sup>420</sup> G. A. Trott, "Let Us Learn War No More," *The Apostolic Way*, March 1, 1926.

the Constitution for their right to oppose war. To dispel any suggestion that they were disloyal Americans they stated

That we, the Church of Christ, having met in regular assembly ... and being citizens of the United States of America, do hereby declare our allegiance to the United States Government, to be subject to its authority and to do the things imposed upon us by its authority, so far as is consistent with Christian duty, reserving to ourselves all the rights and privileges respecting religious freedom granted under the Constitution; and do hereby claim exemption from combatant military service, or any activity in violation of our religious convictions.

Further documents were sent to the War Department with attachments called “Certificates of Membership: Church of Christ, Conscientious Objector’s Claim for Exemption from Combatant Military Service.” These certificates were meant to provide members with a document that they could send to the government as a request for exemption from military duty. Ervin Waters notes that during a trip to Washington D. C. in 1952, he met with General Hershey, the National Director of Selective Service, and he was able to view the War Department’s file on the non-aligned, non-class Church of Christ and war. He notes that many of these same documents were still on file.<sup>421</sup>

The plight of conscientious objectors during World War I helped to motivate the traditional peace churches and the non-aligned Churches of Christ to quickly act to secure for themselves a viable plan to counter military service. During World War I, conscientious objectors were expected to perform non-combatant duties on or near the battlefield. That system proved widely unpopular and problematic as military leaders were frustrated by the conscientious objectors’ presence, and the conscientious objectors often refused to cooperate in protest of what they believed to be military service, even though they were not always required to carry guns or wear uniforms. This was also true

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<sup>421</sup> Wade, *The Sun Will Shine Again, Someday*, 157.

for many like Angus Kessler. However, the non-aligned Churches of Christ did not follow suit with the traditional peace churches; they maintained congregational sovereignty by independently sending out letters and petitions and working with others such as Clarence Teurman and G. A. Trott. Although they worked with these men, local congregations did not allow them to dictate their positions on any matter.

Ultimately, several changes were incorporated into the Selective Service and Training Act of 1940, giving conscientious objectors several options previously unavailable to them. The two most significant changes included 1) stipulations for those who could not, because of religious training and belief, participate in war, and 2) that those who were drafted could request assignment to work on projects of national importance under civilian direction.

Carl Kessler and others realized that they could not actively participate in the war and neither would they serve in a non-combatant role. In a non-combatant role, they would have been entitled to standard Army pay and allotments. Serving in any other position meant a five dollar a month “allotment for spending money, and no allotment could be made for members of your family.”<sup>422</sup> This placed many into the precarious position of either standing up for their convictions or meeting the needs of their families. Most members of the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ chose to stand by their convictions.

The work of national importance available to conscientious objectors was organized under the newly-created Civilian Public Service (CPS) program. The first CPS

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<sup>422</sup> Selective Service System, Local Board No. 1, Springfield, Georgia, to Carl Lewis Kessler, 19 May 1943, letter in possession of the author.

camp was opened near Grottoes, Virginia, in May 1941. It was an abandoned Civil Conservation Corps (CCC) facility which required some remodeling, cleaning and restocking. Old CCC camps were frequently used as “base camps” for conscientious objectors engaged in various work projects. It is possible that the director of Selective Service, Major General Lewis B. Hershey, sought to protect the program and the conscientious objectors by hiding them from the public. Placing them in the old camps was a way of keeping them separated.

When World War II erupted and the United States was engulfed in the fighting, more and more drafted objectors created a need to open an increasing number of CPS camps all across the country. In the six and one-half years the CPS was in operation, more than fifty camps were opened or started. There were, during World War II, 25,000 men who served as noncombatants, 12,000 men who were assigned to Civilian Public Service camps; and 6,000 who adopted an absolutist stance toward military conscription and were sentenced to federal prison.<sup>423</sup>

Although the exact numbers for the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ in the CPS are unknown, it may rightly be assumed that over seventy five percent of those eligible for the draft chose the camps, with less than twenty percent opting for non-combatant status and approximately five percent choosing prison sentences.<sup>424</sup>

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<sup>423</sup> Information from pamphlet handed out at the Pendle Hill Conference on *Civilian Public Service Reconsidered: An “Extraordinary Paradox,”* November 4-7, 2000. Document in the collection of Karl Kessler. Note: Pendle Hill is a Quaker center for study and contemplation of the efforts of conscientious objectors during wartime.

<sup>424</sup> Harry Cobb, based on discussions when preparing directory of the non-aligned Church of Christ. Harry Cobb Interview, by the author, Wedowee, Alabama, 12 February 2003.

Originally, the camps were operated under a system of divided responsibility. The Selective Service System provided general policy supervision and inspection and paid the conscientious objectors' transportation costs from their induction centers to the camps. On the other hand, The National Service Board for Religious Objectors,<sup>425</sup> a voluntary association which represented religious organizations and conscientious objectors to the Selective Service, was responsible for funding and furnishing the rest of the program. This arrangement resulted in peace churches and sympathetic agencies providing millions of dollars in money, goods, administration and staff, generally all of the things necessary for the care and maintenance of the camps.

All Kessler could expect was five dollars per month for spending money. This caused a great hardship for him and his family. Responding to his request for 3-D status, which allowed for someone to remain at home if wartime service caused a hardship, the Selective Service System replied

No special favors can be shown in your case account [sic] your religious views, and if you are not willing to accept neither combatant Service or non-combatant Service, then it will be up to you to provide for your family in some other way, or any way you can, as no provision is made for allotments for those refusing military service<sup>426</sup>

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<sup>425</sup> This organization is still active in anti-draft lobbying and the promotion of rights for conscientious objectors. See: *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, Vol. 3 (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1996), 813-814 and Melvin Gingerich, *Service for Peace: A History of Mennonite Civilian Public Service* (Akron, PA: Mennonite Central Committee, 1949).

<sup>426</sup> Selective Service System, Local Board No. 1, Springfield, Georgia, to Carl Lewis Kessler, 5 June 1943, letter in possession of the author.

Kessler and his family, a wife and six month old child, would have to rely on others to help them during his time in the camp. In October of 1943, Kessler was shipped off to the CPS camp in Mancos, Colorado (fig. 32).<sup>427</sup>



Figure 32: The Camp at Mancos, Colorado.

Initially, the CPS camps were located and organized for work on soil conservation projects of state or federal agencies. The conscientious objectors lived in barracks away from friends and family for an indefinite period. Just like their drafted counterparts in the military, these men faced uncertainty concerning the direction political events might take them and the duration of their time in service. They did not know if they would be treated more harshly after a change of leadership or if the things they received would be cut off.

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<sup>427</sup> The National Interreligious Service Board for Conscientious Objectors (NIBSCO), *Directory of Civilian Public Service* (Scottsdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1996), 204.

Although Kessler's wife, Cassie, and their baby moved to be closer to him, they were allowed only one day per week (and this irregularly) to meet and relax together. Many times Cassie and some of the other women who stayed nearby would prepare home-cooked meals for the men, spending all of their extra money in order to provide them "with some comforts." They were able to move near their husbands, brothers and fathers because someone gave them "the money to move out there."<sup>428</sup> They were able to stay there through the benevolence of the local community, working in low-paying jobs or receiving help from home and the many organizations of the peace movement that were set up to help the families.

The conscientious objectors helped the camps' staff operate and maintain each camp. When it became obvious that the war would drag on for years instead of just weeks or months, they were placed in charge of CPS camp administration. Why? Civilian staffing was becoming increasingly difficult to find and the conscientious objectors had developed first-hand experience in camp operation.

As the war continued, the work duties of men assigned to the CPS camps included soil conservation work and other duties overseen by the U.S. Forest Service, the National Park Service, agriculture experimentation stations, Bureau of Reclamation, and various other organizations. Conscientious objectors could be found parachuting into West Coast forests to fight fires, building forest trails, caring for nursery stock, tending livestock, organizing dairy testing, growing and improving crops, working in hospitals and mental health facilities, and constructing dams. Millions of man hours of labor went into the accomplishment of these and other projects (fig. 33).

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<sup>428</sup> Kessler Interview.



Figure 33: Laying outlet line. Note how much work is done by hand

Initially, upon arrival at the camp Kessler relates how he was “tried to see if he really was a conscientious objector. Those in charge would try to make him mad to see if he would fight.” This happened not once but several times, prompting Kessler to tell them that he “was to turn the other cheek and do good to those that despitefully use you.” The work was hard and long, through every kind of weather, heat and bitter cold. His boots were not enough to keep his feet warm in the winter. His clothing did little to keep him cool in the hot summers. It was a miserable time, but one that the Kesslers said they “would gladly do again.” Cassie Kessler noted that “it was easier because we had so many other members of the church with us. We could have services every first day of the week.”<sup>429</sup> They were in an environment where they met many other members of the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ and were amazed at how similar they all were in doctrine and practice (see Appendix H).

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<sup>429</sup> Ibid.



The Kesslers stayed in Mancos for two years and during their stay a dam was constructed to provide water to New Mexico. The state park that surrounds most of the lake that the dam created has many markers to commemorate the CPS workers and their dedication to their faiths. The love of peace and righteous indignation over war exhibited by the Kesslers persisted among members of the non-aligned, non-class Church of Christ after World War 2.

Throughout the next two decades after the war, many members of the non-aligned, non-class Church of Christ were called on to serve in the Army. Many of these men chose non-combatant service or were called at a time when there was no conflict. Still, there were many that claimed conscientious objector status throughout the Korean Conflict. These men utilized the same arguments as their predecessors, that the Biblical prohibition against killing and the responsibility to love others as yourself should be maintained no matter the cost to self.

Things changed, though, in the 1960s with the increased presence of the United States in Vietnam. Draft calls increased dramatically from 100,000 in 1964 to 400,000 in 1966, and the number of U.S. forces in Vietnam exceeded half a million by 1968. The expansion of the draft meant that some members of the non-aligned, non-class Church of Christ were once again faced with a decision regarding military service.

In 1965, when direct involvement of U.S. troops in Vietnam expanded substantially, Carl Kessler's son Winburn (Windy) was called up for active duty. Like his grandfather and father before him, Windy Carson Kessler (fig. 34) declared himself a conscientious objector. By the time the first conventional battle of the Vietnam war took

place, as American forces clashed with North Vietnamese units in the Ia Drang Valley, Windy was responding to the Selective Service Board in Washington D.C. for the second time. Little did he know that his case would end up being argued before the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals in Atlanta, Georgia, some three years later.

Windy had read and kept a letter from Harry Cobb dated February 11, 1962, which made a profound impact on him and his decisions concerning war and pacifism. This letter was addressed to the “Brethren in Christ,” and was of a type that Cobb had written on a yearly basis since 1951. Usually dealing with a variety of subjects, Cobb had used this letter to teach on the Christian’s response to the secular government and war.

He noted

As a citizen of this superior kingdom [the kingdom of Christ in contrast to earthly kingdoms], he is to be unspotted from the world, be a peculiar person, walk in light and reprove darkness, be separate, abstain from all appearance of evil, love his enemy, and turn the other cheek. These characteristics are in contrast to the attitude of those who with carnal minds attempt to settle matters by means of war.<sup>430</sup>

These comments outlined the non-aligned Churches of Christ’s stand on carnal warfare. All members were encouraged to adopt pacifism and non-violent resistance to war based on the scriptures. This call to an anti-war stance occurred almost three years before the first marches by students in Washington against the Vietnam War.<sup>431</sup>

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<sup>430</sup> Harry Cobb to Brethren in Christ, February 11, 1962, copy of letter in possession of author.

<sup>431</sup> Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam Books, 1993), 242.



Figure 34: Windy Kessler

Windy utilized every opportunity to defend his position against war to the government. His records of his efforts resulted in a file almost four inches thick, with depositions, sermons, articles and letters, all proclaiming his devotion to his faith and his determination to stand as a conscientious objector. After being found guilty of failing “to be inducted ... and perform his duty”<sup>432</sup> by the United States District Court, Northern District of Georgia, Atlanta Division, Windy immediately appealed to the Circuit Court of Appeals, which ruled in his favor. Windy’s stand was followed by many within the non-aligned non-class Church of Christ. Harry Cobb wrote to Windy that it was “of great encouragement to see the strength and determination in your commendable stand.”<sup>433</sup> Mozelle Lemon from Lizella, Georgia, wrote to encourage Windy with many scriptures and “the love of God.”<sup>434</sup>

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<sup>432</sup> *US v. Kessler*, A-25.289 (1968). Copy in possession of author.

<sup>433</sup> Harry Cobb to Windy Kessler, 13 May 1968. Copy in possession of author.

<sup>434</sup> Mozelle Lemon to Windy Kessler, 24 May 1968. Copy in possession of author.

On July 10, 1969, Windy reported to Grady Memorial Hospital in Atlanta in order to meet his responsibilities under the Conscientious Objector Work Program. Unlike his father before him, Windy was paid a modest salary of \$325.00 per month as a cashier in the Out-Patient Registration Department. After completing an exemplary work career, he was discharged on May 26, 1971. Like his father and grandfather, Windy fulfilled his understanding of God's will. This acceptance of responsibility to God and man has been a hallmark of the non-aligned, non-class Church of Christ throughout the years.

The plight of the Kessler's is but one of many examples that could have been given among the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ. Although not considered one of the traditional peace churches, these congregations advocate conscientious objection to military service and war. Yet, the distinction of being pacifists has been one overlooked by others in the mainline Church of Christ. Because of their isolation and lack of widespread periodicals and publications, few are aware of their stand. Unlike the traditional peace churches, the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ promote their doctrine primarily through individual teaching or preaching. Finally, the non-aligned, non-class congregations go beyond the views of even some of the peace churches in that they do not advocate serving on a police force or any other occupation that may require them to hurt or kill another person. "Turn the other cheek" and "love your neighbor" are Christian mottos they have tried to uphold.

## V. CONCLUSION

Throughout the twentieth century, the congregations at Taylor's Crossroads, Oak Grove, Napoleon, Mt. Carmel and Wedowee have maintained close relationships with each other. These congregations have refused to accept practices common in mainstream Protestant churches. Often referred to by more liberal congregations of the Church of Christ as 'antis,' the congregations in Randolph County proclaim that they observe only those things that are specifically authorized by the New Testament and deny any man-made doctrine or dogma. Harry Cobb wrote regarding their stand on these innovations that "there is no question but that truth must be upheld even when division is an inevitable consequence. Peace is not to be had at the cost of truth."<sup>435</sup> This attitude permeates every aspect of their intense preaching and Bible study. Cobb continues by noting their "approach to restoring the early church demands that we follow Scriptural precept in our beliefs and practices."<sup>436</sup>

These congregations primarily use the King James Version of the Bible for teaching and study. Many denominations and liberal congregations of the Church of Christ disagree with these congregations regarding their:

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<sup>435</sup> Harry Cobb to William Yarbrough, 18 August 1990, copy in possession of author.

<sup>436</sup> Harry Cobb to Billy Adcock, 18 April 1988, copy in possession of author.

1. Refusal to utilize Sunday Schools as a method for teaching. (Deut. 29.10-11, 31.12 & I Cor. 11:20).
2. Refusal to retain pastors or located preachers. All are to teach. (Matt. 28.19 & II Tim. 2.2).
3. Refusal to allow women to teach publically or exercising authority over a man. (I Cor. 14.34-35 & I Tim. 2.11-15).
4. Refusal to use musical instruments in worship service. (Eph. 5.19 & Col. 3.16).
5. Refusal to allow a person to divorce, marry another and retain fellowship with Christ or the Church. (Rom. 7.1-3 & I Cor. 7.8-9).<sup>437</sup>

Other things they reject include the second supper (also called the night communion) and theistic evolution. They do not send their donations to specific universities or organizations, nor do they congregationally support religious papers, but maintain congregational autonomy regarding their funds. These items are representative of their refusal to accept non-scriptural doctrines, no matter how convenient they may appear to be. They are not concerned with things that are popular or ‘politically correct’ and they contend that the idea that ‘all beliefs are equal before God’ is not biblical.

What factors contributed to the development of these congregations and their ultra-conservative doctrinal perspectives? Primarily these congregations developed from as early as 1845 through 1890 in rural areas, free from the encroachment of new people and new ideas. Their members have maintained their frontier spirit of independence and conservatism. Randolph County’s industry or natural resources were sufficient to allow the population to be maintained without many members moving away. They remained isolated from other growing and dynamic movements that might have affected their doctrines and traditions.

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<sup>437</sup> Harry Cobb, interview by author, April 11, 2002.

The roots of these congregations can be traced to the efforts of men such as James O’Kelly in the late 1700s and Moses Park in 1845, men with a vision of congregations based upon their understanding of the primitive pattern of church formation and practice described in the Bible. Although O’Kelly died in 1826 having never seen the congregations in Randolph County, his vision and drive contributed to their establishment. Moses Park continued O’Kelly’s initial work in 1845 by moving into Randolph County, an area that received his teaching and that within about forty years became home to four strong and rather large congregations. The influx of local Baptists during this forty year period into the membership of the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ reinforced their rejection of missionary societies and paid preachers.

Several other individuals contributed to the development of Randolph County’s non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ. In the 1860s, for example, A.C. Borden, an acquaintance of Barton W. Stone, no doubt fortified their views on baptism for the remission of sins. Later on during the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, men such as the Kesslers and Dashers helped to maintain the views of the congregations in Randolph County by reinforcing their doctrines through consistent preaching and teaching.

Pacifism has been a hallmark of the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ through four wars (see Appendix I). Their continued stand on pacifism goes beyond serving in the military. They reject service in any profession that may mean killing or hurting another human being. They have actively sought to have their views recognized by all government entities so that none of their members will have to serve in the military in a manner unbecoming their beliefs.

Even though these congregations of the non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ have remained autonomous, many have members related to one another, thereby maintaining conservative teaching in an unbroken generational line. Finally, these congregations have been served by a line of strong doctrinal preachers who maintained their conservative views throughout the years, leaving Randolph County in the unique position of serving as home to more non-aligned, non-class Churches of Christ than any other place in the world. From their point of view, it is a remarkable achievement to hold fast to a vision of Christianity that cleaves to the original Biblical pattern. From a historian's point of view, the study of this group is rewarding because they have exercised a profound influence upon other Christians far beyond the bounds of Randolph County.



## APPENDICES

**Appendix A:** Photograph of main preachers during the 1930s, 40s, and 50s



**Front Row From Left to Right:**

G. W. Lampp (Scott, GA), Ed Marshall (Dutton, AL), Walt Shelnett (Union City, GA), J. A. Dennis (Union City, GA), Noah Holt (Piedmont, AL), Yube O. Moore (Carrville, AL), Billy Dasher (Rincon, GA).

**Back Row From Left to Right:**

J. W. Moore (Hokes Bluff, AL), Angus Kessler (Rincon, GA), Norman Gipson (Texas), Cecil Abercombrie (Birmingham, AL), Dewey Shaw (Texas), Gillis Prince (Woodland, AL), Charles Thomas (Liberty, KY), M. E. Busby (Thomaston, GA), Marvin McDonald (Sylacauga, AL).

Photograph was taken in the mid 1940s at the non-aligned, non-class Church of Christ in Union City, Georgia.

**Appendix B:** Photograph of main preachers from the 1940s and 1950s



Back Row Left to Right: George Watts, Woodrow Allen, Hugh Dasher, Dewey Shaw, Angus Kessler, G. W. Hazelhurst (Texas).

Second Row Left to Right: Zeke Murphy, Ed Marshall, Clifford Kessler.

Third Row Left to Right: Miles Busby, Walt Shelnut, Everette Kessler.

Fourth Row Left to Right: Furman Rahn, Harry Kessler, J. W. Moore, E. E. Marshall.

Front Row Left to Right: Edgar Bigdon, Cecil Abercombrie, L. H. Barron, Charlie Shelnut, Ellis Dasher, J. A. Dennis, Billy Dasher.

Photograph was taken in the late 1940s at the Antioch non-aligned, non-class Church of Christ in Douglasville, Georgia.

**Appendix C: Photograph of main preachers from the 1940s**



List for picture taken in '40s at Walnut Park, Alabama City, Alabama

**Back Row Standing Left to Right:**

1. Edward Pate
2. Charles Thomas
3. Norman Gipson
4. Miles (M. E.) Moore
5. J. W. Moore
6. Bro. Hack or Hark
7. J. D. Strickland
8. Dewey Shaw
9. Bro. Capp
10. Zeke Murphy

**Seated Left to Right:**

1. Cecil Messer
2. Argus Kessler
3. Olieh Sheinutt
4. Clinton Strickland
5. Arthur (J. A.) Pack
6. Cecil Abercrombie
7. Luther McDaniel
8. Edd Marshall
9. George Watts
10. Billy Dasher
11. Walt Sheinutt
12. J. A. Dennis
13. L. W. Hayhurst
14. Marvin McDonald
15. Carmen Pack
16. Warren King

**Appendix D:** Photograph of main preachers in Randolph County from 2000s



**Back Row From Left to Right:**

Mike Kirby (Wedowee, AL), Bill Prince Sr. (Roanoke, AL), Ben McManus (Woodland, AL), Harry Cobb (Wedowee, AL), Alan Daniel (Woodland, AL).

**Second Row From Back Left to Right:**

Edward Herring (Ephesus, GA), Ray McManus (Woodland, AL), Bill Prince Jr. (Oxford, AL), Wayne Spradlin (Wedowee, AL).

**Third Row From Back Left to Right:**

Greg Moore (Roanoke, AL), Sam Dick (Cave City, KY), Junior Bowen (Wedowee, AL), Alex Frederick (Wedowee, AL), Vic Baldwin (Roanoke, AL).

**Front Row From Left to Right:**

Dwight Thomas (Wedowee, AL), W. C. Cofield (Napolean, AL), Brad Prince (Auburn, AL), Chad Prince (Oxford, AL), Mark Carpenter (Woodland, AL).

Photograph was taken June 7, 2002 at Taylor's Crossroads non-aligned, non-class Church of Christ, Roanoke, Alabama.

*The Apostolic Way*  
Things to be learned from the Bible and the Church of Christ  
**CHURCH OF CHRIST**

Semi-Monthly \$1.50 Year      DALLAS, TEXAS, MARCH 1, 1926      Vol. XII No. 12

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## Are You For Peace or For War?

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Thousands of members of the Church of Christ have been caused to study the Christian's relationship to war, through our efforts, and there are tens of thousands we have not yet reached who will take their stand against it, if caused to study the question.

We can reach the honest hearted by private talks, public speeches, private letters and the printed page. Every member of the church in your community should be talked to again and again. If they have sent in their names they should be urged to see and talk to others; if they have not sent us their names, talk with them and secure their names if possible. We furnish blanks for convenience in listing names. Urge every preacher you meet to speak on the subject.

We are beginning to attract the attention of other religious publications and they are giving space to the agitation. We can not afford to lessen our efforts, but should increase them.

A careful reading of this folder will show some of the results, as well as some of the purposes, of our present activity in an effort to arouse the brotherhood.

Millions are being spent to keep alive the spirit of war, while the church spends a mere pittance for that peace taught by our Lord. Only a few who stand with us on the question have thought of sending us a contribution with which to push the work.

We are asking you to read this folder carefully, then do what the last article suggests. We are expecting to hear from you promptly.

R. O. CONNER.

# Reasons For War Campaign

We are so anxious that all understand our opposition to Christians taking part in carnal war that we here reiterate some of the reasons for this campaign.

The church has always opposed Christians taking part in carnal war when aroused on the question, but for several decades the public utterance or lack of stating its position has been such that the impression left on the public mind is that the church has no well defined views on the subject. This we propose to overcome by letters, printed matter and public speeches.

The question has been permitted to lie dormant until many of our own members do not understand the question or what course they should follow in case of war; hence, we want to arouse them to study of the subject.

In the World War the conscientious objector found the weight of the church so far as it effected the public mind opposed to him. In the next war we want him to have the benefit of, at least, a greater part of the church's influence. This we can obtain by registering our position with the Federal and State Governments.

The leading statesmen, newspaper and magazine editors are agitating, many of them urging steps to secure world peace. A number of religious and civic organizations are taking their stand for peace; some even denying that Christians should in any way encourage or take part in carnal wars.

We believe that the Church of Christ should take a stand that will call attention to the teachings of Jesus Christ concerning this subject, and thus help to impress all that He is the leader of this great question.

It is not our purpose to ask for legislation of any kind, either State or Federal. We do not need such legislation. Our purpose is to place the matter in such a way as to give our boys the protection afforded by the laws of the land. To do this we expect to put the church's position, the teaching of Christ, before Congress, the President and the War Department, and then before other Governments. We have had much experience in such work and this experience enables us to know what, and how, to do this work in the most effective way.

We shall not advocate or oppose any legislative movements that are being, or that may be made to secure peace. We are firmly of the opinion that advocating and voting for certain legislative measures are not a part of the church's function. The church is to teach, advocate and agitate the principles of Christ. And the Apostle Paul availed himself of the opportunity of teaching the principles of the gospel to the rulers on such questions, as circumstances provided him.

The agitation of peace in so many quarters gives us the opportunity to present the Word of God on this question, so we can with impressiveness present "love your enemies," "if your enemy hunger, feed him, if he thirst give him drink," "render not evil for evil" under conditions that will give these principles a power upon the mind of humanity never felt before, and at the same time advertise the fact that the Church of Christ believes in being governed by the truth, and the truth only, as revealed by Jesus Christ and His apostles.

Shall we miss this opportunity? Thousands of brethren are saying no, with their efforts and their money, and the larger the number saying no, the stronger will be our efforts in this great fight.

If you have not already sent in your name, or had some one else send it in, do so at once. If you need blanks, write us for them. We expect to go on with the fight. Your assistance and cooperation is needed, and will be appreciated.

R. F. DUCKWORTH.

# Let Us Learn War No More

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I consider the propaganda that has been started by Brothers Duckworth and Conner to establish, beyond all doubt, the true attitude of the Church of Christ in regard to its members engaging in carnal warfare, is the most vital in its importance of any issue that now confronts us. Many of the readers of The Apostolic Way had sons or other loved ones engaged in the bloody and unchristian conflict which so lately convulsed the world. Do they wish to expose them again to the deadly dangers, and the unholy moral contamination to which they were exposed in that awful holocaust of murder? Many perished on the bloody fields of France, and very many more imbibed the deadly poison of the passions engendered there to their ruin. Preachers and editors, who knew the gospel, teaching to love our enemies; to render to no man evil for evil; to suffer wrong rather than to do a wrong, turned traitor to the Lord under the pressure of the popular, frenzied clamor of a nation gone mad with the war lust and are largely responsible for the shedding of the blood of Christians and their loved ones upon the battle fields of Europe. This cannot now be undone, but a similar catastrophe may be avoided if we act NOW before another conflict arises and some of the wisest minds predict that it is almost sure to come and that, perhaps, at no distant day. Are you going to help in this great work or not? It cannot be accomplished without the assistance of your financial aid. Will you refuse or will you delay? What is done should be done quickly and the confidence I have in the genuineness of my brethren's devotion to the principles of our Christ leads me to believe that they will assist and that promptly. Lay your check to Brother Duckworth on this paper, before you lay it down, and write on it all that you feel able to give and while deciding how much that may be, calculate how much a son's or brother's blood is worth to you. Put that check in the very next mail and let it go on its mission of "peace on earth, good will to men."

G. A. TROTT.

Address all communications to The Apostolic Way, 2109 Second Avenue, Dallas, Texas.



**Appendix F: Attitude of the Church of Christ Relative to its Members Engaging in Carnal War.**

**Attitude of the Church of Christ Relative to its  
Members Engaging in Carnal War**

We have been directed, by signed statements from thousand of members, including several hundred preachers, of the Church of Christ, to file with our government the statement that more than 90% of the members of the Church of Christ are opposed to its members taking human life in Carnal War, and that we have and do claim the exemptions granted to the conscientious objector.

The filing of this statement seems necessary as a number of our members were imprisoned because they would not enter the Army during the World War, 1914-1918.

We here call attention to a speech published in The Apostolic Way, under date of February 1, 1928. This speech was delivered by Alexander Campbell in 1848 at Wheeling, Virginia. Mr. Campbell, in his day, was one of the most popular leaders of the Church of Christ and his speech outlines the faith of the majority of the members of the Church of Christ on this question as well as when it was delivered.

The majority of the faithful, preachers, bishops, members have always contended that the Lord's statement, "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you, and persecute you." cannot be broken except at the sacrifice of the perpetrator's soul's eternal happiness.

In compliance with the instructions of the above mentioned members of the Church of Christ, whose signed statements are on file in the office of The Apostolic Way, a religious paper published and maintained by members of the Church of Christ, I am this, the 25th day of January, 1928, filing a signed copy of this statement with the President of the United States, with the War Department, and with each House of Congress now in session.

(Signed) R. F. DUCKWORTH, Editor and Publisher of The Apostolic Way.

THE STATE OF TEXAS, County of Dallas. Before me, the undersigned authority, a Notary Public in and for Dallas County, Texas, on this day personally appeared R. F. Duckworth, known to me to be the person whose name is subscribed to the foregoing instrument, and acknowledged to me that he executed the same for the purposes and consideration therein expressed.

GIVEN UNDER MY HAND AND SEAL OF OFFICE, this the 25th day of January, A. D. 1928.

(L. S.) JAS. R. COCKE,

Notary Public, Dallas County, Texas.

My Commission expires 6-1-1929.

**LETTER TO WAR DEPARTMENT AND REPLY**

To the Secretary of War,  
Washington, D. C.

January 26, 1928.

Dear Mr. Secretary:

I am enclosing you a signed statement, witnessed by a Notary Public, with the request that this said statement be filed in the public records of your office.

Yours respectfully,

(Signed) R. F. DUCKWORTH.

**WAR DEPARTMENT  
THE ADJUTANT GENERAL'S OFFICE  
WASHINGTON**

Mr. R. F. Duckworth,  
4819 East Grand Avenue, Dallas, Texas.

February 1, 1928.

Dear Sir:

I am requested by the Secretary of War to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of January 26, 1928, and the enclosed statement, which has been filed in accordance with your request.

Very truly yours,

(Signed) LUTZ WAHL,

Major General, the Adjutant General.

File No. AG 000.31 Church of Christ (1-26-28) Miscel.

The foregoing instruments are on file with the War Department in Washington, D. C.

Appendix G: The Lubbock Resolution

STATE OF TEXAS }  
COUNTY OF LUBBOCK }

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

BE IT KNOWN: That the Church of Christ, having its principal place of worship at 17th Street and Avenue N, in the City of Lubbock, County of Lubbock, State of Texas, and being a congregation of, and in full fellowship with, that body of disciples generally known and recognized as the Church of Christ, which did place before the government of the United States a declaration of its position concerning military service, as set forth in a communication from R. F. Duckworth of Dallas, Texas, to the Secretary of War, File No. AG 000.31. Church of Christ, (1-26-28) Miscel., having met in regular assembly on the Lord's Day at 10:30 A. M., June 30, 1940, did by the unanimous consent of its members adopt the following resolution, and authorize D. F. Cogburn, Albert Wright, and A. L. Ferguson as its special representatives to execute said resolution and cause it to be placed in the public records, and before the authorities of our government.

BE IT RESOLVED THAT:

WHEREAS: The Holy Scriptures, constituting man's only authoritative guide in matters of religious conduct, teach that Christians should be subject to civil authority, as disclosed in the language of the Apostle Paul, Rom. 13:1-6, "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive unto themselves damnation. . . . For this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing." This language being qualified by the statement of the Apostle Peter in Acts 5:29, "We ought to obey God rather than men," we therefore believe that whenever the civil authorities impose ordinances which contradict the ordinances of God, we are obliged to render obedience to the Divine Government; and

WHEREAS: Our Saviour taught as recorded in Matthew 5:44, "Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be the children of your Father in Heaven," we believe that no Christian may take human life in warfare without violating these principles, and jeopardizing his soul's eternal welfare. It is further taught by the Apostle Paul in 2 Cor. 10:3:4, "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal." We therefore believe that to engage in combatant military service is entirely incompatible with the spirit of Christianity. Jesus himself said to an official of the Roman government, "My kingdom is not of this world: for then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews, but now my kingdom is not from hence," (Jno. 18:36) showing that such ends are specifically forbidden by the New Testament Scriptures; and

WHEREAS: The First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States provides that Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof;" thus guaranteeing religious freedom to the peoples of this nation:

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED: That we, the Church of Christ, having met in regular assembly on this Lord's day, at 10:30 A. M. June 30, 1940, and being citizens of the United States of America, do hereby declare our allegiance to the United States Government, to be subject to its authority and to do the things imposed upon us by its authority, so far as is consistent with Christian duty, reserving to ourselves all the rights and privileges respecting religious freedom granted under the Constitution; and do hereby claim exemption from combatant military service, or any activity in violation of our religious convictions.

WITNESS OUR HANDS, at Lubbock, Lubbock County, Texas, this 10th day of July, A. D. 1940.

(Signed) ALBERT WRIGHT

(Signed) D. F. COGBURN

(Signed) A. L. FERGUSON

STATE OF TEXAS }  
COUNTY OF LUBBOCK }

BEFORE ME, the undersigned authority, a Notary Public in and for the County of Lubbock, State of Texas, on this day personally appeared D. F. Cogburn, Albert Wright, and A. L. Ferguson, known to me to be the persons whose names are subscribed to the foregoing instrument, and acknowledged to me that they executed the same in the capacity and for the purpose therein expressed.

Given under my hand and seal of office this the 10th day of July, A. D. 1940.

(Signed) ARTHUR B. WATKINS,  
Notary Public, Lubbock County, Texas.

**Appendix H:** Members of the non-aligned, non-class Church of Christ at CPS camp, Mancos, Colorado



Back Row (left to right): Orba Miller, Plainview, Texas; Leon Kessler, Rincon, Georgia; unknown, Albis Pack, Crossville, Alabama; Ivan McMillian, Texas; Ralph Lewis, Texas; Bertram Jacks, Texas; Clarence Eagan, Texas.

Front Row (left to right): Guy Mallory, Florida; Dewey Shaw, Union City, Georgia; Ernest Roberson, Crossville, Alabama; Everette Kessler, Rincon, Georgia; Porter Wyly, Texas; Woodrow Foster, North Carolina; Carl Kessler, Rincon, Georgia.

**Appendix I: Conscientious Objectors from the non-aligned, non-class Church of Christ\***

| <b>Name</b>     | <b>Home Town</b>      | <b>War</b> |
|-----------------|-----------------------|------------|
| Bennie Barfield | Thomaston, Georgia    | WWII       |
| R. W. Carter    | Oxford, Alabama       | WWII       |
| Kenneth Cobb    | Birmingham, Alabama   | Korean     |
| Joe Daniel      | Douglasville, Georgia | WWII       |
| Ronnie Daniel   | Douglasville, Georgia | Korean     |
| J.B. Granger    | Lake City, Georgia    | WWII       |
| J.D. Graves     | Collinsville, Alabama | Korean     |
| Elon Harbin     | Plainview, Texas      | WWII       |
| Oliver Hazelton | Sierra Vista, Arizona | WWII       |
| Bertram Jack    | Texas                 | WWII       |
| Allen Kessler   | Rincon, Georgia       | Korean     |
| Angus Kessler   | Rincon, Georgia       | WWI        |
| Carl Kessler    | Rincon, Georgia       | WWII       |
| Everett Kessler | Rincon, Georgia       | WWII       |
| Windy Kessler   | Rincon, Georgia       | Viet Nam   |
| Phil Lemon      | Macon, Georgia        | Korean     |
| Ralph Lewis     | Anton, Texas          | Korean     |
| Carmen Pack     | Crossville, Alabama   | Korean     |
| Marlon Pack     | Crossville, Alabama   | WWII       |
| Ollis Pack      | Rainsville, Alabama   | WWII       |
| James Roberson  | Crossville, Alabama   | Korean     |
| Curtis Rogers   | Rainsville, Alabama   | Korean     |
| Lelon Rogers    | Rainsville, Alabama   | Korean     |
| Tom Smith       | Hollins, Alabama      | Korean     |
| Joe Wheeler     | Douglasville, Georgia | WWII       |
| Harold Williams | Rainsville, Alabama   | Korean     |

\* This list is incomplete, but is representative of the many that did maintain conscientious objector status during the various wars. Not included are those that served in a non-combatant position.