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Charcoal Drawings – Baptists and Religious Liberty

Captions

Aging Widow in Jail for Resisting Clergy Tax

(Norwich, CT; October 28, 1752)

Mrs. Elizabeth Backus, aging widow, spent thirteen days in jail for refusing to pay a clergy tax for the support of a minister of the Established Church. Mr. Backus was unable to explain why she was released, probably because someone paid her fine.

Baptism Takes Place at Night

(Chesterfield, VA; August 15, 1773)

Under cover of darkness, Rane Chastain of Buckingham baptized nine converts in the James River. The candidates for baptism were converted under the preaching of John Weatherford, a Baptist minister. Weatherford was at the time confined to the Chesterfield County Jail. Following the baptismal service, authorities ordered Chastain to leave Chesterfield County or face imprisonment.

Baptist Preacher Whipped

(Bowling Green, Virginia; May 1, 1771)

John Waller, Baptist preacher, was interrupted in his service today by the parson of the state church who stepped up on the platform with Waller, who was leading the singing, and flipped the pages of the hymnbook with his whip. Waller, who three years earlier had spent 43 days in jail for preaching, tried to ignore the interruption. While continuing the service by leading in prayer, the parson repeatedly stuck the butt of his whip in Waller's mouth. The county clerk joined the parson and seized Waller, dragging him from the pulpit to the sheriff at the edge of the crowd. After the sheriff had given the preacher about 20 lashes with his horsewhip, Waller covered with blood returned to the pulpit and preached one of his most powerful messages.

Baptist Preachers Serve in Army

(Philadelphia, PA; July 1, 1775)

An all-out cooperation of the Baptists with the Colonial forces in their fight for freedom has been reported here. Baptist ministers have joined the struggle, many of them serving as Army chaplains, because they see in the cause of civil liberty hope for

their long-cherished dream of religious freedom and the separation of church and state.

Baptists to Perform Weddings

(Richmond, VA; October 1780)

Baptist ministers win the right to perform marriage ceremonies in Virginia. This is another major victory for Baptists and other dissenters in their un-relenting fight against the State Church of Virginia. The enactment of the new law recognized the validity of marriages performed outside the State Church.

Baptists Sing on Way to Jail

(Fredericksburg, Virginia; June 4, 1768)

Four Baptist preachers and a layman were arrested because they refused to quit preaching. They were charged with disturbing the peace. While being marched to jail, they sang hymns which attracted attention of townspeople. The men were: Cris Craig, John Waller, James Reid, James Childs, and William Marsh.

Chaplain John Gano Offers Thanksgiving

(New York; April 19, 1783)

John Gano, Baptist pastor serving as chaplain to the Colonial Army under General George Washington, led the army in a prayer of thanksgiving when Washington announced the peace terms to his troops near Newburg on the Hudson.

Dissenters Gain Liberty to Preach

(Richmond, VA; August 16, 1775)

Baptists and other “dissenting” clergymen were granted liberty to preach to soldiers as operations of the military service would permit. The Virginia State Assembly sent the order to officers of troops fighting England for American independence in response to an appeal from Virginia Baptists. Baptists were forceful in the fight against the British, anticipating that victory would bring complete freedom of religion.

Furman Escapes from British

(Charleston, SC; 1777)

Richard Furman, outstanding Baptist patriot, escaped from the British soldiers who sought to capture him because they feared his prayers and talents exercised on behalf of liberty. Cornwallis put a price on his head, but when the British marched on South Carolina, Furman fled to North Carolina and to Virginia.

George Washington Writes Baptists

(Richmond, VA; September 1, 1789)

President George Washington has assured the Baptists in a letter that “no one would be more zealous” than he in establishing barriers against the horrors of spiritual tyranny and persecution.

Hezekiah Smith Returns to Haverhill

(Boston, Massachusetts; November 1765)

Hezekiah Smith, popular young Baptist preacher and evangelist, returns to Haverhill, Massachusetts, where he served for 40 years as a pastor. Smith, accompanied by two or three members of his Baptist congregation, spent many days and nights on the trail, reaching the backwoods of Maine, into the hills of New Hampshire, and throughout their own state, preaching the gospel message.

Ice Broken for Baptismal Service

(Wantage, NJ; 1752)

William Marsh, pastor of the local “separate church” broke the ice in the frozen river for a baptismal service following their acceptance of the scriptural mode of baptism. Mr. Marsh was baptized by a member of his congregation, Elkana Fuller, and in turn Marsh baptized Fuller and other members of the congregation.

Isaac Backus

(Boston, MA; May 5, 1773)

Isaac Backus of Middleborough who was chosen agent of the Warren Baptist Association, succeeding John Davis at the meeting last September, is continuing his fight for religious liberty. He has distributed a circular from the Committee on Grievances requesting statements to be sent to the next association in September.

Layman Arrested for Assisting Preachers

(Gouchland County, VA; December 1774)

Thomas Waford, Baptist layman of this county, was arrested in Essex County while assisting a group of Baptist preachers in evangelistic services. He was taken before a Justice of the Peace and his saddlebags were searched for “treasonable papers.”

Waford was dismissed without fine or imprisonment because he had not disturbed the peace by preaching.

Officer Samuel Harris Attends Preaching Service Conducted by Baptist Preacher

(Pennsylvania County, Virginia; May 1758)

Colonel Samuel Harris, officer of the militia and commander of Fort Mayo, attended a preaching service conducted by the Baptist preacher, William Murphy and his brother, at a home near Allen's Creek. It is reported that Colonel Harris made a profession of faith and has aligned himself with the Baptists in this part of Virginia. Harris later became an outstanding Baptist preacher.

Patrick Henry Before Jury on Clergy Pay

(Hanover County, VA; December 15, 1763)

Patrick Henry, a young lawyer, technically lost his case of "The People vs the Parsons." The jury in view of King George III's edict that the clergy should be paid at market value of tobacco (which was contrary to the state legislature's decision due to a crop failure in 1758), awarded Rev. James Maury a token judgement of one penny. This well may be the turning point in the affairs of the churches and the state of Virginia. Patrick's relentless attack raked both the crown and the "hired clergy," and though he was accused of "treason," his moral victory was enthusiastically received by the people.

Patriot John Hart Retires from Public Service

(Hopewell, New Jersey; December 1778)

John Hart, outstanding patriot, former legislator, and signer of the Declaration of Independence, retired from public life this fall due to ill health. He has been a champion of religious freedom and individual rights, and has suffered considerable loss because of his stand for independence. Hart and his family worship at Hopewell Baptist Church which was built on land he donated to the church.