

# BLUE RIDGE BAPTIST.

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## THE LEWIS' FORK BAPTIST ASSOCIATION. ART. NO. 9.

The writer often leaves the reader with something to supply—and sometimes strands him in doubt. Let us look at the many-sided picture. The early pioneers, many of them, lived from the Kennebec river, Maine to the Ashley river, S. C., and you will find many familiar old Baptist names in the Yadkin country among the early day Baptists of Maryland, Pennsylvania and New Jersey. From the latter State we instance the following names: Stout, Wilson, Brown, Brooks, Morgan, Bennet, Smith, Moore, Miller, Armstrong, Curtis, Martin, Johnson, Adams, Morton, Thompson, Todd, Davis, Simmons, Van Horn, Eaton, Gano, Sheppard, Reece and Horton. The latter family and others in the above list came from Jersey.

In the mention made of Elder Andrew Baker, the evident pioneer, of the mountain Baptists of Ashe and Wilkes and the western parts of Virginia, some facts were withheld waiting further information from our older and wiser brethren. Col. James Eller says in a recent letter that Elder Baker was a brother in law to Elder Nathaniel Vannoy. The sketch kept by the writer would place him as an older man than Nathaniel Vannoy was and brother to the mother of the latter. Wood Furman places the Bakers in the old Charleston church and Benedict places Samuel Baker one of the constituent members of the Old Ashley River church. Nathaniel Vannoy was the fourth son of John Vannoy and Susannah, his wife, and was born February 19, 1743, probably in the county of Anson (now Davidson), North Carolina. When converted to Christ the writer has been unable to ascertain. When called to the ministry is not known. He was a soldier under Benjamin Cleveland who was claimed as a kinsman in the King's Mountain campaign and performed other services in that war as did his father who must have been more than sixty years of age in 1780. This family were Huguenot on the fathers side and English by descent from the mother. Elder Nathaniel Vannoy is first in the list of the constituent names of New Hope church June 20, 1830. He is said to have been its first pastor. The records do not show this, although, some months after that organization was completed the church by vote asked the church at Reddies River for pastoral help. The first sent, Elder Solomon Stamper and the second sent, Elder James Vannoy—these two alternated the months until Elder Jordan Ashley was called. This, by the way, sounds new to us in these days, but it was the custom among the old regulars seventy five years ago. Prior to 1840 some newly organized body called on New Hope church for pastoral help, and having recently ordained Elder William Church it was agreed by the brethren at New Hope that this brother be sent. This proves the custom. So much by the way and the custom evidently came all the way from the Charleston Association, at a very early day in its history, prior to the Revolution, we find this query.

"Query 14. Is it consistent with gospel order for a minister to have the pastoral care of two distinct churches at the same time?" This was answered in the negative. "Yet," says the minutes, "we are of opinion that the pastor of one church may occasionally administer the ordinances in another which is destitute."

In this we can see the influence of the Regular Baptists in that centre of southern culture and pulpit eloquence among the brethren on the Yadkin. It aids in establishing the origin of the two families under discussion. It has been said that they came from New Jersey, but this was owing to their affinity to the family of Elder John Gano—an-

other Huguenot and probably next to Oliver Hart, the greatest preacher in America during the Revolutionary period, a chaplain in the army and pastor—every where. New York City, however, claimed him then.

Elder Vannoy lived to July 26, 1835, and passed away at Greenville, S. C., where a suitable monument marks his resting place, erected by his descendants—Vannoy and W. C. Cleveland. In his later years he rode as did Elder Gano in many parts of North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee.

His work was principally among the Acadicians of the Saluda, Broad River, Transylvania, Swannanoa, French Broad and to the Dock River regions in Middle Tennessee. Col. J. Eller, the Moderator of the Ashe Association for many years, gives it as his impression that Elders Baker and Vannoy were brothers in law, and says that his own father and the contemporaries of 1830—40 "spoke of Elder Vannoy as a minister of considerable usefulness, was well informed and did much in propagating Baptist principles in the country where he preached. I am confident he was the first pastor at New Hope and was succeeded by Elder Jordan Ashley." He is not mentioned in the organization of the Yadkin Association. I do not think his work, if indeed he was a Christian at that time, would lead him in that direction. But, no doubt, the Old Mountain District Association organized in 1799 from Elder Baker's Virginia church and some others in both states would be more likely to claim him.

(How much those Mountain District Baptists could do to aid the writer in getting information. Will they not do it?)

Elder Vannoy moved from his home on Beaver Creek in Ashe county to Lewis's Fork and settled there about the year 1815. But was no doubt a prime mover in all those occurrences that led to the organization of the Lewis's Fork Association. He was born again when converted on the true missionary plan and was a zealous and faithful man even in old age.

Elder George McNeil has been mentioned by name several times and was the Moderator of the Yadkin Association in 1787 and for many years afterward, "He came from Scotland," says one of his grand-sons, with two brothers, John and Thomas." (He had a sister also whose name was Mary.) They looked back with love as long as they could see a

green leaf on account of their religious freedom. My grand-father came to the State of Va. and married a Miss. Coates, and as the country settled up, being a Baptist minister by profession, was called for to constitute Baptist churches and attend as pastor of Baptist churches. He came into Graysn county, Va., after which he came into Wilkes county, N. C., and constituted and attended churches here. He attended churches down the Yadkin river.

He was pastor of the church near the head of the Yadkin. He lived in Wilkes county about 2½ miles west of New Hope meeting house—and it was this place that was once known as the church at Bro. McNeil's—prior to the Revolution. Nathaniel Vannoy lived within one mile of Bro. McNeil's place in 1816. Elder McNeil was Register of Deeds of Wilkes county about 1802. One of his sons, John, married a Cleveland and settled with the Cleavelands in S. C. His son, William, was a soldier in the war of 1812 and after that was settled in Claiborn county, Tennessee. Elder James McNeil was his grandson, Elder Milton McNeil, of Wilkesboro, and Peter McNeil, of Ashe, also Col. J. Eller of Ashe Association are grand-sons. One of the contemporaries of Elder McNeil was Elder James Parsons, of Ashe county near the Old Fields church. Elder Thomas Proffit was also a neighbor and contemporary. The inter marriages of this family have brought a long train of kinsmen and descendants, of different family names. The descendants of this pioneer doubtless number their thousands at this time. Ten thousand might be a high estimate, but the writer would hardly hesitate at half that number. They are generally in the footsteps of their ancestors in their religious opinions.

Dr. Green in his sketch of the Baptists of the upper Yadkin Valley, written a few years ago, gives this account of the McNeil family. He says "they first settled in the lower part of Carolina probably in the Cape Fear region. His two brothers went farther west but he himself went first to the western part of Virginia. Here he probably struck the trail of the emigrant from Pennsylvania to Western North Carolina, and turned southward to Ashe county. Soon he crossed the Mountains and settled on Lewis' Fork, in Wilkes, near where New Hope church now stands."

(continued on second page.)



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