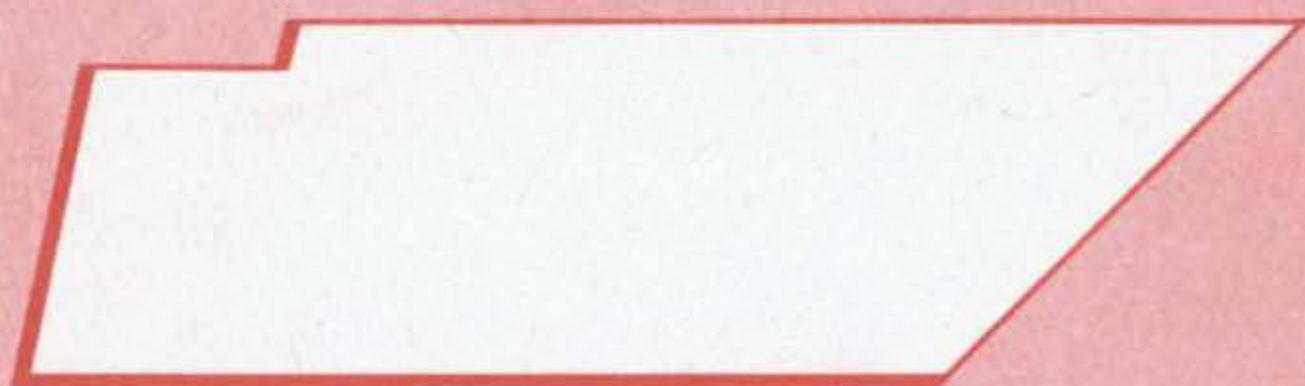


**THE
HISTORY
OF
TENNESSEE
FREE WILL
BAPTISTS**



ROBERT E. PICIRILLI

THE HISTORY OF TENNESSEE FREE WILL BAPTISTS

by
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PREFACE

July, 1985: The National Association of Free Will Baptists celebrates the fiftieth anniversary of its organization. That body was formed in 1935 in a meeting that took place at Cofer's Chapel Free Will Baptist Church in Nashville, Tennessee. How fitting, then, that the fiftieth anniversary session should convene, again, in Nashville.

Tennessee Free Will Baptists—volunteers all—are pleased to host this historic convention. No sooner had it been decided that the meetings would be here than we started thinking about doing something special for the occasion. The State Association decided to name a Historical Commission to sponsor this project, which soon took shape as a written history of the Free Will Baptist movement within the state—a publication to be distributed, free, to those who attend the Fiftieth Anniversary Session of the National Association.

We are glad to welcome you to Nashville and to our state. We are privileged to have our denomination's national offices, publishing house, and college here. We trust you will treasure this booklet as a memento of the occasion: indeed, we believe you will find it valuable for our people's broader history and not for Tennessee alone.

You should also know that this publication would not be possible except for the fact that the Tennessee Free Will Baptist Children's Home agreed to underwrite the printing costs. The superintendent of the home, and its board, are due special thanks. So is the State Association itself, which has borne the cost of research and writing.

You will understand that what is written herein represents the "knowledge" of the writer as it is now, with a painful awareness that there is much yet to be known. As there is time for further research, the understanding could very well change. That is the way history is always written.

The Tennessee Free Will Baptist
Historical Commission

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INTRODUCTION

Free Will Baptists have been in Tennessee a long time, since the early eighteen hundreds if not before that. There are at least four "pockets" of the movement in the state that are more than a hundred years old. As far as I can tell, these four origins have no relationship to each other. Nor does any of them appear to have any connection with Free Will Baptists anywhere else.

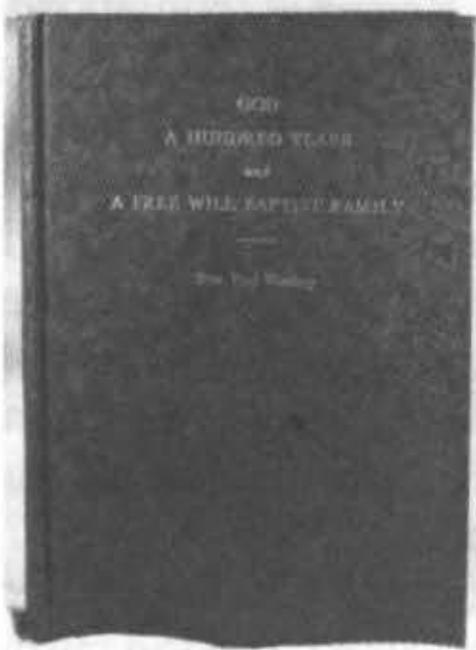
I have chosen to treat these four stories in geographic rather than chronological order, moving from east to west. Thus the first chapters will deal with the Tow River and Union Associations, and their progeny in East Tennessee, dating to 1850. Then will come the story of the Stone Association in East Middle Tennessee, founded in about 1865. Next is a chapter on Free Will Baptists in South Central Tennessee, in the Tennessee River area, where the oldest association may have been organized as early as 1839. Then comes the Cumberland Association in the western part of Middle Tennessee, with roots earlier than 1815.

After dealing with these four areas, I have concluded with the State Association and more recent activities. Obviously, a booklet as short as this one cannot tell everything, and I have deliberately concentrated on the earlier history. I assumed that this was the least known part and would therefore be the most interesting.

Since the Union and the Cumberland are the two that have been most active in the State Association, their stories are more fully told. The truth is, their stories are better known. Even so, I felt it only proper to give serious attention to the Stone Association, and to the Tennessee River and Muscle Shoals Associations. Had I known more about the early origins of these, I would have told more.

A word about documentation. I have avoided extensive footnoting. Any time I make reference to what an association did, the minutes of that association for the year(s) referred to are the source; and I did not think footnoting was necessary. All other sources that have been helpful to me have been noted, even though not as extensively as might have been. All sources are found in the Free Will Baptist Historical Collection.

Chapter 1: East Tennessee Beginnings



Research into the history of Free Will Baptists in the eastern part of our state has not recently been done. The last person to give serious attention to this was Paul Woolsey, beloved preacher and missionary to India. His book, *God, A Hundred Years, and a Free Will Baptist Family* is a helpful source and delightful reading, even though its emphasis is on the history of the Woolsey family. Regrettably, most of his sources of information are not known and much information is unverifiable.

THE TOE RIVER ASSOCIATION

The “mother” association of Free Will Baptists in East Tennessee and western North Carolina was the Tow/Toe River Association. Three men were the founding ministers of that association: Moses Peterson, John Wheeler, and William B. Woolsey. We know almost nothing about the background of Peterson and Wheeler; thanks to Paul Woolsey’s work, we know more about his grandfather, W. B. Woolsey.

The Woolseys had come to southwestern Virginia from Pennsylvania before 1750, and were already Baptists, apparently Calvinists.¹ W. B.’s grandfather, Zedekiah, migrated on down to East Tennessee (still North Carolina at the time) and settled south of the Nolichucky. Thus William Bonapart Woolsey was born in Greene County in 1821, married Alice Bird—a devoted Christian—in 1842, and was converted later that same year. He was licensed to preach in 1843 by the Nebo Baptist Church, which he had joined at his conversion, and “at once began to proclaim Free Salvation, Free Grace, Free Will and Open Communion.”²

W. B. Woolsey was ordained in 1847 even though it was apparently that he did not agree with the Calvinistic doctrines of those he was

associated with. By 1849 he had organized the Horse Creek Church and had assisted in organizing the Dry Fork Church. He had also become acquainted with Peterson and Wheeler, "talented ministers of the Gospel, the latter known widely as a successful evangelist."³

According to Paul Woolsey, Moses Peterson lived most of his life in Yancy County, North Carolina, "a man of physical strength and natural vigor"; of John Wheeler he wrote: "He literally practiced the injunction 'go ye into the byways and hedges and compel them to come in' He was a man of sincere convictions and placed his trust in the leadership of the Holy Spirit."⁴ Both men were older than W. B. Woolsey.

Peterson and Wheeler were in the French Broad Association of Baptists. That group soon divided into Calvinistic and Arminian segments, with the Arminian group—led by Rev. Garrett Dewese—taking the name Freewill Baptist, but insisting on closed communion.⁵ Peterson and Wheeler felt they must be free to invite all believers to the Lord's table. Joined by Woolsey, they began considering alternatives. The outcome was the Toe River Association of Free Will Baptists, formed at Jack's Creek Church in Yancy County, North Carolina, November 15, 1850. Wheeler preached the introductory sermon, Peterson was elected moderator, and Woolsey was named clerk.

The reader must recognize that the recounting of this information does not, in fact, tell how the "free will" doctrine came to be the faith of these three pioneer Baptist men. What sources of influence shaped their thinking we do not know. If there were other men who taught (or baptized) them in this doctrine—as there may have been—we do not know their names or whence they came to the Great Smoky Mountains. Paul Woolsey probably did not miss it far when he suggested that these early East Tennessee and West North Carolina Free Will Baptists "did not know (at the time) that there were any other groups with similar beliefs and the same name elsewhere in the world."⁶

When the Toe River was organized, the three preachers served six small churches reporting 212 members: Jack's Creek, Ramsey Town, Horse Creek (Liberty?), Dry Fork, Pine Grove, and New Liberty. As well as I can determine, the last four of these were in Tennessee. The second session met at Pine Grove Church in Washington County, Tennessee, and saw the reception of five more churches—apparently all in North Carolina.

Among the twelve "Articles of Faith" written for the new association were: one that declared "a full atonement for all men"; one apparently meant to contradict unconditional perseverance ("We believe the saints will be saved by faith and practice and not without"); one presenting "washing the saints' feet" as a command to be practiced by all saints; and one on communion that said: "We invite all of the protestant Denominations who believe that God for Christ's sake has

pardoned their sins."⁷

Using written articles of faith appears to have been a debatable thing: at the third session (1852), the association agreed "to have no articles of Faith but the Bible." Perhaps this meant none *other* than the ones already written; in 1879, the minutes record: "Agree to have our constitution, rules of decorum, articles of faith, and form of a church letter reprinted." (The year before, there had been some disagreement over whether to adopt "the treatise of the Free Will Baptist north.")

One of the old customs allowed for churches to refer "queries" to the association. At the second session (1851), one query asked "whether it be right to buy and sell men, women and children . . . though they be black." After a year's postponement, the question was answered in the affirmative. This was the pre-Civil War south, but Paul Woolsey shows that there was considerable sympathy in the mountains with the Yankees, including anti-slavery sentiment. That was especially true when the war broke out. Following the war (1861-65), if not before, the association expressed opposition to bearing arms: in 1867 all "carnal warfare" was discountenanced and members were threatened with exclusion for volunteering to take up arms; in 1868 it was "Resolved that the Freewill Baptist Church of Christ Petition Congress to relieve us of military duty."

OTHER EARLY ASSOCIATIONS

There is not space, here, to treat the history of the Toe River Association. What must be described, however, is the fact that various other associations of Free Will Baptists grew out of the Toe River. In 1868, when letters were read from 32 churches reporting 1,480 members, a decision was made to divide, thus creating the "American Association of Free Will Baptists," with "eighteen churches, mostly from the Tow River Association."⁸ Some Tennessee churches—in Carter County—remained in the Toe River, while others were in the American: its organizational meeting was scheduled for November, 1868, at the New Liberty Church in Greene County, Tennessee. W. B. Woolsey was in the American: the 1869 Tow River minutes list him among the delegates received from the American Association.

From the Toe River minutes we learn that, in 1878, a reunion of the two associations was made, on the basis of "the old Wheeler and Peterson platform." But in 1882, the Toe River agreed "to restore the American Association with its former boundaries" and set a date later in the year for its organization. Apparently this was called the "New American Association," about which the *Free Baptist Cyclopaedia* says: "The New American Association was organized in November, 1881, by

consent of the Tow River Association, and is in some respects being the same." (Evidently the date should be 1882.) Paul Woolsey said this was later renamed the "French Broad Association" and consisted solely of North Carolina churches.⁹ But the *Cyclopedia* reported two Tennessee churches in the New American in 1887.

In 1872, some of the Tennessee churches in the Toe River were released to form the Union Association. There were 13 churches, reporting 581 members, most of them "under the care of Brother (W. B.) Woolsey and his 'sons in the Gospel'."¹⁰ (More about this association in the next chapter.)

At some time, there was a "Holston Valley Association," and—given its name—it must surely have included Tennessee churches. From 1875 to 1886, "corresponding delegates" regularly went back and forth from the Toe River to the Holston Valley. I have no further information about it.

In 1881, the John Wheeler Association was organized, consisting mostly of churches in southwestern Virginia, but also including some across the state line in North Carolina and Tennessee. Wheeler himself was not involved, having died in 1870. In some way, controversy was (at least subsequently) involved. In its brief description of the first "American Association" (above), the *Free Baptist Cyclopedia* says there was a "spirited" contest between the advocates of the Treatise (of the northern movement) and the "John Wheeler Platform"; that, after 1877, some of the churches in the American went back to the Toe River (as seen above) "under the John Wheeler platform," while others went to the John Wheeler, "working under a plan something like that suggested in the Treatise." In 1878 Toe River minutes refer to these tensions, reporting that the northern Treatise was adopted at "the association held in Johnson County, Tennessee," then "referred to a set meeting to be held at Bakersville the next October for ratification or rejection," at which meeting it was rejected. Nothing further is known about all this. That the John Wheeler Association was more inclined toward the ways of the northern brethren is apparent from the fact that it was, for a time during that period, known as the John Wheeler Yearly Meeting. The John Wheeler Association is never mentioned in the Toe River minutes (through 1886).

The Clinch River Association "had a common origin" with these,¹¹ but I have no further information about its date or circumstances of organization. If the *Free Baptist Cyclopedia* is correct, it must have been organized at about the same time as the John Wheeler, included some Tennessee churches, had 6 churches in 1884, and afterward received the churches in Hawkins County (Tennessee) that were in the Union Association. The Toe River minutes for 1882 mention sending corresponding delegates to the Clinch Valley, but that is the only year

(through 1886). The 1883 minutes of the Union Association refer to delegates sent to the Clinch Valley. (I am assuming that "Clinch River" and "Clinch Valley" were one and the same.)

All these associations, apparently, owed their origins to the Toe River Association and were therefore in the lineage of Peterson, Wheeler, and W. B. Woolsey. The picture shortly before 1890, then, is that there were East Tennessee Free Will Baptist churches in at least 6 associations: the Toe River (org. 1850), American/New American (org. 1868, reorg. 1882), Union (orig. 1872), Holston Valley (org. 1875), John Wheeler (org. 1881), and the Clinch Valley (org. by 1882). The Jack's Creek Association came, I am told, from the Toe River in about 1894. There may have been others.

EFFORTS AT A BROADER ORGANIZATION

One interesting thing about the period is that there were efforts, at times, to bring these associations into a broader organization. At the 1883 session of the Union Association, it was voted to "consider the propriety of uniting the Union, John Wheeler, etc., the American, Toe River, and Clinch Valley Associations,¹² into one Association; and that the Ministers be requested to lay this matter before the churches, and report at our next session. And we also request that this matter be laid before every church of the above-named Associations, for their consideration." Whether related or not, the 1884 minutes of the Toe River record: "Resolved that the Toe River Association petition the sister associations to her in convention at North Bend Church Yancy Co. N.C. on Friday before the 4 Sunday in November 1884 for the purpose of consolidating all into one."

Something came of all this: a one page "Circular," printed in 1885 (86?) reports "a general meeting of the Free Will Baptist Church" held at Liberty Church in Washington County, Tennessee, on November 19-21, 1885. At that session a "General Meeting" was organized, and the circular announced that the next session would be at Chimney Top Church in Greene County, Tennessee. Delegates had been present from the Toe River, American, and Union Associations. W. A. Headrick was chosen Moderator, and W. B. Woolsey Clerk. The 1886 Toe River minutes included reference to delegates "to the General Conference"—probably a reference to this organization. No further information about this effort, or about how long it survived, is known to me.

A subsequent effort along similar lines was made in 1908. The minutes of the Union Association for that year refer to a meeting scheduled for November for the purpose of organizing a cooperative

conference of Mountain Freewill Baptists, but a motion to send delegates was "Tabled without discussion." Nevertheless, such an association was formed: there are printed minutes for the Second annual session of the "United Association of Mountain Freewill Baptists," meeting at Midway Church in Greene County, Tennessee, October 21-24 1909. Delegates represented the French Broad, Clinch Valley, and Unicoi Associations and the Greene Co. Quarterly Meeting. These reported by letter; "verbal reports" were made of the Jack's Creek, Toe River, and John Wheeler associations. The Constitution provided for delegates from all seven bodies. The Reverend John H. Ballard was especially instrumental in this effort. Once again, I have no way of knowing how long the organization survived.

THE CURRENT SITUATION

In some ways, the present Free Will Baptist situation in East Tennessee is similar to those times in the 1880's. There are Tennessee churches in four associations that are *not* affiliated with the Tennessee State Association. These are as follows:

- Toe River Association, 19 churches, 1525 members
- Jack's Creek Association, 9 churches, 1292 members
- John Wheeler Association, 6 churches, 515 members
- Clinch Valley Association, 3 churches, 225 members

The last two of these associations are affiliated with the Virginia State Association, where most of the churches in these associations are located.

Chapter 2: The Union Association and its Progeny

I have already mentioned, in the previous chapter, the organization of the Union Association in 1872 by some of the Tennessee churches in the Toe River and American Associations. Thirteen churches, reporting 581 members, formed the association, meeting at Liberty Church in Washington County, Tennessee. I am not able to list those first 13 churches: the earliest minutes I know about are for 1883 and list 14 churches: Midway, Bell's Chapel, Mt. Zion No. 1, Chimney Top, Woolsey College, Mt. Pleasant, Bear Creek, and Union in Greene County; Van Hill, Grassy Creek, and Mt. Zion No. 2 in Hawkins County; Big Creek and Clear Creek in Cocke County; and Liberty in Washington County.

The Liberty church was the oldest of these churches, according to Paul Woolsey. It first met in a long school house on Horse Creek in Greene County, and later in the Hacker School House in Washington County. This makes it the first church organized by W. B. Woolsey in about 1847.¹² When W. B. Woolsey died in 1905, at the age of 85 (Wheeler had died in 1870, Peterson in 1880), there were 25 churches in the Union, reporting 1,272 members.

ALIGNMENT WITH THE NORTHERN MOVEMENT

One of the interesting things about the Union Association was its decision to affiliate at the time of its organization with the General Conference of Free Will Baptists—the Randall movement. W. B. Woolsey had learned of the movement some time earlier and had become a lifelong subscribe to *The Morning star*.¹³ The Civil War, which

split some American denominations, had not lessened Woolsey's interest in the northern Free Will Baptists: as already noted, there was strong feeling for the Federal Union in the mountains.

As early as 1869, the Toe River and American Associations had cooperated in writing to L. R. Burlingame of the General Conference to inquire about "amalgamation" and to ask that a home missionary visit "the scattered Free Will Baptists in Western N.C. and East Tennessee." The letter included this: "Very dear brethren we have been reduced to poverty by the rebellion and are very weak. We are desirous of instruction as we are illiterate, unlearned and scattered." The committee to look into this included Peterson, Wheeler, Woolsey, and others. While the Toe River minutes do not tell what came of this (the years 1872-74 are missing), the minutes of the 1874 session of the northern General Conference do record letters seeking admission from the American, Tow River, and Union associations. All three were admitted, but apparently the Union was the only one of the three that ever pursued the relationship any further. (Reference has already been made to tensions in the Toe River later on, in 1877-78, about whether to adopt the northern Treatise.)

Apparently W. B. Woolsey was more interested than the others, and so the action of the Union Association, under his influence, is not surprising. (Paul Woolsey says "Other newly formed associations followed the lead of the Union Association in this matter."¹⁴ I cannot provide specific validation of that, except that the John Wheeler did join.) Relations with the Randall movement affected names used by the association. At some point subsequent to 1883 the Union substituted "Yearly Meeting" for "Association," but changed back in 1893. At some point prior to 1906, the name was changed to "Union Free Baptist Association," with the "Will" not being put back in until 1920-21.

The alignment with the General Conference, which met triennially, continued until shortly before its merger with the Northern Baptists in 1910-11. Rev. J. W. Lucas attended the 1901 session at Harper's Ferry, West Virginia. Dr. T. H. Woolsey, W. B.'s doctor-layman son, was the Union's last delegate, attending the 1904 session at Hillsdale, Michigan. We may conclude that the Tennessee freewillers were not inclined to participate in the merger. The Union minutes for 1912 contain this: "Whereas the Union Association is not within the territory of the Northern Baptist Convention, but surrounded by Southern Baptists our relations to whom can in no way be effected (sic) by the proposed union between Free Baptists and Baptists of the Northern Convention therefore Resolved, that Union Association take no action for or against the proposed union."

EDUCATIONAL INTERESTS

Another important interest, closely related, and not limited to the Union Association, was educational effort. The first effort was "Woolsey's College." There had been talk about the need for education before the Civil War. As early as 1858, a committee on education of the Toe River Association had asked the churches to send delegates to a meeting to "select some suitable place in the bounds of this Association for the purpose of erecting a schoolhouse and building up a school of high character." It may be, as Paul Woolsey wrote, that "The war and the almost complete break down of the economic life immediately following this terrible conflict delayed any further action on the proposition."¹⁵ Regardless, the education committee at the 1866 session was more specific, asking for "the churches and individual members to liberally contribute to the aid of building a house for the purpose of a high school near Camp Creek Greene Co. Tenn." They named five trustees, including W. B. Woolsey. The 1867 minutes appointed several others, "with the former Trustees for a seminary for this association to meet Christmas day on the site near Camp Creek Greene Co. Tenn." Apparently these first efforts were unfruitful.

Paul Woolsey says that the 1872 session of the American Association named a committee to select a site, raise funds, and prepare to open, with W. B. Woolsey chairman. Subsequently (?-compare "the site" referred to above) he donated a three-and-a-half acre site "on the banks of Little Lick Creek between what is now South Greene and Camp Creek."¹⁶ A two-story brick building, 60 feet by 30 feet, was erected; Woolsey's College was opened in 1873 (or 1874?). Included among the funds provided was a \$300 donation from the Home Mission Society of the General Conference of Free Will Baptists. The program called for a regular high school course, with additional courses in Bible.¹⁷

During its 25 or 30 years of service, Woolsey College played a role in training a great number of young people, including several ministries—Free Will Baptist and otherwise. The school's program was discontinued soon after the turn of the century, although the "Woolsey College Church" continued to appear in the roll of churches until 1921.

A second, and much less successful, effort involved a school at Unicoi, Tennessee. The Rev. J. W. Lucas attended the 1901 General Conference at Harper's Ferry, West Virginia, to seek help for a school at Unicoi. Whereupon, the Mountain Educational Commission was established for that purpose, with the famous Rev. George H. Ball as chairman and Lucas as financial agent and secretary. This commission purchased, from the Unicoi Promotional Company, land and buildings for \$18,500—the intention being that Lucas would sell lots and raise the money to reimburse the General Conference. But the Unicoi Church

and others could raise but \$500, and so the commission asked the General Conference to take over. The school opened in 1903 with 65 students, 90 the following year.¹⁸

Union Association minutes during the period reveal something about the struggle. In 1906, a "Committee on the Unicoi High School" strongly urged support for it as "our own Institution." In 1908, the Committee on Education report revealed that some had endeavored to create division over the Unicoi property, reminding: "The Gen'l Conf., has at Unicoi reserved for school purposes about \$10,000.00 worth of property which it is ready to turn over to us when we satisfy them that we can maintain a school." The 1909 report "Resolved that we request our people to take hold of the property according to the proposition of the General Conference." The 1910 report of the Committee on Education professed to be "yet interested" in Unicoi and recommended that everyone hold ready "as soon as present litigation ceases" to accept the very liberal proposition of General Conference . . . and build a Free Baptist School at the earliest possible date." Paul Woolsey regarded the merger of the General Conference with Northern Baptists as the final blow; the Conference sold the property, leaving many to feel cheated and Brother Lucas to be blamed by some.¹⁹ Even so, a memorial for Brother Lucas, in the 1916 Union minutes, said, "He established schools at Parrottsville, Midway and Unicoi for the express purpose of education our poor Free Baptist children and ministers under adverse and trying circumstances . . . but by no fault of his own he failed." In 1917 the Education Committee recommended the new school recently opened in Tecumseh, Oklahoma; in 1918, they recommended both Tecumseh and "a splendid seminary" established at Ayden, North Carolina.

Later on, like the Cumberland, the Union was interested in getting the National Association to locate its college in Tennessee. Even before the National was organized, the eastern General Conference was talking about a central educational institution (after Eureka burned). The 1933 Union minutes recommended cooperation with the General Conference "in its efforts to establish a centralized educational institution for our church." Then, a year after the National was organized, the 1936 Union minutes include a motion to donate \$100 to "the new Bible College at Nashville, Tennessee"—obviously the action was a little premature, since nothing was established at that time. In 1939, the minutes refer to information that the National was planning to locate the proposed school "in Tennessee, perhaps in the bounds of our Association" and established a committee to work in cooperation and make immediate contact "in order to avoid the possibility of our losing [sic] it." That reference is clarified by the Tennessee State minutes for the same year, which endorsed "the property at Cedar Creek, near

Greeneville"—which was apparently being considered. By 1940, however, the Union minutes were still supportive but referred to the fact that, while Tennessee was ideal, two or three possible sites were being spoken of. When Nashville was finally chosen as the site, the Union's enthusiastic support was still evident.

THE CURRENT PICTURE IN EAST TENNESSEE

In the previous chapter I listed Free Will Baptist churches in East Tennessee that are *not* affiliated with the Tennessee State Association. There are now three associations in the area that *are* affiliated with the state. The Appalachian Association was formed in 1968, made up of churches that were in the Union, mostly in its Eastern Quarterly. The Union covers a wide geographic area, and the distances involved apparently provided the main reason for the new organization. The Northeast Tennessee Association was formed in 1970, consisting of churches in Tennessee that had been in the Clinch Valley Association in Virginia. Apparently these churches felt it would be more appropriate to be in the Tennessee State Association.

Current statistics are:

Union Association, 84 churches, 7,572 members

Appalachian Association, 29 churches, 3,568 members

Northeast Association, 6 churches, 452 members

It will readily be seen, therefore, that all the associations listed here and at the end of the previous chapter trace their ultimate origins to the Toe River Association founded by Moses Peterson, John Wheeler, and W. B. Woolsey.

Chapter 3: The Free Will Christian Baptists

The Stone Association of Free Will Christian Baptists exists in two subdivisions, the Eastern and Western Divisions. These Free Will Baptists are not now affiliated with the State Association; even so, there has been good contact and fellowship over the years. They occupy the territory that might be called East Central Tennessee.

ORIGINS OF THE STONE ASSOCIATION

The origins of the Stone Association are unknown, insofar as specific details are concerned. Some general things can be said, among them the fact that these folk were not "Free Will Baptist" in name when they first began. J. H. Grime has suggested that their roots reach back into the widespread controversy that arose over the work of Alexander and Thomas Campbell. One of the Campbells' associates was Barton W. Stone. Apparently there was "a faction of [his] followers . . . which never did attach themselves to Campbellism . . . adopting the name Christian."²⁰ More evidence is needed before I could be sure that there is a definite connection with Barton Stone.

What is surer, I think, is that in the Caney Fork Baptist Association, (a strong Calvinistic body in DeKalb and other central Tennessee counties) there was an Elder Chorder Stone, an Arminian, who—with his son, Thomas Stone—withdraw from this body. Grime understands that these Stones formed an alliance with Barton Stone's "Christians," this ultimately leading to the name "Christian Baptists."²¹ This happened in about 1850. Such, apparently, was the origin of the "Stone Association of Christian Baptists, Church of Christ." (One should not think that the attachment on the end, "Church of Christ," had anything to do with the Campbells' emphasis. Long before the Campbells, it was common practice for many churches, Baptist or otherwise, to attach these words.)

I am not able to give further detail. I do not know, for example, whether Barton Stone and Chorder Stone were related, or for which—if either—the Stone Association was named. Current minutes identify the 1910 session as the 45th. That would carry the Stone back to about 1865. The division into two sections, Eastern and Western—an amiable one so far as I know—apparently occurred in about 1887-88.

MERGER WITH SOUTHERN BAPTISTS

One important chapter in the history of the Stone Association concerns union with the Southern Baptists. In 1918-19, with which dispute, the body (Western Division only, so far as I know) joined the Tennessee Baptist Association and changed its name to the Stone Association of Baptists. The *Freewill Baptist Messenger* for November 15, 1918, justified this action, which took the form of adopting the New Hampshire Baptist Confession of Faith and providing for the election of delegates to the Tennessee and Southern Baptist Conventions. (The story, from the side of a Southern Baptist personally involved, is told in Sam Edwards' article, mentioned in note 21).

It seem clear, however, that this was not the will of the majority. The Cumberland Association minutes of 1918 may contain a hint how this happened: the fraternal letter from the Stone to the Cumberland says, "Owing to the flu, attendance was small, with but half the churches represented." At any rate the "union" produced two Stone Associations, one of "Baptists," the other of "Free Will Christian Baptists." And while the 1920 minutes of the "Baptists" still listed all of the original churches, by 1922 only 12 were listed, with the next year's minutes listing 27 churches that "made no report." Of the approximately 35 churches in 1918-19, at least 18 were still in the "Free Will" organization after the others had united with the Tennessee Baptist Convention, in 1925 and years following.

We are not surprised, however, that the 1920 "Baptist" minutes bemoaned the "attempt on the part of some of our brethren to organize another association and thus disrupt the fellowship . . . in this mountain country." (Those who merge always blame the others for creating disunity, whether in the majority or not!)

FREE WILL CHRISTIAN BAPTISTS

The Stone Association took the name "Free Will," as an addition, probably in the late 1880's. This was apparently because of the influence of John L. Welch Sr., father of the recently deceased John L. Welch of

Cofer's Chapel. The senior Welch was reared and preached in the Stone Association, in DeKalb County. In about 1885, he and his family moved to the Dickson, Tennessee area, thereupon becoming acquainted with—and joining—the Cumberland Association of Free Will Baptists. Recognizing that the two bodies had identical beliefs and should be in fellowship, Brother Welch persuaded each group to take on parts of the other's name. The Cumberland added "Christian," and the Stone added "Free Will," making both of them "Free Will Christian Baptists." The Cumberland wore the lengthy name from 1886 to 1920, when the "Christian" was dropped. The Eastern Division of the Stone also dropped the "Christian" in 1968. The Western Division still wears the full title.

Since we can be sure how this was effected in the Cumberland, this explanation seems clearly more reliable than the one that appeared in the November 15, 1918, issue of the *Freewill Baptist Messenger*: as part of justifying the union with Southern Baptists, the editor attributed the addition of "Freewill" to a visit—"about 25 or 30 years ago") of a representative from the northern Freewill Baptists; he then observed that the Stone's union with Tennessee Southern Baptists was but following the lead of the northern Freewill Baptists in merging with the Northern Baptists.

One item of interest is that there was a fine periodical in the area (mentioned above), the *Freewill Baptist messenger*, which was published from 1912 until some time after the union-split. The Cumberland had also supported this monthly paper, and at one point John L. Welch was editor of a page devoted to the Cumberland. When the union with Southern Baptists came, the publishers of the paper were part of the union.

THE STONE AND THE STATE ASSOCIATION

Many are not aware that the Stone has taken part, occasionally, in the State Association. The 1939 minutes include the report of the association evangelist, G. W. Poague, who indicated that he had attended the National Association, had the association recognized and statistics entered. He had also attended the State Association and "secured our admission," following which the state association had voted to convene in a Stone Association church in 1940; Col. Poague had selected Dodson's Branch as the site. The 1940 session of the State Association did meet there, and the 1940 minutes of the Stone included favorable action in a motion to receive an offering "to pay on our dues for the past State Association." Further, a motion was carried to print

the State Association budget in the Stone minutes, assuring the churches that there was nothing compulsory about it, and recommending that the various churches cooperate with the State and National programs.

Chapter 4: Free Will Baptists in South Central Tennessee

The Free Will Baptists in the southern part of our state, along the Tennessee River, have been there a long time. They are not affiliated with the state association and therefore have been neglected by others of us in the Volunteer State. So far as I know, there is no connection, in origin, with Free Will Baptists in other parts of Tennessee, although that guess might be proved wrong by some thorough research. For what I report here, about origins, I am totally dependent on *The Free Will Baptist Cyclopedia*, in its article on "Tennessee"; I can not verify the information. I have found no sources within the Tennessee River Association that can help.

Apparently the "mother" association in the area was organized by Rev. C. C. Vandiver in 1839 and called the Bethlehem Association. Churches were in Perry, Wayne, and Hardin counties.

From that association, in 1877, churches were set off to form the Tennessee River Association, including churches in the edges of Tennessee, Alabama, and Mississippi.

Then, in 1879, yet another association was formed by churches of the two just mentioned: The Flat Creek Association, "located in the southern part of Tennessee west of the Tennessee River."²²

The Flint River Association was formed in 1881, also of churches in this fellowship, but apparently included churches in Alabama only. The *Cyclopedia* reported (1890) that all four of these associations, having a common origin in the Bethlehem Association, participated in a Quadrennial Meeting that held its third session in 1888. In 1889, when J. T. Ward, editor of the *Free Baptist Cyclopedia*, gathered statistics, the four associations had a combined strength of some 2,700 members, with the Tennessee River the largest at 1,062.²³

From what I can learn, of the three associations that had churches in Tennessee, only the Tennessee River Association still survives. Older members of that association have not even heard of the Bethlehem

Association; the Flat Creek I remembered as having ceased to exist many years ago. The 1910 Tennessee River minutes report a corresponding letter from the Flat Creek Association, but the few minutes we have in subsequent years do not: these are 1924, 1934, 1937, and scattered ones following. Apparently two or three Flat Creek churches—some by reorganization—are now in the Tennessee River Association.

In earlier years, there was occasional exchange of fraternal delegates between the Tennessee River and the Cumberland Associations: reference occurs in Cumberland minutes in 1890, 1911, 1920. In 1907 and 1910 both the Tennessee River and the Flat Creek Associations participated in the southern, triennial General Conference (see chapter six).

The latest (1984) minutes of the Tennessee River Association list 17 churches, six of them in Alabama. The eleven Tennessee churches report 971 members. These churches are almost entirely in Hardin and Wayne Counties.

The Muscle Shoals State Line Association represents a division from the Tennessee River Association, apparently in 1920—since the 1983 session is identified as the sixty-third annual session. Some 20 of its churches are in Tennessee, five in Alabama. The territory occupied by the 20 Tennessee churches is similar to that occupied by the Tennessee River Association: Hardin, Wayne, and Lawrence Counties for the most part. These churches report 1,643 members.

The 1952 minutes also included a notice that the State Association would meet at the Scott Street church and urged all churches to send delegates. The 1973 minutes also record a motion passed "that we send the Moderator from our Association to the Cookeville Church on November 12 to welcome the State Association which will be meeting there."

Like the Union and Cumberland Associations, the Stone has often expressed interest in education for the ministry. The *Freewill Baptist Messenger* always advertised the "Baxter Seminary": the April 1, 1913 issue expressed it thus: "If you mean to go to college, teach school, or till the soil you will find the special course you need at Baxter Seminary." Apparently this was an independent effort, perhaps by the editor of the paper, and not officially a project of the association. Even so the 1916 Stone minutes (Western Division) contain a fine report on education, urging the establishing of a Freewill Baptist school and recommending that ministers—especially the young ones—"avail themselves of every opportunity to acquire an education." Later on, after Free Will Baptist Bible College was started, the minutes often contained reports of education committees that recommended the college for training (see 1944-49, 1956, 1965-72, etc.).

THE PRESENT SITUATION

Current statistics for the Stone Association are as follows:

Western Division, 40 churches, 6,564 members

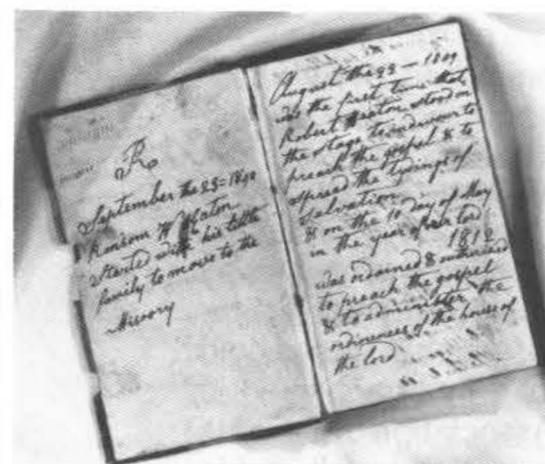
Eastern Division, 21 churches, 2,064 members

The Western Stone, in 1967, purchased the Yankee Town School property to serve as a headquarters and central meeting place.

Two smaller associations of churches, affiliated with the State Association, have been organized in recent years by churches in the same geographic area of the Stone. The Central Association was organized in 1968 and has 5 churches with some 280 members. Most of those are relatively young churches. The Liberty Association, organized in 1976, has 6 churches reporting 975 members—most or all of these were Stone Association churches at one time.

Chapter 5: Beginnings in Middle Tennessee

The Free Will Baptist work now represented by the Cumberland Association has its roots in the period when the area was first being settled. There are still some unanswered questions, but given the current knowledge our story must begin with Robert Heaton (sometimes "Eaton").



HEATON AND THE BEGINNINGS

Robert Heaton was born in 1765, his family among the earliest settlers of the area. When the famous Donelson-Robertson group moved from East Tennessee in 1779, the Heaton family had established "Heaton's Station" on the Cumberland—evidently in preparation for the settlement. When the settlers petitioned the assembly of North Carolina for protection (1782), Robert Heaton's name was eighth. According to Heaton's own record book,²⁴ he

began to preach in 1809 and was ordained in 1812. In 1813 he "set in order" "Zion Church in Davidson County White's Creek State of Tennessee." (Since some of the names are identified as "former members," we may assume there had been an earlier organization there.)

By 1820 Heaton had established another preaching point on Sycamore Creek in Robertson County, and in 1823 that arm was constituted the Sycamore/Sweet Spring Church. In 1826, another church was established on the Marrowbone, later to be known as Charity. An 1839 entry refers to his church as "the Church of Christ called Separate Baptist." By 1841 he was ministering at another church called Good Spring—I cannot say whether the present Good Springs

Church is descended from that or not, since its history is not continuous.

From Heaton's record we learn that his earliest affiliation was with the South Kentucky Association of Separate Baptists. The 1812 minutes of that association refer to an unnamed "body of Baptists in Tennessee, who were received in our association." The 1813 minutes mention petitions from two Tennessee churches—White's Creek and Sam's Creek in Davidson County, Tennessee. The 1815 South Kentucky minutes list Heaton as present, representing his church(es).

When the South Kentucky Association decided to divide, in 1819, the southern area was known as the Nolin/Nolynn Association of Separate Baptists, and the Tennessee churches were in that jurisdiction. In fact, in 1820, the Nolin met at Lowe's Meeting House in Tennessee, with the Sycamore arm of Heaton's Zion Church. In 1825, Heaton's churches petitioned for permission to form an Association in Tennessee; evidently nothing came of this. By about 1830, after some disruptions, Heaton and his Marrowbone Church were the only ones being mentioned in the records of the Nolin Association. Even so, the movement was receiving new growth, and another possible associational fellowship, closer home, had developed.

THE CONCORD ASSOCIATION

This new option, in Middle Tennessee, was the Concord Association of Separate Baptists. The churches of the original Concord Baptist Association, formed about 1809-10, evidently regarded themselves as "United Baptists," a name that represented a union of the Regular Baptists (strong Calvinists) with Separate Baptists (which included bold milder Calvinists and Arminians)—that union had been achieved in Virginia in 1787. Apparently, then, the Concord Association of Baptists represented both Calvinists and Arminians, attempting to fellowship with one another in peace. But in 1826-27 tensions surfaced and the Concord was split, leading to a Concord Association of Separate Baptists. This meant that, for the first time, there was an association made up entirely of "Separate Baptist" churches, in Tennessee, available to Heaton and his circle.

At this point, another important name enters the picture: Wilson L. Gower. Gower had been baptized by Heaton in 1822, had come with him in 1826 as clerk at Marrowbone, had been dismissed by letter—I would guess to join a church he served as pastor—in 1832, and had attended the Nolin Association with Heaton in 1833 when Heaton went there for the last time. Gower, evidently, had begun establishing churches and was first to become interested in the Concord Association

of Separate Baptists.

By 1837, then, Heaton and Gower and their churches had begun to represent in the Concord: that year, they both preached at the association. Gower was moderator in 1838, when he represented Blue Spring Church and Heaton represented Good Spring and Charity/Marrowbone. In 1840, Heads church was in the list, represented by Charles Lankford and by George Head, who had been baptized by Heaton in 1835. In 1841, yet another church in this circle joined Concord: Liberty in Stewart County, represented by Gower.

But this associational fellowship proved to be short lived: in 1842, the Concord Association of Separate Baptists reunited with the Concord Association of United Baptists, and there was no longer a distinctively Separate Baptist association. One is not surprised, therefore, to find, in the last minutes (1842) of the Concord Association of Separate Baptists, this entry: "Resolved that those churches which petitioned for letters of dismissal, for the purpose of forming a Separate Association, be dismissed, viz. Heads Church, Liberty, Blue Spring, Good Spring, and Charity." These were the very five that had joined the Concord since 1837 under Heaton's and Gower's influence; clearly, they did not intend to lose their identity as Separate Baptists. We also note, as a subsequent entry in those 1842 minutes: "Mt. Zion church is dismissed." This church had joined in 1840, represented by R. R. and William Barton. Whether there was any original connection with the Heaton-Gower circle I do not know, but it is clear that Mr. Zion decided to go with the other five churches.

Out of this came the Cumberland Association, organized shortly afterward. Minutes for 1843 exist, and appear to presume a prior session (in 1842, I would assume). At any rate, the "Cumberland Association of Separate Baptists," in 1843 meeting at Head's Church, included seven churches: Liberty, Blue Spring, Good Spring, Charity, Mt. Zion (represented by William Barton), Heads, and Sycamore (which was apparently received during the session). Barton was moderator. Gower, Barton, and a James M. Cherry preached. Heaton was present. One month beyond this October, 1843, meeting, Robert Heaton, aged 78, died. His grave is in the Forest Hill Cemetery in Ashland City, Tennessee, where he lived for many years. He saw the fruition of his life's ministry in the formation of a Separate Baptist association in Middle Tennessee—one that has survived to the present day.

THE SEPARATE BAPTISTS

That these were "Separate Baptists" needs some background explanation. The Separate Baptists go back to a group of Connecticut

colonists who settled at Sandy Creek, North Carolina, in 1755, under the leadership of Shubal Stearns and Daniel Marshall. These men, originally Congregationalists, had become "New Light" Separatists under the revivalistic preaching of men like Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield. When they became Baptists, they were much more conscious of the importance of evangelism and conversion than the old Calvinistic Baptists had been. Consequently, the Separate Baptists were more mildly Calvinistic and tolerant, allowing room for varieties of belief on the Calvinistic-Arminian issues, apparently including those of outright Arminian persuasion. By the 1780's the winds of union were blowing strong, and the Separate and Regular Baptists of Virginia agreed to merge, as United Baptists, in 1787. Similar mergings occurred in other places.²⁵

At this point, I can only guess at what happened. My theory is that the more convinced Arminians among the Separate Baptists, unlike the mild Calvinists, had trouble accommodating themselves to such union. Apparently, pockets of these kept the name Separate Baptist, even after some of their brothers united with the Regulars. (Some of these have persisted until the present day.) Such would include, if these assumptions are correct, the South Kentucky and Nolin Associations referred to above, as well as the Separates among the Concord. The Tennessee Baptist historians, like Grime, appear to think the "Separate Baptists" in Tennessee were a more-or-less local phenomenon, produced mostly by Campbellian Arminianism. I think it more likely that they represented the movements and influence of the Arminians among the original Separate Baptists, whether Campbell's preaching may have stirred their feelings or not.

At any rate, the fact that Free Will Baptists—in some places—were originally "Separate Baptists" need nor surprise us. The Arminian Separates were sometimes called "freewillers." (Actually, *anyone* holding Arminian sentiments—Baptist or not—was likely to be called, with a sense of ridicule, perhaps, a "freewiller.") In 1825, for example, a little testimony pamphlet entitled "The Experiences of Lucretia Patterson" identified the lady as belonging to "the Society of Free Will or Separate Baptists." (She was in the Heaton circle.) Even before that, the 1823 minutes of the Nolin Association of Separate Baptists included a report from one of its committees that had attended a meeting sponsored by Regular Baptists seeking union. The report, heavily sprinkled with satire and humor, includes various references to themselves as "free willers"—evidently indicating that they did not mind accepting a name others had put on them.

I do not know precisely when the Cumberland Association officially changed its name from "Separate" to "Free Will" Baptist. It was done at least by 1856, as indicated by a loose copy of the constitution and

bylaws of the association bearing that date. (The 1911 minutes contain a brief historical article written by G. V. Frey, who says "Freewill" was added in about 1851 and that for awhile "Freewill Separate Baptist" was used, with the "Separate" being dropped "some years after the Civil War." But the article contains many inaccuracies and is not documented.)

As I have noted at other places in this history, the reader will surely recognize that there are many gaps in the information given above—and a few wrong conclusions may have been drawn. While I can say confidently that Heaton and Gower should be regarded as founding fathers of the Cumberland Association, in 1842 (or 43), I cannot say what "free will" influences were already in place before Heaton. Who taught or baptized him? We may never know. The Goodspeed history of Robertson County said that Free Will Baptists had an organization there as early as 1798, near Turnersville, organized by Nathan Arnett and Jonathan Darden; that this organization lapsed and was later revived, as Head's Church. But there is at present no way known to me of verifying or developing this. Furthermore, the 1815 minutes of the South Kentucky Association of Separate Baptists made reference to "churches in connection with Joseph Dorris of Tennessee"; but no further mention of this name occurs. I am aware that one Joseph Dorris had been a principal in a controversy in a "Mero Association of Baptists" (Kentucky-Tennessee)—one that led to its dissolution in 1803; and that a "Jo Dorris" had been excluded from the pulpit of a Hazel Creek Church in 1801, for preaching open communion. But all these remain tantalizing tidbits of information that might—or might not—open doors to much more information about Free Will Baptist beginnings, prior to Robert Heaton, in Middle Tennessee.

Chapter 6: The Cumberland Association

The history of the Cumberland Association, since its organization in 1842/43, has been uninterrupted, even though not much is known about its first 30 years. Except for the 1843 minutes, we have none until 1876, then for 14 of the 25 years through 1900. In 1876, the Association listed 19 churches, as compared to the seven of 1843. Of those seven, two were no longer listed: Blue Spring and Sycamore.

Some matters of interest can be noted. One of these is found in the articles of faith: the earliest we possess are in the 1876 minutes. Of ten articles, two deal with the possibility of apostasy, as follows:

Art 5: We believe that the faithful Christian will never fall from grace; not withstanding: we believe in the free moral agency of man, after justification, and that there is a possible danger of falling into sin, and being finally lost.

Art 6. We believe, according to the Scriptures, Paul's letter to the Hebrews, 6th chapter, 1st to 7th verses, that after a man has been made partaker of the Holy Ghost, if he shall fall from grace, it is impossible ever to renew him again unto repentance, or restore him again into the favor of God.

Also interesting is article 10: "We believe in the justification of infants by the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ, in passive state, and thereby adopting them as heirs of His Kingdom." (All ten articles, without any significant changes, continued to be printed in each year's minutes until 1947.)

FELLOWSHIP WITH OTHER FREE WILL BAPTISTS

In chapter two I have dealt with the relationship between the Union Association and the northern movement. The Cumberland Association also had some interests, although apparently not as strong. The 1876 minutes recommended northern Free Will Baptist schools and publica-

tions, and this continued until shortly before the northern brethren merged with the Northern Baptists. In the 1885 minutes, there is "An Address to the Churches," written by J. W. Gower (son of Wilson L. Gower), urging zeal and using the growth of the Free Will Baptist cause in the North as a stimulus. He says, "Brethren, we have attached ourselves to the General Conference, as you know . . . it is a very thriving body at this time, numbering 140,000. If we are as zealous as we ought to be in a few years every Free Will Baptist, South, will become a member of the Conference." The proceedings for that year included the appointment of Gower as a delegate, with G. W. Binkley, his alternate. The 1883 minutes of the General Conference confirm that the Cumberland joined that year: a letter of petition is included in the minutes, naming T. C. Cofer as delegate. (Since he is not named in the list of delegates, I assume he did not make it in person.)

Not much came of this; the distances were very great. Ten years later, in 1896 and 1897, Rev. H. M. Ford, of Hillsdale, Michigan, Field Secretary for the General Conference, attended the Cumberland, which responded with a letter of "fraternal greeting and Christian salutation to the Free Baptists of the North," professing to "desire a more thorough acquaintance" and naming G. W. Binkley a fraternal messenger who, it was hoped, could represent at the General Conference at Ocean Park, Maine (1898). He did not go but the Rev. Mr. Ford's report to his own people is interesting, as taken from the 1898 minutes of the General Conference, north:

I have visited the General Association of the South twice, and the Cumberland Association twice, and the Western Division of the Stone Association once. These white Freewill Baptists of the South spring from a different denominational ancestry than the Free Baptists of the north. There are between forty and fifty thousand of them. They are true to Free Baptist instincts, but uneducated, unsystematic, and not well organized . . . These people believe intensely what they believe, and are tenacious especially of footwashing . . . When I said before an audience of five hundred or more that in matters of religion we in the north cared no more for the color of man's skin than we did for the color of his eyes, . . . I could not see that it affected the audience in the least, but when they asked me point blank if we practised footwashing, and I replied "No," you should have seen the look of disappointment.

Mr. Ford continued by observing that matters were somewhat different in the John Wheeler and Union Associations where they "do not practise footwashing and approach nearer our methods and ideas." (In

view of the Tow River articles of faith cited earlier, I would question Mr. Ford's understanding that footwashing was not practised in the John Wheeler and Union Associations.)

The 1900 Cumberland minutes indicate, again, that G. V. Frey, J. E. Hudgens and W. H. Jackson were to "write and bear letters of fraternal greetings to the Triennial conference of General [sic] Baptist North." (I assume this is an accidental error and really refers to the Free Baptists.) What they meant by "fraternal" is not certain. At any rate, I find no further reference to official delegations or letters to the Randallites. One reason *may* be that a General Conference, South, was being formed, referred to in the 1901 minutes (to be discussed below). Unlike the Union Association, the Cumberland minutes took no notice, later, of the merger of the northern General Conference with the Northern Baptists. Also unlike the Union, the Cumberland never changed its names to fit the terminology of the northern Free Will Baptists.

This discussion leads, naturally, into a discussion of other, broader bodies that the Cumberland worked with. In 1890, a Committee on Literature and Union expressed thanks for increasing favor for a "union of all white Liberal Baptists of the South" and named delegates to represent in "the coming General Association." The 1896 minutes also named delegates to the "General Association," as did those of 1897, indicating that said meeting would be "at Nashville, Tenn., Oct. 28, 1897." Nothing further is known about this organization: how broad its scope or how long it survived. It is obviously the association referred to (above) by Mr. Ford of the northern General Conference.

More important was a triennial "General Conference" of mostly southern Free Will Baptists, modelled after the northern General Conference. Its 1898 meeting (at Ayden, N.C.) was called its 30th session, but that is obviously because the 1898 session of the *northern* General Conference was its 30th session. The southern version viewed itself as a challenge to, and true replacement for, the northern organization. This happened, to begin with, at the instigation of Rev. Thomas Peden of Ohio. When the northern General Conference voted, in 1889, to incorporate as the "General Conference of Free Baptists," Peden was one who voted "No," apparently because "Freewill" was not used. At the next triennial meeting, in 1892, Peden voted (with the majority) to hold up the transfer of General Conference funds to the Corporation until three-fourths of the bodies composing the conference had ratified it. Thus by 1895 Peden was challenging the validity of the incorporated conference and in that year held his own version. Of this version of the "General Conference," the northern body heard, at its 1898 session, that "Mr. Peden continues his opposition . . . , is misleading brethren and churches as to the polity and purpose of our organization under our present constitution"; and that

"The Peden Conference held at Coulton, Ohio, in October, 1895, was very small, no ministers attending from a distance . . . , the only business transacted was to adjourn to meet at Coffers [sic] Chapel, Nashville, Tenn."

It seems likely to me that Peden's effort and the "General Association" in the south referred to above, were in some way blended. Whether or not, the south thus had its own version of the triennial General Conference, billed as though it were the true continuation of the original northern General Conference. Its earliest session, as just seen, was 1895, and we have minutes for sessions from 1898 to 1910.

The Cumberland took part. The 1898 minutes of the triennial conference named G. W. Binkley of the Cumberland to its board. The 1901 session met at Cofer's Chapel in Nashville and received letters from the Cumberland and the Stone Association in Tennessee. The 1907 meeting was also at Cofer's Chapel in Nashville, with its pastor—W. M. Brummit—serving as temporary Moderator. The 1910 meeting, at Florence, Alabama, saw W. M. Rodgers of the Cumberland elected as one of the body's "National Evangelists." Apparently the 1910 meeting was the last one.

INTEREST IN A NATIONAL BODY

The Cumberland did not give up hope for a more "national" body of Free Will Baptists. In 1916, the western brethren organized the "Cooperative General Association of Free Will Baptists" at Pattonsburg, Missouri. In 1917 that body met at Tecumseh, Oklahoma, and John L. Welch had been designated to be present. The 1917 Cooperative minutes do not indicate that he was there, but the 1918 Cumberland minutes record a decision to petition that association for admission. The 1918 Cooperative minutes confirm that Welch was there (at Paintsville, Kentucky) and presented the Cumberland letter, which was favorably acted on. At the 1919 Cumberland meeting, Welch reported, and an offering was taken to help pay for printing equipment at Tecumseh. J. E. Hudgens was named delegate to the next session, to be held at Cofers in Nashville. (I have not been able to confirm whether the session did meet at Cofers.)

This relationship was not destined to be permanent, perhaps because of the distances involved. At any rate, the southeastern brethren were once again promoting a "General Conference." And so an organizational meeting was scheduled for 1912 in Nashville, at Cofer's Chapel. The 1920 Cumberland minutes had "approved" and named Welch and G. W. Fambrough as delegates. Upon its organization, the General Conference chose Welch as its first moderator. This

organization was not doomed to fail. It met annually from 1921-38, the Cumberland always taking part, until the National Association displaced both it and the western Cooperative General Association.



*Organizational Meeting of National Association
Cofer's Chapel, 1935*

As a final installment in the story of the Cumberland's participation in broader Free Will Baptist organizations, I note only that John L Welch was a member of the (eastern) General Conference committee that met with the (western) Cooperative General Association committee in 1933 and 1934 to lay the groundwork for the first meeting of the National Association of Free Will Baptists in 1935 in Nashville, Tennessee—at Cofer's Chapel again!

FREEWILL CHRISTIAN BAPTISTS

Many people are unaware that, for awhile, the Cumberland bore the name "Freewill Christian Baptist." The reason for this is explained in chapter three, where the history of the Stone Association is dealt with. The 1886 Cumberland minutes record the change and attribute it to the fact that John L Welch, Sr., had come into the Cumberland area and convinced them that the doctrine of the two associations was the same. The 1920 Cumberland minutes record the decision to drop the "Christian": surely it is not coincidence that this followed shortly after the 1918-19 decision of a segment of the Stone Association to unite with the Southern Baptists. Prior to this, there had been an almost annual

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NASHVILLE PASTOR NAMED PRESIDENT OF BAPTIST SECT

Rev. Welch Heads Na- tional Free Will As- sociation Here

The Rev. J. L. Welch, pastor of the North Side Free Will Baptist church, was elected president of the National Association of Free Will Baptist churches yesterday.

The association is now in the process of organization in a meeting of representatives of Free Will Baptist churches from 12 states being held at the North Side church, 1600 Tenth avenue, north. The conference opened Tuesday night and will continue through tomorrow afternoon. The association will govern approximately 200,000 Free Will Baptists.

heretofore joined only in state associations, in the South and Middle West.

The Rev. I. J. Blackwelder, Ayden, N. C., editor of The Free Will Baptist, was elected recording secretary. Both officers will serve three-year terms, until the next national meeting is held.

Tuesday's speaker was the Rev. Winford Davis, representing the Monet, Mo., Indian Creek association.

Wednesday's speakers included the Rev. S. H. Styron, of Pine Level, N. C., president of the North Carolina association, and the Rev. T. H. Willey, missionary representative of the Free Will Baptist church in Tennessee.

An explorer and missionary in South America for many years, the Rev. Mr. Willey is planning a future exploration trip through Panama, Colombia and Venezuela. He spoke dressed in the garb of a South American Indian.

Today's program will be as follows:

9 a. m., devotional; 9:30 business session; 11 a. m., sermon by the Rev. M. F. Vanhose of Paintsville, Ky.; 2 p. m., report of committees; 8 p. m., sermon by the Rev. C. B. Thompson of Bryan, Tex.

Mrs. Rosa McAdams will preach tonight at 7:30 o'clock at the West Nashville Free Will Baptist church.

Delegates attending the conference from the various states are as follows:

Alabama, 15; North Carolina, 20; Georgia, 9; Arkansas, 3; Oklahoma, 13; Missouri, 14; Texas, 6; Nebraska, 1; Tennessee, 33; Kentucky, 1; and two delegates representing the Ohio, Kentucky, West Virginia tri-state association.

exchange of delegates between the Stone and the Cumberland; afterward, many years passed before there would again be correspondence with that segment of the original Stone that remained "Free Will Christian Baptists."

EDUCATIONAL INTERESTS

In the area of education, the Cumberland was not as successful but apparently as interested as the Union. In many of the minutes, one school or another was recommended. In 1876, we find the following:

Resolved, that this Association recommend the Free Will Baptist Theological Institute of Reddyville [sic: read "Ridgeville"], Indiana, and we would recommend that our churches take steps to assist young men to prepare themselves for the ministry.

For the next several years, both Hillsdale and Ridgeville were recommended. In 1897, the association named a committee to "formulate a short course of study for our ministers." By 1900, the Ayden, N.C., Seminary was being recommended. By 1901, ministers were being recommended to use the Butler and Dunn theology text and to read "Ecclesiastical history as much as practical."

What might have been—but was not—a significant development is reflected in the 1908 minutes. A Rev. Dell Upton had come to Nashville, from West Virginia, to pastor at Cofer's Chapel, having become acquainted with the work when he attended the 1907 (southern triennial) General Conference at Cofer's (see above). Subsequently the Cumberland "Education Committee," of which he was chairman, resolved to "exhaust every resource to establish a school for our denomination, and that we accept the charter of the Freewill Baptist University of Nashville, Tennessee"—which Upton had secured. The resolution went on to invite other associations to join in making this "a grand success," and a further resolution named C. H. Pickle the Cumberland's financial agent to collect funds "for our school and publishing house."

Upton was also involved with the publishing of a little paper by the Ladies Aid Society of Cofer's Chapel—the *Free Will Baptist Record*. In the June, 1908, issue Dr. E. L. St. Claire, of Georgia, wrote that he and Upton had selected a building in Nashville that would be suitable for the university and for a denominational headquarters; he challenged Tennessee Free Will Baptists to buy the building—the price was \$8,000. Nothing came of this effort except for the important fact that John L. Welch, Jr., moved to Nashville to live with the Uptons as the first—and

only—student. By the next year (1909), Upton was gone and the Cumberland Presbytery, demanding his credentials, took action that he be "excluded for contempt."

In spite of the disappointment, the 1909 Cumberland minutes deplored the ministers' educational deficiency and admonished candidates for the ministry to "make every effort to obtain an English education," suggesting that churches assist worthy young men along these lines. Nearly every year, the minutes said similar things, and at times short institutes were conducted. In 1919, for example, the schools at Ayden and Tecumseh were both recommended, as was John H. Wolfe's correspondence course—reflecting the Cumberland's identification with the (western) Cooperative General Association (see above). In 1920, the Moody Bible Institute was recommended and the association offered to try to make arrangements for the expenses of attending. In 1921, this idea was refined and redirected, with a committee named to make provision to defray the expenses of ministerial students, including two members of Cofer's Chapel then at Ayden—such help to be a loan that was forgiven if the candidate remained with the Free Will Baptist denomination. The 1922 report indicated that a number of young ministers had been assisted in this way, and the annual reports continued to report this program up until about the time the National Association was organized.

From the beginning of the organization of the National Association, when talk about a national school was heard, the Cumberland actively encouraged the effort. The 1935 minutes (which named delegates to the national conference scheduled for Cofer's in November, 1935) contain a report of the Cumberland Woman's Auxiliary Convention which refers to articles written inviting the National Body's use of "a building" for a school—the building meant is not clear. The report of the association's Education Committee included a recommendation to cooperate with the "national conference in its efforts to establish a centralized educational institution." A 1936 resolution commended "the untiring efforts" of John L. Welch "to create both a sentiment for and to locate a denominational school at Nashville, Tenn." The resolution continued, observing that the denominational board apparently favored a Weaverville, N.C. location, but went on record as favoring a Nashville location. (Even so, a later action approved sending the board \$200 even if the Weaverville property were purchased.)

Apparently the national efforts were temporarily derailed: the next minutes (1937) recommended support for Zion Bible School in Blakely, Georgia. The 1938 minutes recommended cooperation with the educational plan adopted by the Eastern General Association, to send money to Rev. J. R. Davidson, treasurer of that association's Board of Education. In 1939, the Cumberland endorsed and pledged its support

to the National Education Plan and heard a report from the State Association urging full cooperation with the National Board in carrying out plans for a Bible College. In 1940, the Cumberland heard from Rev. L. R. Ennis on the subject and pledged its full support to efforts at establishing a denominational school. We can imagine the rejoicing, then, when W. E. Coville reported, in 1941, that property had been bought on Richland Avenue in Nashville, with plans for opening in September of 1942. No doubt the Cumberland's efforts made some contribution to the fact that our Free Will Baptist Bible College was located in the state of Tennessee.

OTHER CONCERNS

The Cumberland Association has been involved in other important endeavors as a pace setter. One of these was the women's work. In 1907, Pastor Dell Upton of Cofer's Chapel organized a Ladies' Aid Society in his church. Other churches followed suit and in 1920 a group of these organized the "Convention of Ladies' Aid Societies of Tennessee"—although all were in the Cumberland. By 1929, the Union Association Ladies' Aid Societies had also organized; and in 1947 the two groups organized the Tennessee Woman's Auxiliary Convention.

Space does not permit a fuller account of this work here. Reference will be made in chapter seven to the role of the Cumberland Ladies' Aid Societies (the name was changed to Woman's Auxiliaries in 1933) in the founding of the Free Will Baptist Home for Children; at their organizational meeting in 1921 they committed themselves to such a project. Reference has already been made to their role in seeking an educational institution in the state. It is clear that the women's organization in Tennessee was one of the forerunners of that work in our denomination. The story of the women's work is being fully told in a book by Dr. Mary Wisheart, available at the same time this booklet is.

The Free Will Baptist League (now the Church Training Service) was also early in the area. In the Cumberland minutes for 1920, the following entry appears:

Miss Ruth Steward, of Nashville, gave us a very interesting and inspiring talk on the F.W.B.L. (Free Will Baptist League) of Cofer's Chapel She explained that the League is a kind of Training School to prepare the young people for general church work.

On motion we recommend that similar Leagues, for the training of our young people, be organized in all our churches.

In the minutes for 1923, a report was given that a "Free Will Baptist

League Convention of Tennessee" (for the Cumberland only, however) had been organized on July 29, 1923. W. Henry Oliver was the first president.

The Cumberland also had a regular and separate Sunday School Convention a little later on. It was organized on May 29, 1927, called by L. O. Burroughs, of Cofer's Chapel, who was also elected its first president. Printed minutes of this convention exist from 1927-41.

THE CURRENT SCENE

Since its organization in 1842/43, the Cumberland Association had certainly experienced growth. There are now some 68 churches, representing in the Northern, Southern, and Western Quarterly Meetings, and reporting about 8,400 members. The Association owns and operates a 300-acre campground just northwest of Clarksville, Tennessee, called Happy Hill Acres.

Chapter 7: The Tennessee State Association

The earliest reference to a desire for a state association, so far as I know, is found in the Union Association minutes of 1924, when a committee was appointed "to correspond with the adjoining Associations in an effort to form a Tennessee State Convention." The 1925 minutes say essentially the same thing. Nothing came of this.

At least one more effort at organizing a state convention preceded the present one. The 1931 Union Association minutes refer to a talk by Rev. J. C. Howington (visiting from the Toe River Association) on the need for a State Convention. That same year, the Cumberland Association minutes refer to a committee named to meet with a committee (of the Union, presumably) in Greeneville to organize a State Convention. The framework must have been set up, for the 1932 minutes of both associations provided for delegates. But then the 1933 Cumberland minutes refer to "plans" for a State Convention, and the 1934 minutes encouraged "efforts" at a state work. This organization was, therefore, short lived: no minutes have been preserved.

THE PRESENT ORGANIZATION

Those involved would not let the idea die: the 1936 and 1937 minutes of the Cumberland charged a committee to pursue contacts toward such an organization; the 1937 Union minutes did likewise. Rev. John L. Welch told me that he volunteered to get in touch with Rev. George Dunbar, who had been president of the earlier organization. A preliminary meeting was set for May 11, 12, 1938, at Greeneville, Tennessee. Dunbar was named moderator, Welch the assistant, G. W. Fambrough secretary-treasurer, and W. E. Coville his assistant. The minutes contain the following: "The constitution was adopted . . . with the understanding that some changes were to be made. These changes were somewhat indefinite as no copy of the constitution was available

for reading"—referring, obviously, to the constitution of the former organization.

Perhaps the most significant action, in that first session, was a decision to purchase property near Greeneville for an orphanage. See further the story of the Free Will Baptist Children's Home, below.

The name of the former constitution was changed from Tennessee State Convention to Tennessee State Association. Provision was made for five lay delegates each from the two associations participating—Cumberland and Union—and for two votes from each auxiliary of those associations. A date was set for another session to be held in the same year. That session took place September 1, 2, 1938—since counted the "first annual session" of the Tennessee State Association of Free Will Baptists.

From 1938 to 1956, the Cumberland and Union Associations were the only ones regularly participating in the State; the Western Division of the Stone "lettered in" and took part in the 1940 session. Other associations have since joined the state organization, as follows: 1957—Bluff City Association (now the West Tennessee Association); 1969—Appalachian Associations; 1971—Northeast Tennessee Association; 1973—Central Association; 1976—Liberty Association.

This means, then, that there are seven associations currently active in the Tennessee State Association. 9184 statistics are as follows:

Appalachian: 29 churches, 3,568 members;
Central: 5 churches, 280 members;
Cumberland: 68 churches, 8,391 members;
Liberty: 6 churches, 975 members;
Northeast: 6 churches, 452 members;
Union: 84 churches, 7,572 members;
West: 5 churches, 592 members.

This makes a total of 203 churches with 21,830 members.

THE FREE WILL BAPTIST CHILDREN'S HOME

One of the most important works of the State Association has been the sponsoring of the Free Will Baptist Children's Home near Greeneville. The minutes of the organizational session, for May 11, 1938, contain the following:

The State Convention by unanimous opinion recommended the purchase of certain property near Greeneville as a prospective location for an orphanage. A resolution was passed to the effect that with the approval of the Ladies' Auxiliary Convention of the Cumberland Association the orphanage should become a state project. The site of the proposed orphanage was to consist of



about 160 acres and was to be bought from Greene County for \$4500.

A motion was made authorizing the appointment of a board of trustees. The following were named on the board: George D. Dunbar, G. F. Cannon, B. M. Pierce, Sam Harrell, D. L. Long, G. W. Fambrough, G. T. Harris, J. L. Welch, Mrs. Fanny Polston, and Mrs. Ed. Parker.

The proposed orphanage was officially named Tennessee Free Will Baptist Orphanage.

The next day, a "board of control" for the orphanage was elected: J. S. Burgess, Frank Stroup, Mrs. Pinkie Christian, Mrs. Edna Harris, E. D. Hendrick, J. L. Welch, and A. J. Felts. A payment of \$100 on the property, to hold it until full payment could be made, was authorized.

When the Association met again in September of the same year, some refinements were made. The duties of the Board of Control and of the Board of Trustees were defined; Rev. H. D. Bailey was elected treasurer of the orphanage work; and new elections for the Board of Control were held, resulting in the replacement of Frank Stroup, E. D. Kendrick, J. L. Welch, and A. J. Felts (in the list above) by Mrs. E. D. Parker, G. T. Harris, E. M. French, and Mrs. J. C. Howington.

The 1939 session of the State Association met at the new orphanage. At that session, Moderator Dunbar recommended that the two boards be combined into one, but that action did not finally take place until 1944.

The excerpt from the state minutes, above, refers to the women's work and shows that permission was sought to make what had been *their* project into a state project. From its inception, the organization of "Ladies' Aid Societies" in the Cumberland had been working and collecting funds for the purpose of a home for children. By 1938 the total had reached a little more than \$7,000. In 1937, the ladies had voted to empower their Orphanage Committee to buy a site for an orphanage: clearly, the State Association's decision in May, 1938, displaced that.

The minutes of the Women's Convention do not show that they officially acted to give the requested "permission," but they were clearly enthusiastic and readily lent their support: \$500 of their fund was used for the down payment on the Greene County property. By the next year (1939) some \$4000 of the fund had been spent for payments and expenses at the orphanage, and the decision was made that all funds received in the future for this work should be sent directly to the orphanage treasurer. Within another year or so, the women's fund for the orphanage had been depleted and was no longer maintained.

Equal credit for the beginning of the Children's Home should no doubt go to the Union Association. It seems clear, from their minutes, that they would have proceeded with the project on their own if the State had not become involved. The 1937 Union minutes include, first, a recommendation that immediate steps be taken to open "an asylum for orphan children." Following this, the association adopted plans for an orphanage—plans that included the naming of a Board of Trustees to obtain and hold property, a Board of Directors to administer the program, and a financial committee to raise funds. But before the Union could convene again (in August, 1938) the State Association had been organized and made the orphanage its project. Thus the 1938 Union minutes report: "The Orphanage work was made a state project with the [Union] Association cooperating," and an offering was taken. Apparently the Union group had located and determined to buy the property in Greene County when the State Association entered the picture: the 1938 Cumberland Woman's Auxiliary minutes refer, in fact, to the place as property that was "being purchased by the Union Association for an orphanage."

The name of the institution was officially changed to the "Free Will Baptist Home for Children" in 1946-47. Over the years, the Home has had ten different superintendents, as follows: I. L. Stanley (through 1941); Paul Woolsey (1942-44); Andrew Johnson (part of 1945); Zenas Stantion (1945-46); I. L. Stanley (1947-54); Gerald Medsker (part of 1954-55); E. M. French (acting, 1955); H. C. Burgess (1956-62); Ray C. Turnage (1962-67); Donald Ellis (1967-70); Ray Turnage (1971-72); James Earl Raper (1973 to the present).

The Home currently cares for about 25 children at one time. Property consists of 300 acres, with 5 cottages, 3 other residences, and a gymnasium.

GROWTH AND ACTIVITIES IN THE STATE

One of the most encouraging activities of the Tennessee State Association in recent years has been the planting of churches,

especially in areas where the Free Will Baptist cause was not well known. For many years, there was no work in the western part of the state. In the early fifties, work was begun in Memphis: the present Randall Memorial Church had its origin in a revival conducted there by Rev. M. L. Hollis during that period.

In the early sixties, the State Association charged its own Home Missions Board to set about to foster the planting of new churches. Under the oversight of that board, new churches have been begun in Chattanooga (1964), Jackson (1966), Murfreesboro (1970), Crossville (1972), North Memphis (1974), Lebanon (1977), Millington (1978), and Paris (1983). Three of these are in the west and are part of the West Tennessee Association.

The Tennessee State Association employs a Promotional Director, currently Rev. Raymond Riggs. There is a state paper, *The Tennessee Echo*.

CONCLUSION: FREE WILL BAPTISTS IN THE VOLUNTEER STATE

Throughout this booklet, statistics have been given as different areas of the work have been described. Just above 203 churches with 21,830 members have been listed as members of the State Association. Elsewhere, some 129 churches with 14,800 members—not in the State Association—have been reported. This makes a total of 332 churches within the state, providing church homes for 36,630 Free Will Baptists.

This booklet has provided an all too brief glimpse into the history of the Free Will Baptist movement within the state of Tennessee. The story of the future remains to be told.

Notes

¹A 1768 church covenant, written by Thomas Woolsey, refers to the 1742 Baptist Confession written in Philadelphia, a thoroughly Calvinistic confession.

²Paul Woolsey, *God, A Hundred Years, and a Free Will Baptist Family*, 3, 4.

³Woolsey, 14 (rephrased from the *Free Baptist Cyclopedia*, 639).

⁴Woolsey, 20, 21.

⁵*Free Baptist Cyclopedia*, 639.

⁶Woolsey, 4.

⁷Handwritten book of minutes of the Tow River Association, containing minutes for all but nine of the sessions from 1851-1886. The first few pages are missing, including the minutes of 1850; but the last two articles of the constitution, the articles of faith, and the rules of decorum—apparently adopted at that first session—are still there.

⁸*Free Baptist Cyclopedia*, 640.

⁹Woolsey, 23.

¹⁰Woolsey, 19.

¹¹*Free Baptist Cyclopedia*, 640.

¹²Woolsey, 16, 64.

¹³Woolsey, 28.

¹⁴Woolsey, 38.

¹⁵Woolsey, 41.

¹⁶"The Rise and Fall of Woolsey College," in *The Sun Weekender (The Greeneville Sun, Dec. 4, 1971)*, 1.

¹⁷Woolsey, 93, 103.

¹⁸Woolsey, 103, 104.

¹⁹Woolsey, 104.

²⁰J. H. Grime, *History of Middle Tennessee Baptists*, 550.

²¹Grime, 550. Sam Edwards, writing in the *Baptist and Reflector* ("History of Stone Association") for Nov. 30, 1944, attributed the name "Christian Baptist" to a passing suggestion from a Cumberland Presbyterian pastor. This explanation does not seem likely.

²²*Free Baptist Cyclopedia*, 641, 642.

²³Minutes of the General Conference of Free Baptists for 1889, 16.

²⁴The original record book was donated by Mrs. Pinkie Hudgens

Christian. Things attributed to Heaton, in this chapter, are from this source.

²⁵For a helpful history of Separate Baptists, see William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Foundations in the South*.