

South Fork — Pastors

Peter Davis, the organizer of the South Fork church and baptizer of the nine original members, visited them from time to time from his pastorate at the New Salem church, as did other ministers.¹

Peter Davis, 1834 - ? visited intermittently

Asa Bee, 1842 - ? received into church, 1839; served until death; called "The Elder" in church records

Ezekiel Bee, 1868 - ? worked with his brother Asa since 1857; died in 1893

Marcus E. Martin, 1876 - ? called to be assistant pastor for a one-year term at a salary of \$52 per year; (previous pastors served without pay); appears in 1881 records as first pastor of the Bear Fork (Conings) church, organized October 21, 1881

Alpheus A. Meredith, 1878-1880, chosen when Ezekiel Bee requested that the church look for a new minister

Ordinations and Licentiates

Licensed to preach:

By New Salem church:

Ezekiel Bee 1831

Asa Bee 1832

By South Fork church:

Joshua S. Davis 1843

Job Meredith 1868

Marcus E. Martin 1874 (ordained April 7, 1878)

Alpheus A. Meredith 1875

John Ehret 1875

Zebulon Bee 1878 renewed 1879²

Randolph reports that church records show the names of over 130 members during the half century of existence of the South Fork church.

Fierce Opposition From Within

As in so many instances of a people attempting to literally obey the Bible, the South Fork Sabbath-keepers faced severe persecution. As is common, most of the persecution came from their "Christian" associates.

Randolph sneeringly calls their practices "half-crazy ideas of Biblical interpretation."³

A council of 18 delegates from the New Salem, Lost Creek and Middle Island churches, including Elder B. Gillette from the Seventh Day Baptist Missionary Society and five disaffected members of the South Fork (or Pine Grove, as it was also known) church, met together to face the challenge of the "heretics" of the South Fork. The result was the organization of an opposition church of 26 members, which included 11 from the South Fork church who had turned from their former beliefs.

On October 22, 1870, a committee was appointed by the opposition group to select a suitable site for erection of a church building. The new group was called the Ritchie Church. Problems of an unexplained nature developed among the Ritchie group, but construction was finally completed in April, 1881.

South Fork Loses to Ritchie Faction

A life and death struggle resulted between the South Fork and the Ritchie groups. The Ritchie Church had received the aid and recognition of both the Seventh Day Baptist General Conference and the Southeastern Association when it was organized in 1871. However, the South Fork church did not join either association.

The "mother" church steadily lost ground; c. 1880 it gave permission to pastor Alpheus A. Meredith to distribute Seventh-Day Adventist tracts. On February 22, 1883, ten members were excommunicated for affiliating with the Seventh-Day Adventists. The record book fell

into the hands of one of the excommunicated members. The South Fork church continued for only a few more meetings; it was soon disbanded and the remaining few were absorbed into the Ritchie Church.

The Ritchie Church soon demonstrated the decadence to which Seventh Day Baptists had sunk. A woman, Experience P. Randolph (later "Rev." Perie R. Burdick), publicly announced her decision to enter the ministry, and the Ritchie Church backed her, ordaining her in 1885.⁴

West Virginia Legacy

Seventh Day Baptists founded a college in West Virginia, called West Union Academy, in 1852. Open to other denominations, the academy folded in 1856 due to financial failure. Because local members desired a school tailored to Sabbath-keepers, another attempt was made to organize a college.

Salem Academy was established in January, 1889, through the efforts of a stock company. Its name was changed to Salem College in 1890. Established under direct Seventh Day Baptist authority, the president and 2/3 of the board were required to be Seventh Day Baptists. Salem College is more "Sabbatarian" than its only sister Seventh Day Baptist institution, Milton College, of Wisconsin. Numerous independent Sabbath-keepers, not affiliated with Seventh Day Baptists, have attended Salem College.

Seventh Day Baptists continue to be very active in West Virginia. Other chief centers are Wisconsin, western New York, and New Jersey.

Seventh Day Baptist — Church of God Link?

In West Virginia especially, there appears to be a definite link between Seventh Day Baptist churches and the Seventh Day Church of God.

Independent Sabbath-keepers, not associated with Seventh Day Baptists, nor with the tiny Seventh Day Church of God, continued through the late 1800s and early 1900s in West Virginia. When discovered by A.N Dugger (probably in the 1920s), these Sabbath keepers had existed since at least 1859.

The Wilbur Church

Dugger and Dodd, in *A History of the True Church* (pages 311 to 316), state that the Wilbur Church of God was "the oldest true Church of God now functioning [1930s] in the state of West Virginia." The church was organized in 1859, as a "Church of God" by Elder J.W. Niles, from Erie, Pennsylvania. Outsiders called them "Nilesites." Among the members were the names of Pierson, Wilcox, Vandergrift, Shuman, Baker, and Brown.

The group faced great persecution, and sometimes physical harm, from other religionists in the area because of their "strange doctrines," such as Passover observance. Dugger and other Church of God ministers held debates at Wilbur.

Importance of Salem, West Virginia

Salem, West Virginia, came to be quite an important center for the Seventh Day Church of God. It yielded such leaders as F.L. Summers, C.O. Dodd, W.W. McMicken and others. West Virginia Church of God Sabbatarians tended to be doctrinally conservative. They abstained from unclean meats, adhered to strong church government with a central governing body, and observed the annual Passover on the beginning of the 14th of the Jewish month of Nisan. Coincidentally, these were the very same beliefs held by the "Seventh Day Baptist" South Fork (Pine Grove) church.

When the Seventh Day Church of God split in 1933 over these issues (and the Dugger-

Marrs leadership struggle), Salem, West Virginia, became the headquarters of the “clean church party.” The Salem group established a ministerial school and published Sabbath literature.

Those Seventh Day Church of God people who refused to accept the 1949 merger with Denver, went “Back to Salem” and re-established Salem, West Virginia, as headquarters of their church and publishing plant for their paper. Salem, West Virginia, continues to be a center for both Seventh Day Baptists and the Seventh Day Church of God, showing the close interrelationship between these two groups.

VIII. Western Development

Western Sabbath Missionaries — Chronology⁵

1817 At its annual session, the Seventh Conference decided on a plan for organized missionary work. Amos R. Wells, and Wm. B. Maxson were recommended to be

1818-19 Elder Amos R. Wells visited various parts of Virginia, and baptized 35 in Harrison County, Virginia. He visited the Mad River church in Ohio,

1820 Wells again traveled to Virginia and French Creek, Pennsylvania.

1821 Elder John Davis and Deacon John Shiloh, New Jersey, conducted a 3 1/2 month missionary tour of Virginia, Ohio, and Indiana. In Ohio and Indiana, they visited former Baptist and Presbyterian churches.

1821-22 Elder John Greene toured western New York, Pennsylvania, and Virginia. Amos R. Wells made another tour of the churches in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Ohio, Indiana, and New York.

1823 Greene again toured western New York and Pennsylvania, and advanced into Virginia, where he

stayed a considerable time.

1828 Elder Joel Greene was employed by the Piscataway church for a year in Virginia, Indiana, Ohio, and French Creek, Pennsylvania.

1832 Joel Greene worked in Virginia for 4 1/2 months.

1833-34 Elder Alexander Campbell, sent by the church in Shiloh, New Jersey, to Virginia, and was so successful that he was asked to return in 1834. He organized the church at the North Fork of the Hughes River with Lewis Bond. His debates on the Sabbath with Methodist Tichnell resulted in the conversion of the Lowther and Starkey families, baptized by Elder Peter Davis, the founder of the South Fork church. Campbell went as far as Woodsfield, Monroe County, Ohio, and preached five times in Ohio. Many meetings in Virginia were so well attended that meetings were held in groves because no house could contain the crowds. Revival meetings held were similar to camp meetings.

1835 Elder Stillman Coon worked in Virginia.

1832-35 Elder Lewis A. Davis worked in Ohio and Indiana.

1836-39 Joel Greene worked in Virginia.

1844 Elder Azor Estee worked in Virginia.

1845 Elder Richard C. Bond worked in

- Virginia.
- 1849 Estee returned to pastor Salem and Lost Creek. He also worked to promote West Union Academy.
- 1866 Elder Walter B. Gillette was sent as a missionary to West Virginia.
- 1870 Gillette assisted in the formation of Charles A. Burdick was a missionary in West Virginia.
- 1875-76 Elder Charles M. Lewis worked in

Into Ohio

Sabbath-keepers in Ohio were closely associated with the West Virginia churches. In 1824 a church was organized for the first time in Pike, Clarke County, Ohio, although Sabbatarians had been there for some time. Simeon Babcock and Samuel F. Randolph were its ministers. It grew at one time to 102 members, then declined due to a secession. In 1842, James B. Davis was its licentiate, but there was no pastor.

The reason for the division in the Pike church was the issue of alcohol. A "Temperance Reform" movement gathered the support of some of the Pike members, and they broke off and formed another church, the dry North Hampton church, in 1837-40.

A new church was also organized at Port Jefferson, Shelby County, in 1840 with 19 members with Lewis A. Davis as minister. The Jackson church, also formed in 1840, was composed of 38 members, most of which had moved from Pike. Also in 1840 a church at Stokes was organized with Joshua Hill as minister.

The Scioto church, organized in 1842, was composed of immigrant members from the churches in Scott and Brookfield, New York.⁶

Associations Formed

The 1835 General Conference adopted a

plan for reorganizing the conference into geographical divisions, or associations, of churches. Churches were to report to the associations, and the associations to the General Conference.

As a result, in 1839 the Southwestern Association was formed of the following seven churches:

Virginia: New Salem, Lost Creek, North

Ohio: Pike, Temperance Reform Pike

Pennsylvania: Woodbridgetown
Total membership was 271.

In the early sessions, the Ohio churches brought their temperance dispute into the association meetings. Later, when the association took a strong pro-temperance stand, the Pike church failed to report to the association and severed its membership.

In following years, the churches in Port Jefferson, Jackson Center, Scioto, and Stokes, Ohio, and Madison, Indiana, were admitted. In 1850 the association divided into the Ohio and Virginia associations.⁷

Northwest Association

The first Sabbath-keepers in the Old Northwest were emigrants from Allegheny County, New York, and included many from the Scott church. They arrived in 1838 and organized a church in Milton, Wisconsin, in 1840. A church at Albion, Dane County, was organized in 1843, and a church in Walworth in 1845. In 1846 these churches banded together in an association which in 1849 became known as the Northwest Association.⁸

Milton, Wisconsin, became a center for Seventh Day Baptists, whose churches at one time dotted the state. A select school was started by Seventh Day Baptists at Milton in 1844, which was incorporated as Milton College in 1867. The college continued to be a

repository of Seventh Day Baptist history.

Other early western Sabbatarian Baptist churches were these:

1. Fredonia, Iowa, organized in 1842 by
2. Madison, Indiana, organized in 1843
3. Farmington, Illinois, begun in 1849,

The Farmington church was pastored by Samuel Davison, previously a pastor at Marlboro (Salem) from 1844 to 1846, and Shiloh from 1846 to 1849. (It is interesting to note that a Samuel Davison was a leader with Gilbert Cranmer in the 1863 *Hope of Israel* movement in Michigan, which developed into the Seventh Day Church of God.) The church in Farmington, Illinois, was disbanded in 1856 and dropped from the association, but was reorganized again in 1872.

By 1860, the following western Seventh Day Baptist churches had been organized.

Wisconsin	
Milton	1840
Albion	1843
Walworth	1845
Christiana (Utica)	1850
Berlin	1850
Dakota	1853
Rock River	1856
Edgerton	1859
Iowa	
Fredonia	1842-1843
Madison	1842 (?)
Welton	1855
Illinois	
Farmington	1849
Minnesota	
Trenton	1859
Dodge Center	1860

IX. Yearly Sabbatarian Meetings

It is not known whether the English Sabbatarian churches observed a yearly

meeting. As for American Sabbatarians, every recorded group held a yearly meeting, but more information needs to be gathered as to the time, nature, and purpose of these meetings.

Scarce Information — But Interesting

The “Philadelphia Movement” churches established from the start a practice of holding yearly meetings. Sometimes the New Jersey Sabbatarians also attended. Jonathan Dunham, from Piscataway, New Jersey, was sent to be ordained at the 1745 yearly meeting at French Creek (Nantmeal), Pennsylvania. Newtown, as the headquarters, usually held the “May Meeting,” while the “August Meeting” was conducted at Nottingham. “All were expected to attend” these regular yearly meetings.⁹

German-speaking Seventh Day Baptists, established in America under the influence of Abel Noble, had “love feasts.” The official Seventh Day Baptist history states that “at Ephrata and Morrison’s Cove [both in Pennsylvania], the annual love-feast [written circa 1900] is celebrated in the autumn, the exact date being set from year to year. At Snow Hill, the annual love-feast is usually held in the Pentecostal season, commonly known as Whitsuntide, or the seventh week after Easter. Other love-feasts occur here at Christmas and Easter.”¹⁰

Early in its history, Piscataway established its own yearly meeting, as previously shown in Chapter V in the letter from the Mill Yard Church, dated August 27, 1743, addressed “to the Churches of Christ of the same faith, usually holding their yearly meeting at Piscataway.”¹¹

The above records are among the few references discovered so far regarding yearly meetings outside of the Sabbatarian church in Newport, Rhode Island.

Newport — The First Recorded Yearly Meeting

On October 31, 1683, Samuel Hubbard of Newport wrote Elder William Gibson, then at New London, Connecticut, desiring a yearly meeting. However, a severe winter prevented meeting that year.

A yearly meeting date was eventually settled upon, and the first recorded Sabbatarian yearly meeting was held at Newport on May 14, 1684 (Old Style; Pentecost that year was May 12, Old Style). The stated purpose of the meeting was to bring the scattered members together “at a communion season.” Members came from Newport, Westerly, Narragansett, Providence, Plymouth and Martha’s Vineyard.¹²

Twenty-six or twenty-seven attended this meeting, praying and listening to sermons and asking Bible questions. One of the questions asked was whether or not the Lord’s Supper ought to be taken at night. No answer was given on this issue.¹³

On Friday, April 13, 1696, Sabbath keepers met at Westerly, Rhode Island, and broke bread the same day (Passover that year was Sunday evening, April 15). On May 15, 1696 (Pentecost was June 11), they met at Newport, Rhode Island, and appointed a meeting at Westerly for September 5 (Feast of Trumpets was September 27). Here they also broke bread (had communion?).

Another meeting was held on June 17, 1697 (Pentecost was May 27), at Newport. On the Sabbath, June 18, they broke bread. The 1698 meeting was set for June 6 (May 9 was Pentecost) at Newport and the third Friday of September in Westerly (September 20, New Style, which was the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles; or September 16, Old Style, which was the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles).

Most of the yearly meetings came to be held at Westerly, also known as Hopkinton. The meeting dates continually hover around Passover, Pentecost, and Feast of Tabernacles times.¹⁴

Events at Newport Yearly Meetings¹⁵

- 1703-4 A fraternal letter and a visiting committee were sent to the Pennsylvania brethren for the settlement of an unexplained difficulty.
- 1705 Edward Dunham was ordained at the yearly meeting held at Westerly, by prayer and laying on of hands by Elder William Gibson, on October 22, 1705 (New Style; but History of the True Church cites the *Seventh Day Baptist* Memorial, page 121, as stating that the date was September 5, Old Style, which would equal September 16, New Style; the Feast of Tabernacles was October 3 to 10, New Style, from Saturday to Saturday), and the New Jersey brethren were admitted into “Christian association and communion.”
- 1717 Four persons were appointed on behalf of the church to sign letters addressed to brethren in Pennsylvania.
- 1734 Two brethren were appointed to visit New Jersey. Correspondence was sent to Sabbath-keepers in England.
- 1762 Apparently this year Newport decided to discontinue “General Meetings.”
- 1763 The yearly meeting was reinstated as a means of unifying the various Sabbatarian churches. The date was set for the third Sabbath in September, with a church business meeting the Friday before, and an optional meeting on the Sunday after.

What Yearly Meetings Were Like

Other general meetings were held in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Connecticut, and later among Sabbath-keepers in eastern and

central New York, as well as western Virginia. Churches at the several Sabbatarian general or yearly meetings began to exchange fraternal greetings, letters, and delegates. Hopkinton was the central location to which all others looked. Burlington or Bristol, Connecticut, and Petersburg (now Berlin) and Brookfield, New York, were other centers for Sabbatarian yearly meetings.¹⁶

The yearly church meeting at Hopkinton, Rhode Island, “was considered to be a day not for common church business, but a preparation day before communion. The Sabbath, with its general communion, was indeed an high day.” The indication is that communion was taken on the Sabbath (Saturday) of the yearly meeting.¹⁷

These annual gatherings were termed the “Yearly Meeting,” or the “General Meeting,” or the “Sabbatarian Great Meeting.” They were devoted almost wholly to preaching and devotional exercises and are described thus by the Seventh Day Baptist historian, James Bailey:

The journeys to attend them were often performed by migration to a distance of one hundred miles or more to attend West Virginia led pleasure for Nation more excitement. The old members of the church, who attended the firm new churches, tired, the desire over and profitable meetings. Their social intercourse was of a holy and sanctified character to induce missions which to visit them and raise up additional members. The drive for this missionary activity was a major factor in the formation of the General Conference, and grew out of the practice of holding yearly meetings.²² The following records of yearly meetings show the interest in this activity on the part of the Yearly Meeting for the Unification of the members of the Church scattered throughout the world.

Bailey further gives unique insight into the real meaning of these “feasts” observed by Sabbatarians:

The meeting was REGARDED SOMEWHAT AS THE HIGH DAY OF THE YEAR for the Unification of the members of the Church scattered throughout the world. It was a time when the members of the Church gathered together for a spiritual re-union The Lord’s Supper was observed on the 15th of September, 1722, was celebrated the ordinance of Bread and Wine.

Alcohol problems seemed to continually plague these Sabbatarian meetings: “The use of intoxicating drinks was common among all classes. Liquor dealers were accustomed to gather around the places of meeting, and sell to the multitudes assembled.” Crowds often gathered of people who had no special interest

in the meetings, causing trouble for the assemblies of Rhode Island and New Jersey. The annoyances became so great that state laws were enacted prohibiting the sale of intoxicating drinks within a mile of the place of meeting. The Hopkinton Yearly Meeting of August, 1797 appointed a committee to see that the law was not infringed.²⁰

Not a Unique Practice

Holding yearly meetings was not a practice unique to Seventh Day Baptists. Sunday-keeping Baptists, in their various regional associations, held similar yearly meetings. The Warren Baptist Association met yearly in September; the Shaftsbury Association met on the first Wednesday in June; and the Vermont Association met the first Wednesday in October. These associations all began in the latter part of the 1700s.²¹

Yearly Meetings Lead to Unification

The drive for this missionary activity was a major factor in the formation of the General Conference, and grew out of the practice of holding yearly meetings.²² The following records of yearly meetings show the interest in this activity on the part of the Yearly Meeting for the Unification of the members of the Church scattered throughout the world.

1795 “Reverend” Henry Clarke was commissioned as an evangelist to central New York by the Hopkinton Yearly Meeting.

1796 Letters from Bristol and New London, Connecticut, and Petersburg, New York, were received during the annual meeting at Hopkinton.

Brethren were appointed to attend the Bristol meeting, and letters were sent to Newport, Bristol, New London, Piscataway and Petersburg.

1797 Progress was made toward closer circular letter told of their proposal to correspond or send yearly meeting.

1798 Elder Henry Clarke and the for a change in time for the Rhode Island yearly meeting, al meeting for all the churches.

1799 The Hopkinton "Yearly Meeting" or changed to the second Sabbath of September.

1800 Sixty-five members met at Hopkinton on September 12, 1800. A letter was received from ed and united plans for preaching the gospel, under the land Yearly Meeting.

Not every church adhered to the unification movement: "In 1800 there were ten or twelve churches or Sabbath-keeping settlements in Massachusetts, on Long Island and in Pennsylvania, Virginia, Kentucky, and North Carolina that had not yet become associated with the Rhode Island General Meeting."

Records of Conference Meetings — Truth Ebbs Away²³

1800 Seventy-two delegates from seven Connecticut, New York, and New Jersey attended the Rhode Elder Henry Clarke of Brookfield, New York, proposed eventh-day Baptist churches should be united in active and k." The Rhode Island Conference backed the proposal and a he other churches for their approval. Total reported member-urches were urged to send letters or delegates to the next n September, 1802.

1802 Seventy-eight from seven churches attended this meeting. Newport, Hopkinton, New London, and Brookfield approved the proposed missionary movement. Cohansey and Petersburg were in the middle, while Piscataway opposed the movement. The "Annual Sabbatarian Conference" was in fact established. Brethren were exhorted to send money to the Conference treasury to

support traveling ministers. The meeting site was to rotate among the various churches.

1803 This year the Seventh Day Baptist Conference was organized. Voting was by churches, each church having from one to four votes, depending on its size. The Conference could only advise local churches, and contributions to the Conference were voluntary. The eight churches composing the Conference with their membership were:

Hopkinton	605
Petersburg, New York	190
Piscataway	80
Cohansey	80
Brookfield	68
Newport	48
Bristol, Connecticut	32
Waterford, Connecticut	26

1804 Apparently internal dissension was prevalent, indicated by the following circular letter: "... do nothing to wound the weak and feeble lambs of Christ, who cannot endure much; and be not offended with those who cannot see as far and walk as fast as you . . . establish nothing new, although it might be for the better, until the whole be generally agreed thereon, that peace and harmony may be established among ourselves" Here is the "have love" philosophy, also shown by the fact that the new constitution took especial pains to safeguard the independence and individuality of the churches.

1805 The church in Bristol, Connecticut, opposed the missionary movement as "changing the custom and usages of the church," and opposed the call for money to support missionaries. The name "The Sabbatarian General Conference" was adopted. Not a single church voted against this

- conference's proceedings.
- 1808 The Conference refused to receive
York church in Virginia on the grounds that it invited first-day
- 1809 "It was voted, as the opinion of the
sacrament of the Lord's supper, once serving round of the bread
answers the design of the institution" (once a year?). On the
g, about 300 partook of the communion.
- 1811 Doctrinal disagreements were
letter laments "a day of trial [which] generally prevails in the
nd (1) warns against anti-nomianism (doctrine that Christians
by grace), (2) exhorts that good works do not merit salvation,
thren have accepted the seventh-part-of-time theory, and (4)
open communion.
- 1812-13 Large membership additions were
elin added 102, making a total of 437 members; Hopkinton
making a total of 800.
- 1815 Eleven churches were now part of the
churches seldom reported. Offensive war was condemned as
- 1817 The churches in Alfred and
re received into the Conference, which was called the Seventh
General Conference.
- 1818 The churches in Lost Creek and
a destitute condition and requested ministerial assistance. The
officially changed from Sabbatarian to Seventh-day Baptist
- 1820 The Conference exhorted the brethren
chers and members of other denominations.
- 1822 The Conference advised members
th in marriage."
- 1824-25 The Conference met in June instead
of in the autumn.
- 1826 A letter from Elder Burnside was
received by the Conference. He was
pastor of Cripplegate (Pinner's Hall)
Church in London, and "described
certain fanatical and unworthy
observers of the Seventh-day"
in England. These were followers of
Joanna Southcott in Manchester and
elsewhere, keeping the Sabbath,
wearing extra long beards,
was of using the firchil and, "no longer set forth the practice of laying on of hands as
calling themselves "true Israelites."
He mentioned other Sabbath-keepers
- in Devonshire near Torfay. (See
Christian Intelligencer for May,
1825.)
- 1830 The Conference recommended
excommunication of brethren who
persisted with Masonic connections.
- 1833 The Conference voted unanimously
to abstain from alcohol except as a
medicine.
- 1836 Strong resolutions were passed
against slavery and alcohol; the "state
of religion" was reported as "coldness
and apathy," with more energy
needed "for the salvation of the
church."
- 1840 The title "Reverend" before the
names of ministers was voted to be
omitted. (The earliest ministers had
termed themselves "Elder." When
the title "Reverend" came into use is
not known.) "Apathy and
backsliding were widespread," and
the church was "languishing."
- 1841 The question of whether or not the
laying on of hands should be
practiced in ministerial ordination and
reception of new members was left to
the individual churches to decide.
The denomination was described by
its own leaders as "very deficient in
fervid and active piety."
- 1844 The Mill Yard Church in London
requested, and was granted, honorary
membership in the Conference,
despite "important doctrinal
differences" between them and
Seventh Day Baptists in America.
- 1849 German Seventh Day Baptists in
Ephrata, Pennsylvania, desired to
cooperate with the Conference, and
sent Dr. William M. Fahnestock as a
delegate to the General Conference.
- 1854 The amended statement of doctrine
no longer set forth the practice of laying on of hands as
- 1864 Seventh Day Baptist members were

nal affairs” (engaged in the Civil War).

1869 The Conference resolved to send a Seventh-Day Adventist meeting.

1870 A resolution was passed for Seventh-Day Adventists, but without compromising the distinctive principles.

1871,73 J.N. Andrews of the Seventh-Day Adventists visited the Seventh Day Baptist General Conference.

1876,79 Elder James White spoke on the differences between the two denominations. The Seventh Day Baptist General Convention reported that Seventh-Day Baptists were modifying their views and moving closer to the Seventh Day Adventists. Mention of Seventh Day Adventists in further Seventh Day Baptist conferences is absent.

X. Communion — Varying Practices

As stated previously, communion was generally observed on Saturdays. However, during the various annual meetings down through Seventh Day Baptist history, there were many variant modes and times of communion observance.

The *1926 Seventh Day Baptist Manual* notes that the “Mill Yard Church of London, the original Seventh Day Baptist Church, celebrates it but once a year, at the time of the Passover, from the Jewish Church.”²⁴ Besides the church at the South Fork of the Hughes River in West Virginia, no other Seventh Day Baptist church is known to have observed communion at the Passover time.

A.H. Lewis, Seventh Day Baptist counterpart of the Seventh-Day Adventist Sabbath historian John N. Andrews, wrote that the crucifixion was on Wednesday, and the resurrection on Saturday. Further, he admitted, “The earliest Christians, i.e. those of the New Testament period, continued to observe the Passover; and since Christ died at that time, they associated His death with that festival. In this way the Passover became the festival of Christ’s *death*.” The Scriptural time, Lewis knew, was the 14th of Nisan, without reference to Sunday or any other day of the week.²⁵ Yet it is doubtful if Lewis, influential in Seventh

Day Baptist circles, ever really *kept* the Passover.

If the Mill Yard Church observed communion at the time of the Passover throughout its history, it appears that the American churches deviated from English practices from the start. The very purpose of holding yearly meetings (the first recorded one was May 14, 1684, Old Style) was to bring scattered members together “at a communion season.”²⁶ From its earliest records, communion at Newport was reported to have been held in April, May, September, and at other times of the year. On December 1, 1754, Newport communion time was set on the last Sabbath of every month. It was still observed on the last Saturday of the month in 1771.²⁷

On July 12, 1746, the Shrewsbury church voted to observe communion once in two months in conformity with the practice of the Westerly church. On March 3, 1775, the church voted that communion be held quarterly, on the last Sabbath in November, February, May, and August.²⁸

In 1811, the Piscataway church was also observing communion quarterly, with the Friday before communion Sabbath, set apart as a day of fasting and prayer.²⁹

Closed Communion

From the start, Seventh Day Baptists have differed with regular Baptists in restricting communion to members of the church. This practice stems from the original American group, which refused to commune with “apostate” former Sabbath-keepers.³⁰

Changes in the Communion

Seventh Day Baptists have altered the elements of the communion which were originally used. “Formerly, fermented wine and unleavened bread both, only, were used.” However, contents of the “cup” were replaced with grape juice, and today leavened bread is

often used.³¹

Footwashing

The first mention of footwashing in connection with communion occurs in 1750, when Shrewsbury wrote a letter to its mother church at Westerly recommending that its members take up the washing of one another's feet. Some at Shrewsbury had observed this practice for years after the Lord's Supper and before the closing hymn.

Footwashing was carried into West Virginia when the Shrewsbury church migrated there, and the practice was generally observed there until the middle 1800s. For a short time in the 1870s it was revived.³²

Further Communion Notes

The early creeds and statements of belief are silent about the time of Seventh Day Baptist communion.

The 1809 General Conference voted "that, in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, once serving round of the bread and wine at one meeting answers the design of the institution." Yet this statement did not mean conforming to the practice of once-a-year communion at the time of the Jewish Passover, for at the 1809 fall meeting of Seventh Day Baptists, communion was served.³³

According to the 1833 "Confession of Faith," it was the duty of members to take the Lord's Supper "as often as the church shall deem it expedient and the circumstances admit."³⁴

If Mill Yard, the "mother church" of London, England, always observed communion once a year on the date of the Jewish Passover, why didn't American Sabbatarians do the same? The exact reason is unclear. However, the fact that the Americans had forgotten how they had received their doctrines and beliefs (Revelation 3:3) cannot be denied.

XI. Church of God — Church of Christ

A.N. Dugger, in his book *A History of the True Church* traces the name "Church of God" from English Seventh Day Baptists (so-called) to American Sabbatarian Baptists and on through the Adventists to the forming of the Church of God (Adventist) about 1863. Yet his "proofs" leave much to be desired in the way of historical rigor.

English "Church of God"?

Dugger states that it is evident that the Newport church was at first called "Church of God" because of its relationship with Sabbath-keeping churches of London known by this name.³⁵

In the "Confession of faith, and other public documents of the Baptist churches of England, in the 17th century," edited by E.B. Underfield, there is recorded the "humble petition of several 'Churches of God' in London [1640] commonly, though falsely, called anabaptists."³⁶

Francis Bampfield's book, *Shem Archer* (1600s) on page 28 mentions the "Church of God."³⁷

The letter by Joseph Davis, Sr. from Oxford prison to the Newport Sabbath keepers, 1670, uses the words "Church of Christ" at least twice. Davis wrote, "I believe there is but one true visible Church . . . noted by the Spirit in Revelation 14:12 to be such as keep the Commandments of God, and the Faith of Jesus, and such are, and shall be blessed, Revelation 22:14 They are the Lord Christ's Church."³⁸

First mention of the title "Seventh-day Baptist" in the Mill Yard records occurs on October 6, 1754: "the Congregation of Protestants dissenting from the Church of England, commonly called the seventh-day Baptists" The official history concludes,

“How long they had been ‘commonly’ so called, we do not know.”³⁹

A 1668 letter by William Gibson and ten others of the Bell Lane Church in London to the Newport Sabbath-keepers begins, “The church of Christ, meeting in Bell Lane, London, upon the Lord’s holy Sabbath”⁴⁰

A. N. Rogers, former President of the Seventh Day Baptist Historical Society, refuted the idea that English Seventh Day Baptists ever termed themselves “Church of God.” He reported that “the *John Evans List of Dissenting Congregations and Ministers, 1715-29*, London, designates our churches of that period as Sabbatarian Baptists.”⁴¹

Newport Name — “Church of Christ”

In a reply concerning an investigation respecting Sabbatarians in Newport, the members of Newport stated: “Under the former dispensation there was a church and a world as there is now; and as it is the duty of the world now to repent and believe the Gospel, so it was the duty of the world to be proselytized and joined to the then Church of God.”⁴²

In a letter of admonition to Peter West in Martha’s Vineyard, June 20, 1709, the Newport church termed itself “The church of Jesus Christ keeping the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” And the letter from Newport to the Mill Yard Church on September 2, 1753, began, “The Church of Christ at Newport, observing the Seventh-day Sabbath, to our well-beloved brethren of the same faith and order at London” And three times, in 1763, 1766, and 1775, Newport correspondence referred to the church as “the Sabbatarian Church in Newport.”⁴³

In 1819 the Newport church obtained a charter with the name “Seventh Day Baptist Church of Christ.”⁴⁴

Not an Exclusive Name — Use of Name No Proof

Sabbatarians were not the only religious people to use the name “Church of Christ” or “Church of God.” A group of Sunday observers on Noodles Island, near Boston, were apparently in correspondence with the Sabbatarians at Newport. Samuel Hubbard wrote them on November 4, 1671, addressing them as “the church of Jesus Christ, meeting on Noodle’s Island,” and argued for the observance of the Sabbath. After the schism in Newport (in which the Sabbath-keepers formed a distinct church), the Noodle’s Island people wrote Hiscox and the other Sabbath-keepers on September 1, 1672: “The church of Christ in or near Boston sends greeting.”⁴⁵

Mere use of the name “Church of God” or “Church of Christ” is no definite indication that a group holds any particular religious belief. Both Sabbath-keepers, Sunday-keepers, including those in the Roman Catholic Church, have used the name “Church of God,” although they differ widely in beliefs. Any attempt to classify a group as a “true church” merely because it bears the name “Church of God,” is historically and theologically inaccurate.

Westerly — No Name?

Three months after its organization, the church in Westerly, Rhode Island, wrote to Newport on December 19, 1708: “The church of Christ in and about Westerly, keeping the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus, to the church of Christ in and about Rhode Island, in the same faith and order of fellowship.”⁴⁶

The official Seventh Day Baptist history states the following about the Westerly church:

. . . there seems to have been no special thought that it should have an official name For nearly fifty years after the separation from the brethren in Newport, it was referred to as the ‘Sabbatarian Church in

Westerly'⁴⁷

Additional evidence of “no official name” is presented by the same source:

The Sabbath-observers in both places [Newport and Westerly] formed one communion which had no name and no articles of faith save the Bible. In the first minute in the first record book extant, the church is referred to as ‘The Church of Rhode Island and Westerly.’ . . . Sometimes it is spoken of as the ‘Church,’ at other times the ‘congregation,’ but it had no official name.

However, in 1819 the Westerly Sabbatarians secured a state charter with the name, “The Seventh-day Baptist Church of Christ at Hopkinton.”⁴⁸

Other Uses of A Name

At its founding in 1705, the Piscataway church designated itself “the Church of God, keeping the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus Christ, living in Piscataway and Hopewell.” Article Eight of its Nine Articles of Faith states, “We believe that a company of sincere persons, being formed in faith and practices of the above . . . may truly be said to be the ‘Church of Christ’.”⁴⁹

The New London church, formed in 1784, agreed “to become a Church of Christ in fellowship with the . . . Church of Christ at Hopkinton, taking the Scriptures to be the rule of our faith and practice.”⁵⁰

The Shrewsbury Church of God

Formed in 1745, the Sabbatarian church at Shrewsbury, New Jersey, relates its beginning: “This is a book of records of the settlement and proceedings of the Church of Christ, keeping the Commandments of God, particularly the

Holy Seventh Day”⁵¹

Shrewsbury’s Articles of Faith, stated June 13, 1774, refer to “The Church of Christ in Shrewsbury and Middleton.” Article Thirteen states, “We believe a company of sincere persons being found in the faith and practice of the above-said things may truly be said to be the church of God.”

The short articles, or covenant, read to persons when received into the church, included this admonition: “That you shall walk honestly towards those that are without, that you give no offense to Jew or Gentile, or the Church of God.” These same articles are in use today in the church in Salem, West Virginia.

Standard procedure during ordination, used in the 1775 ordination of Jacob Davis, included this question to the ministerial candidate: “Have you entire freedom to administer the ordinances of God to them as to a church of God; to pray with them and for them and endeavor to build them up in the faith?” The charge to the new minister was, “Brother Davis, I charge thee before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, that thou take charge of the church of Christ dwelling at Shrewsbury”

On September 8, 1750, Shrewsbury wrote a letter to its mother church at Westerly, addressing them as “the church of Christ in Westerly.”

Names in West Virginia

The Woodbridgetown church in Pennsylvania, organized in 1790, termed itself “Seventh Day Baptist Church of Christ,” and had 22 articles similar to Shrewsbury’s.

The covenant of the Lost Creek church, organized in 1805, reads, “The Church of Christ on Lost Creek, in the observance of God’s Holy Sanctified Seventh Day-Sabbath.”

The church at the South Fork of the Hughes River called itself “Church of Christ” or “Seventh Day Baptist Church.”⁵²

Names in 1833 “Exposé of Sentiments”

The “Exposé of Sentiments,” adopted in 1833 by the Seventh Day Baptist General Conference, uses both “Church of Christ” and “Church of God.” It states that the law of God is “morally and religiously binding upon the Church of Christ,” and also states, “We believe it is the duty of all men, and especially the Church of God, to observe religiously the seventh day of the week”⁵³

Controversy Surrounding the Name

As can be seen in the above records, the words “Church of God” and “Church of Christ” were often used interchangeably. Later records show the use of the terms “Sabbatarian Church of Christ,” and “Seventh Day Baptist Church of Christ.” To the latter, the words “of Christ” were subsequently dropped.

It is claimed by Dugger that at first these Sabbatarians held to “Church of God” but later became corrupted and adopted names other than the Biblical denotation.⁵⁴

However, Albert N. Rogers, President of the Seventh Day Baptist Historical Society, strongly refutes the historicity of the use of the name “Church of God.” In a personal letter to the author, he states that the matter of the use of the term “Church of God” in Seventh Day Baptist history has come up many times since the publication of Dugger and Dodd’s book. His counter-argument reads as follows:

(1) Dugger and Dodd “appropriated much of our history without authorization.”

(2) “There is no instance of which I am aware of the term [Church of God] being used in a nominative sense as a title, although it may very well have been used in a general way as in Acts 20:28.”

(3) Seventh Day Baptists were known, says Rogers, as Sabbatarian Baptists until 1818, when the name was changed by the General Conference to “Seventh Day Baptist.”

XII. Seventh Day Baptist Doctrine

Anti-Trinitarianism and “Soul Sleeping”

William Davis in the early 1700s believed in the immortality of the soul and the Trinity. Yet his views were in direct opposition to the leading elders, Joseph Clarke, Joseph Crandall, and Thomas Hiscox, whom Davis derisively termed as “soul sleepers” and “Arians.” Besides the name question, doctrinal disputes also mark the history of the Sabbatarian Baptists.

Today, almost the only distinction between Seventh Day Baptists and Sunday Baptists is the date of weekly worship. However, it is obvious that this was not always the case. Current Seventh Day Baptist theological views are vastly *different* from those of early Sabbatarian Baptists.

Three Major Points

Dugger and Dodd give three cardinal points of doctrine of the “Church of God” throughout its history: (1) anti-Trinitarianism, (2) conditional immortality, and (3) Sabbath-keeping. They state, “There is no body of Christians in the world, with the exception of the Church of God, which teaches all three of these beautiful truths.”⁵⁵

All three of these beliefs *were* held generally by early Sabbatarian Baptists, but later, through the influence of men like William Davis, Trinitarianism and immortal-soulism entered, along with a host of other false doctrines.

The Holy Trinity?

A Seventh Day Baptist wrote in 1811 that Sabbatarian Baptists believed the Holy Ghost to be the “operative power or spirit of God. Nevertheless, there are few, if any, of this denomination . . . who believe that the Father,

Son, and Holy Ghost, are three absolute distinct persons, coequal . . . and yet one God; as such an idea would be in the face of scripture.”⁵⁶

However, the 1833 Exposé of Sentiments, passed by the General Conference, did stand in the face of Seventh Day Baptists.

It is evident that in New Testament days the baptized believe that churches have always held . . . [and have interpreted the New Testament] ideal to approach God through Christ directly, to interpret the Scriptures for himself, to formulate his own doctrine, to dictate his own opinions existing between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; and that they are equally divine and equally entitled to our adoration.

James Bailey in 1866, although he was a Trinitarian, acknowledged that among some Seventh Day Baptist ministers, there was a strong aversion to the word, “Trinity.” Bailey also reported that “there are a few societies of Sabbatarians in the state of New York, not of our fellowship, however, that may strictly be called Arians.”⁵⁷ Who were these Sabbatarians? They could not have been Seventh-Day Adventists, since Adventists believe in the Trinity. Were these Arian Sabbath-keepers part of the Sabbatarian Church of God?

Congregationalism

Baptists generally are extremely congregational; individual churches have absolute independence in all matters of discipline and faith. Yet, “Seventh Day Baptists were even more independent than the Baptists . . .”⁵⁸ Various statements of faith had no binding force over any church or individual.⁵⁹ The General Conference was designed as an advisory body, with no right to interfere with local autonomy. During individual church meetings, issues were decided by a vote of all members.⁶⁰

Church officers and elders were chosen by vote of the membership in all churches (except the one at the South Fork of the Hughes River). Moreover, at Piscataway, officers were chosen

by casting lots in cases of lack of agreement.⁶¹

Beliefs regarding church government were stated in the *1926 Manual*:

It is evident that in New Testament days the baptized believe that churches have always held . . . [and have interpreted the New Testament] ideal to approach God through Christ directly, to interpret the Scriptures for himself, to formulate his own doctrine, to dictate his own opinions existing between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; and that they are equally divine and equally entitled to our adoration.

Further, Seventh Day Baptists believe the New Testament does not support the establishment of any central power to give instructions to local churches and individual members.⁶²

This “local autonomy” belief is very much like that held by the Seventh Day Church of God.

Membership — Reception and Excommunication

Members were received only upon the vote of a Sabbatarian Baptist church at a business meeting. In the Westerly church (Hopkinton), a written confession of faith was required of candidates for membership so that the initiate knew the step he was taking.⁶³

After baptism, laying on of hands was generally performed. The Newport church observed this practice from the start, in accord with English Sabbatarian churches, and the 1833 Exposé of Faith upholds it.⁶⁴

Much internal dissension occurred within the churches. Personal and business differences among members were taken before a church council composed of the elders, deacons and several leading members.⁶⁵ Recalcitrant members were sometimes excommunicated with a formal “Awful Sentence of Excommunication.” A frequent reason for excommunication was continual breach of the Sabbath, among other offenses.⁶⁶

Modified Calvinism

In the Calvinism-Armenian controversy over predestination, Seventh Day Baptists generally held a middle position, indicating that they believed that the Holy Spirit guides a person but does not force him to do God's will.⁶⁷

persons, being formed in faith and practices of the above said things, may truly be said to be the 'Church of

Restricted Communion

Lord, and to one another, as Baptists do, and open only to one another,

but Seventh Day Baptists, owing to their origin, have always restricted their communion to Sabbath-keeping members.⁶⁸

Christmas

An 1892 SDB tract stated: "No fact is more fully established than that Sunday and its associate festivals came into Christianity through pagan influence." This included Easter, Christmas, Whitsunday, and others.⁶⁹ This view was generally held by Seventh Day Baptists until the late 1800s, when Christmas influence began to show itself in the holding of "Founder's Day" on December 23, in order to hold the interest of the children during the holiday season. It was really only a pretense, a Christmas observation two days early.⁷⁰ Now, Christmas and Easter are commonly observed among Seventh Day Baptists.

Credal Statements

The Articles of Faith of the Piscataway Church, founded in 1705, are as follows:⁷¹

I. One God the Father, one Lord Jesus Christ, who is Mediator between God and mankind, and the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God.

II. Both the Old and New Testaments are

III. The Ten Commandments continue to be

IV. The six principles in Hebrews 6:1-2 are

V. The Lord's Supper ought to be

VI. All Christian churches ought to have

VII. All persons thus believing ought to be

VIII. "We believe that a company of sincere persons, being formed in faith and practices of the above said things, may truly be said to be the 'Church of

IX. "We give up ourselves first unto the Lord, and to one another, as Baptists do, and open only to one another, according to the Word of God."

The 1833 Exposé of Sentiments, the first creedal statement of the General Conference, holds a Trinitarian viewpoint. It declared the law of God to be "morally and religiously binding upon the Church of Christ," and that it is the "duty of all men, and especially the Church of God, to observe religiously the seventh day of the week"⁷²

XIII. Signs of Spiritual Weakness

Since 1900, Seventh Day Baptist North American membership has steadily declined. In 1811, Clarke wrote of the history of Sabbatarian elders: ". . . there is not an instance of one of them being guilty of any scandalous immorality; but their lives have been marked by purity of morals, and exemplary piety and virtue."⁷³ Yet in 1971 the President of Milton College stated that the Seventh Day Baptist Church had become a haven for former Seventh-Day Adventists who smoked and ate pork, and former Church of God members who had divorced and remarried.⁷⁴

Sabbatarian Baptist views *have* been drastically watered down since the early days of their history! It is this spiritual decay from within that has led to the continuing decline in church membership.

Five key reasons for their decline can be given:

(1) Other Churches Condoned; Sabbath Neglected

and practice.

Seventh Day Baptists have been unusually tolerant of other churches. They quickly forgot the admonition of Dr. Peter Chamberlain not to become “little horn men,” and that of Joseph Davis, Sr.: “As to the churches of Christ, they generally keep from a sinful compliance with the false worshipers.”

The city of Westerly, Rhode Island, was at one time nearly all Sabbatarian. However, when other ministers came to town, the Sabbath-keepers listened to them and even complimented them on their preaching. A first-day missionary who came to Westerly in 1722 expected Westerly’s two Sabbatarian ministers to virulently attack him. But to his surprise, the Sabbatarian ministers were in his audience and thanked him for coming, and even spoke against some of the Sabbatarians who were critical of the Sunday-keeper’s ideas. Quite naturally then, “The decline in [Sabbatarian] numbers was due . . . chiefly to the organization of other churches from its members.”⁷⁵

In 1848 a first-day Baptist church was meeting on Sundays in the Newport Sabbatarian church building.⁷⁶

Sabbath-keeping ministers in America followed the corruption of their English counterparts by often preaching to Sunday congregations as well as to their own.⁷⁷

President Smith of Milton College has stated that Seventh Day Baptists do not believe they constitute the only true church, and that Sabbath-keeping is not essential to being a Christian.⁷⁸

Here were sown the seeds of their own destruction, which began with neglect of the Sabbath, the very practice which most distinguished Seventh Day Baptists from other non-Catholics.

If a person believes one church is as good as another, he will marry a person of another church and go to the most convenient or socially desirable church rather than the one in which he was called. That is precisely what the “younger generation” of Seventh Day

Baptists did. A decline in members also resulted, as Seventh Day Baptists joined the “Second Great American Migration” from farms and small towns to large industrial cities.

(2) Their “Small Town Syndrome”

Prevented Growth

Seventh Day Baptist churches were invariably established in small rural towns, not in large cities. Seventh Day Baptist attempts to establish big city congregations failed. Six-day working weeks were common in 19th Century America, and this custom made Sabbath-keeping difficult, but this problem did not stop Seventh-Day Adventists from establishing big city churches.

Seventh Day Baptists have not escaped the “small town syndrome,” and therefore they are declining. They have been content to rest in sleepy little towns, and have not been fired with zeal to preach the gospel to the whole world as a witness.

Apparently tithing was not observed in early Seventh Day Baptist churches. “Almost every method of raising money, except the lottery, has been before the church and many of them tried.”⁷⁹ Some churches imposed a tax on their members, assessed by a committee of three “judicious” members.⁸⁰ Elders generally supported themselves. The care of the poor was given the most attention, with little or nothing set apart for the spread of the gospel.

“Small Town Syndrome” has significantly affected not only Seventh Day Baptists but also the Seventh Day Church of God. And so it is that leading Seventh Day Baptist churches came to be located in such unknown places as Plainfield, New Jersey; Salem, West Virginia; and Milton, Wisconsin; while leading Seventh Day Church of God churches were established in Hartford, Michigan; Marion, Iowa; Stanberry, Missouri; Salem, West Virginia; Meridian, Idaho; and Harrisburg, Oregon. Why not New York, Philadelphia, St. Louis, Chicago, or San Francisco?

(3) Seventh Day Baptist “Have Love Attitude” Allowed the Entrance of False Doctrine

Seventh Day Baptists were “most patient”

with lax, backsliding members. Some cases of excommunication dragged on for years before the church finally acted.⁸¹

At the church in Shiloh, New Jersey, many members held to beginning Sabbath at Friday midnight instead of Friday sunset. Instead of enforcing the correct practice, “charity was shown in letting everyone decide for himself, and some continued to begin at midnight.”⁸²

In the Circular Letter of 1820, the Conference extolled “divine love” and exhorted the brethren to love all mankind and “to practice kindness toward preachers and people of other denominations.”⁸³ It is recorded that individual members of a Seventh Day Baptist church had “loving regard” for those with differing views.⁸⁴

As a result of this “have love” philosophy, coupled with the independent nature of their church government, Sabbatarian Baptists were fraught with internal doctrinal dissension, and much false doctrine entered.

William Davis

False doctrines were introduced early to the Seventh Day Baptist church through the influence of William Davis. Born in Wales in 1663, William Davis switched from the Church of England to Quakerism and came to America with William Penn, but afterwards joined Keith in his revolt against Penn. Then he became a Baptist, but because of his orthodox views of Christ (he thought Christ was not divine), he was excommunicated from the Baptists and through Noble became a Sabbatarian.

In 1706 Davis applied for membership in the Newport church, but was rejected because he held wrong doctrines. In 1710 he tried again and was accepted, although some still objected to him. In 1713 he was authorized by the church to preach and baptize.⁸⁵

Davis was “in” and “out” of the church for the rest of his life. He had views favoring the immortality of the soul, Trinitarianism, and going to Heaven, in opposition to church

leaders such as Clarke, Crandall, and Hiscox. Davis' views crept in and later became official Seventh Day Baptist doctrine.

Sabbath Schools

The "have love" attitude made early Sabbatarian Baptists churches easy targets for these false doctrines. Once introduced, these wrong doctrines were able to take root because Sabbatarians were inadequately instructed in doctrine.

"The beginning of the modern Sunday-school movement" stems from Robert Raikes at Gloucester, England in 1780. Interestingly, a Seventh Day Baptist Sabbath school was organized in 1740, at Ephrata, Pennsylvania, among German Sabbatarians.⁸⁶ This was years before the first Sunday School, but Sabbatarian doctrinal teaching did not effectively combat false teaching. Among English-speaking Sabbatarians, the first Sabbath School was probably begun, strangely enough, in the church at South Fork, of the Hughes River in c. 1842. However, it was not until later that Sabbath Schools became a general practice among Sabbatarians. By then, false doctrine had ~~worked by keeping~~ ^{worked by keeping} the commandments."

(4) Seventh Day Baptists Mixed in Politics

Another key reason for their decline was that Sabbatarian Baptists were active in political affairs. From the start, numerous Sabbatarian church members were in the colonial and later state legislatures. Richard Ward, member of the Newport church, was governor of Rhode Island from 1741 to 1742.⁸⁷

As noted previously, numerous Seventh Day Baptists participated in the Revolutionary War, as well as in the War of 1812. As late as the 1970s, U.S. Senator Jennings Randolph of West Virginia continued the SDB tradition of public service.

Inside the church, "politics" was the name

of the game. "Grave internal dissensions" seemed to be prominent in many West Virginia churches, as well as in others.⁸⁸

A new lowering of Scriptural standards was attained with the appearance of women preachers in Ritchie, West Virginia, and western New York during the mid-1880s.⁸⁹ Church "politics" supported this move.

(5) Disunity and Lethargy Resulted in a "Dead" Church

John Maxson, fourth pastor of the Newport church, 1754-1778, was examined by the Westerly church in 1743 but declined to preach there. The contents of his "exam" show the moribund spiritual condition of the Sabbatarian church.⁹⁰

Q: Do you believe the Seventh Day keeping church in V

A: Maxson replied that he believed in their fundamental doctrine, or in a DEAD, dull, or cold state."

Q: Do you believe Adam and Eve's sin brought eternal c

A: "I cannot find anything [in Scripture] to urge me

Q: Do you believe that faith without works will justify m

A: "... true faith in Christ entitles to salvation, which Salvation is freely offered only to "true believers that are sincere

Conference reports are rife with admissions of the cold and lethargic state of the Sabbatarian churches at the turn of the nineteenth century. In 1836 there was said to be "general coldness and apathy" in the whole church. In 1840, despite the "revivals" in the church, there remained widespread "apathy and backsliding." By 1846 little interest was shown in denominational matters.⁹¹

Periodical after periodical published by Seventh Day Baptists ceased due to lack of support. In fact, the history of nineteenth century Seventh Day Baptists is the record of one paper's demise after another.

A "tent campaign" began in 1878, with several evangelist preachers in the effort. The

development, initiative and energy, the general church members would not support it. A feeble revival of the program was attempted in 1895, with few visible results.⁹²

A Declining Church

Those few who did come into Seventh Day Baptist congregations during the 1830s and 1840s (the period of greatest growth) were termed “converts to the sabbath.”⁹³ They had merely accepted the argument of the Sabbath. True conversion was sadly lacking.

A declining church, both in numbers and in spiritual power, had significantly departed from the beliefs and practices of its ancestors: this characterizes the present state of Seventh Day Baptists.

XIV. Will History’s Lessons Be Remembered?

“Rev.” Stephen Burdick, in the official Seventh Day Baptist history, gives a number of “lessons from the past.” He makes two major points:

(1) God’s chosen people must be separated from others who have not the Spirit effectively perform His work. Burdick states:

... co-operation in religious work, with others, known to be wrong in matters of religious doctrine and practice [results inevitably in] the loss of moral and spiritual power and the unavoidable experience of disappointment and failure. The lesson is obvious . . . [God’s people] must be a peculiar people, zealous of good works

(2) No other organization can take the place of the “church of God” in doing God’s work:

The church of God is a missionary organization.

God, guided by His word and directed by His Holy Spirit is the only qualified pastor of the church of God.

No more accurate statements could be made than the two above conclusions of Burdick. Yet Seventh Day Baptists have totally forgotten these lessons. They fail to remember the former practices of their church or the lesson of martyrs, such as John James, who refused to compromise with the truth.

Dwell on the Past, But Forget Its Lesson

Yet paradoxically, Seventh Day Baptists dote on their history. Their periodicals have continually emphasized the church’s rich historical legacy. Seventh Day Baptists, including President Smith of Milton College, admit the lessons of their history, but refuse or cannot resuscitate their dying (or dead) church.

Sardis Church Forgets Lesson of History

The Bible records Christ’s message to the Sardis era of His church:

Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, lest thou shalt be deprived of thy crown. (Revelation 3:3, 13)

A Sabbath-keeping church, terming itself the “Church of God,” which condones false doctrines, neglects what little truth it has (as the Sabbath), and is infected with “small town syndrome,” the “have love attitude,” internal politics, and lack of proper church government, and is disunited and lethargic: such a church is in the “Sardis” condition. It is “dead” spiritually because it does not remember the lesson of its own history and does not choose to repent when shown to be in error.

Unmistakably, the Sardis message applies to the history of a people who now term themselves “Seventh Day Baptists,” but who at times formerly held the name “Church of God.”

remember the lessons from the history of the
Sardis church? **Ω**

FOOTNOTES

¹Randolph, 205-6, Gardiner, 37.

²SDB, 860-61.

³SDB, 855-57.

⁴SDB, 854-64, 1367.

⁵SDB, 874-85.

⁶Tamar Davis, *A General History of the Sabbatarian Churches* (Philadelphia: Lindsay and Blakiston, 1851), 200-201.

⁷Randolph, 267-77; SDB, 868-71.

⁸SDB, 773.

⁹SDB, 673, 130.

¹⁰SDB, 1248.

¹¹Bailey, 12-13.

¹²Dugger, 271-72.

¹³SDB, 602-3.

¹⁴SDB, 150, 613.

¹⁵SDB, 150-51.

¹⁶Bailey, 27.

¹⁷SDB, 151.

¹⁸Bailey, 25-26.

¹⁹Bailey, 20-23.

²⁰Bailey, 31-32.

²¹Backus, Vol. II, 408-12.

²²SDB, 150-54.

²³SDB, 153-209.

²⁴William L. Burdick, *A Manual of Seventh Day Baptist Church Procedure* (Plainfield, New Jersey: W.L. Burdick and C.F. Randolph, 1926), 47.

²⁵A.H. Lewis, "The Time of Christ's Resurrection and the Observance of Sunday," *Sabbath Reform Library*, (New York: March, 1892), Vol. I, Number 3, 17-32.

²⁶Dugger, 271-272.

²⁷*Seventh Day Baptist Memorial*, Vol. II, January 1853, 38.

²⁸Randolph, 99.

²⁹Clarke, 34.

³⁰SDB, 135.

³¹Burdick, 45.

³²Randolph, 14-17.

³³SDB, 163-64.

³⁴W.B. Gillette, cited in I. Daniel Rupp, *An Original History of the Religious Denominations at Present Existing in the United States* (Philadelphia: J.Y. Humphreys, 1844), 81.

³⁵Dugger, 274.

³⁶*The Bible Advocate*, Vol. LX (July 6, 1926), 463.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Black, 28-47, 51-55.

³⁹SDB, 42.

⁴⁰Clarke, 11-12.

⁴¹A.N. Rogers, letter to the author, December 31, 1970.

⁴²*Seventh Day Baptist Memorial*, Vol. I, 36; cited in Dugger, 274.

⁴³*Seventh Day Baptist Memorial*, Vol. II, January 1853, 30, 37, 39.

⁴⁴Dugger, 282.

⁴⁵Backus, Vol. I, 316-26.

⁴⁶*Seventh Day Baptist Memorial*, Vol. II, January, 1853, 27.

⁴⁷SDB, 613.

⁴⁸SDB, 610.

⁴⁹*Seventh Day Baptist Memorial*, Vol. II, 120-21, cited in Dugger, 275-76.

⁵⁰SDB, 650.

⁵¹Randolph, 11-12, 14-15, 20-24.

⁵²Randolph, 73-74, 146, 199.

⁵³Bailey, 99.

⁵⁴Dugger, 282-83.

⁵⁵Dugger, 277-78.

⁵⁶Clarke, 61-64.

⁵⁷Bailey, 94-101.

⁵⁸SDB, 133-134.

⁵⁹Burdick, 44.

⁶⁰SDB, 133-34.

⁶¹Clarke, various pages.

⁶²Burdick,. 21-23.

⁶³Burdick, 28; SDB, 428.

⁶⁴Gillette, cited in Rupp, 81; *Seventh Day Baptist Memorial*, Vol. I, July 1852, 113.

⁶⁵Clarke, 53; SDB, 825.

⁶⁶SDB, 824.

⁶⁷SDB, 134.

⁶⁸SDB, 135.

⁶⁹C.D. Potter, "Pagan Origin of 'Christian' Festivals," *Sabbath Reform Library*, Vol. I, Number 8 (New York: American Sabbath Tract Society, 1892), 101-103.

⁷⁰George B. Shaw, *Pulpit Gleanings*, (Plainfield: The Recorder Press, 1904), 123.

⁷¹*Seventh Day Baptist Memorial*, cited in Dugger, 275-77.

⁷²Bailey, 99.

⁷³Clarke, 64.

⁷⁴Kenneth Smith, President, Milton College, Interview August 18, 1971.

⁷⁵SDB, 617-18.

⁷⁶Benedict, 468.

⁷⁷James White, *Life Incidents*, Vol. I (Battle Creek, Michigan: Steam Press of the Seventh-Day Adventist Publishing Association, 1868), 335.

⁷⁸Smith Interview.

⁷⁹SDB, 632-633.

⁸⁰Clarke, 53.

⁸¹SDB, 628-29.

⁸²SDB, 685.

⁸³SDB, 170.

⁸⁴SDB, 138.

⁸⁵*Seventh Day Baptist Memorial*, Vol. I, 101-108; Vol. II, 11.

⁸⁶Randolph, 335; SDB, 271-73.

⁸⁷SDB, 634.

⁸⁸SDB, 850-51.

⁸⁹Randolph, 219, 1367.

⁹⁰*Seventh Day Baptist Memorial*, Vol. I, January, 1852, 9-11.

⁹¹SDB, 182-88.

⁹²SDB, 438-39.

⁹³SDB, 1287-90.

⁹⁴SDB, 1298-99.