7-1-1963

Like Fire in Dry Stubble - The Stone Movement 1804-1832 (Part 1)

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RESTORATION QUARTERLY

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STUDIES IN CHRISTIAN SCHOLARSHIP
VOL. 7, NO. 3, THIRD QUARTER, 1963
A Study in the Restoration Movement

Like Fire in Dry Stubble — The Stone Movement 1804-1832* (Part I)


The religious reformation of Barton Warren Stone in the early 19th Century is an integral part of the Restoration Movement to which we belong and of American Church History. It contributed much more to the ongoing of the Restoration than either the New England movement of Abner Jones and Elias Smith or the South Atlantic movement of James O'Kelly. In much of the Mid-continent area where the Movement had its greatest growth, the Stone churches contributed a part equal to, and in many cases larger than, that of the people from the Baptist background led by the Campbells and Walter Scott in numbers, congregations, and preachers.

But it has been frequently urged that Stone and his group have never received their share of recognition for the part they played in our history. There are good reasons for this. One is that the historians of the Restoration who wrote its story looking back over the years from after the Civil War were largely from the Campbell side.1 These men liked to dramatize the events of the Campbell-Scott group in Pa., Va., and Ohio, especially in 1826-28, as the point at which "for the first time in modern times the primitive Gospel was preached in its purity and simplicity." Alexander Campbell was a more dominant figure than Stone, was younger, and thus after their union in the 1830's provided a more pronounced leadership.

Another factor has been that there remain few records of the critical period of 1804-26 in the Stone Movement. Through these years the Christian Churches (as they were called) spread so rapidly Stone published no paper. His journal, The Christian Messenger, was not begun until Dec. 1826. After this, Stone published a serial history of the churches in Ky. and an autobiography. But he was concerned in them more with the initial facts—the Cane Ridge Revival, the Springfield Presbytery, and the beginnings of

*This paper, much expanded, contains the material presented in a paper at the Biblical Forum at the Abilene Christian Lectureship for 1964. Credit should be given to a number of students taking part in the McGarvey Fellowship program at ACC whose work provides the basis of some of the conclusions set forth, though the writers assume responsibility for all the contents.

1E.g., Robert Richardson, The Memoirs of Alexander Campbell (2 vols., Cincinnati, 1913); A. S. Hayden, The Early History of the Disciples of Christ on the Western Reserve (Cincinnati, 1876); and A. Campbell's various works, esp. The Millennial Harbinger (1830-1870).
the churches as independent congregations. Thus there is little beyond 1807. Later attempts such as Roger's *Cane Ridge Meeting House* and Levi Purviance's *Biography of David Purviance* helped to fill the gaps, but again there are only scattered references in them to the years between 1804 and the meeting of Stone and Campbell in 1824. It was not until the publication of C. C. Ware's *Barton Warren Stone* in 1932 that any real survey of Stone's life and work was made.

Modern attempts to re-evaluate Stone's part in the history deserve praise. Besides Ware's book one mentions William Garrett West's Ph.D. dissertation at Yale, which was published as *Barton Warren Stone: Early American Advocate of Christian Unity* (1954), Dr. Evan Ulrey's dissertation at LSU, "The Preaching of Barton Warren Stone" (1955), and still nearer to us two contributions by Dr. Colby Hall of TCU, a study in the life of Rice Haggard (one of Stone's co-workers) and a short history of the movement entitled *The New Light Christians*. In these there is not only a re-assessment of Haggard's influence, but also that of Stone, and an attempt is made to show that Stone's movement had priority to that of Campbell.

As praiseworthy as these attempts are, they fall short in some respects. Some of them (Ulrey excepted) do not seem to this writer to be properly motivated. Part of the desire to give Stone his "proper place" seems prompted by a desire to bypass the Campbell movement with its "more rigid theology" and insistence on a "pattern concept" of the church and to find a more ideal prototype for the liberal theology and ecumenical outlook of the present Disciples of Christ denomination in Stone. This thesis is highly questionable.

Another point is that the background of the Stone movement in the regions where it developed, together with the depth and breadth of the growth of the Stone group before the union with Campbell, has never been to our knowledge extensively investigated. Thus the extensive labors, the widening borders, the truly zealous missionary and the evangelistic outreach of Stone and his lieutenants in the three decades from the dissolving of the Springfield Presbytery to the union of the "Reformers" and the "Christians" at Lexington, Ky., in 1832 are little appreciated. Stone's efforts are simply lumped together with others in "Pre-Campbell" or "Pre-Restoration" studies.

Attempts here will be made to point out some of the lines along which Stone's work could be restudied and to present some facts which show the priority and magnitude of his contribution to the movement of which we are a part. Before coming directly to Stone

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2Colby D. Hall, *Rice Haggard, the Frontier Evangelist Who Revived the Name Christian* (Ft. Worth, 1957).
two facets of background which predate the spread of his movement will be emphasized.

THE O’KELLY FORCES IN THE WEST

The first of these is the extent to which the way was prepared for the Stone reform by the Westward movement of the Christians who stood with James O’Kelly in Virginia and the Carolinas and (to a lesser extent) of the followers of Elias Smith. It is quite likely that the extent of this influence has never been recognized.

O’Kelly’s forces withdrew from the emerging Methodist denomination in 1793 and organized the Republican Methodist Church at Manakin­town, Va., on Dec. 25 of that year. The following August at Old Lebanon in Surry Co., Va., the simple pattern of undenominational Christianity founded upon the Bible alone was adopted. In the following years this voice for primitive Christianity was to be heard powerfully across the Piedmont region of Virginia, through the Carolinas to Georgia; and it was to join with the Christian churches of Abner Jones and Elias Smith in New England. Many of these churches in Virginia were to join the Campbell movement, especially north of the James River, while another group in the Shenandoah Valley more largely from the New England group were to come under Campbell’s influence.

But what is especially pertinent is that this group was to exert a powerful influence on the Stone movement and to provide a base and impetus for its growth. This came from the fact that many of O’Kelly’s people moved across the Alleghenys into the Cumberland and Ohio Valleys.

For example, in the year 1786 James Haws and Benjamin Ogden were appointed Methodist missionaries to the newly opened region of Kentucky, where they preached in the Cumberland circuit comprising Middle Tennessee and the South Central portion of Kentucky lying in the valley of the Cumberland. The Methodist cause in these regions prospered under their labors. But in 1794-95 Haws and Ogden embraced the views of the O’Kelly churches, and of Haws it is said that “by his influence and address, (he) brought over the travelling preachers and every local preacher but one, to his views, in the county in which he was located.” Haws later is said to have joined the Presbyterians at the time of the revival (1801). He settled in Sumner Co., Tennessee, where the citizens gave him 640 acres

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5The union came in 1811. See MacClenny, ibid., pp. 156ff.
6Though this is played down by later followers of O’Kelly, it is well documented. See MacClenny, ibid., p. 159, footnote.
7See H. J. Darst, Ante Bellum Virginia Disciples (Richmond, Va., 1959), pp. 18-23.
of land. He died in the Presbyterian connection some years later. The date and reference to the revival seem to indicate a connection with the Cane Ridge Revival, but this is not clear. But at least he led a successful revolt against Methodism in favor of O'Kelly's ideas in the West long before the Stone revival. There are references made to Christian churches meeting in this region with no apparent connection with Stone. One can but wonder about their origin.

Other O'Kellyites to enter Kentucky were David and Rice Haggard. David Haggard had been appointed to the ministry in 1787 and had preached in North Carolina and Virginia. In 1790 he accompanied Henry Birchett into Kentucky serving the Lexington circuit for two years. Later he served two years in Virginia and North Carolina circuits. Then in 1793 his name drops from the Methodist minutes (though his name is not listed with James O'Kelly, John Allen, Rice Haggard, and John Robertson as those who had withdrawn themselves from the Methodist order and connection). However, Redford states that he did associate himself with the O'Kelly group.

According to records of Cumberland County, Ky., David Haggard received a land grant of 200 acres on Little Renox Creek north of Burkesville in 1798. He received two more grants on the same creek in 1799. Concerning him we find:

The Reverend David Haggard produced satisfactory proof of his being in regular communion with the society called the Christian Church of which he is a member, who thereupon took the oath prescribed by law and entered into bond with Lucy Haggard his surety, conditioned as the law directs, ordered that license be granted him to solemnize the rites of marriage between persons regularly applying to him with a license as the law directs.

About this time David was prevailed upon by a friend Reuben Dooley (soon to be met again in our story), a Presbyterian who had had three tours of preaching among the Cherokee Indians (in Tennessee?), to go preach to these poor benighted people. Haggard was back in Cumberland County later where on December 5, 1801, he certified to the court that he had solemnized six marriages during the year, performances repeated in 1803 and 04.

After David came his brother Rice. Rice Haggard is listed in the 1791 minutes of the Methodist church as a deacon (preacher). That

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9Minutes of Methodist Church Taken at the Several Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America, Microprint. Col. 25808, Evans collection.
10Ibid., p. 74.
13Levi Purviance, Biography of Elder David Purviance (Dayton, Ohio, 1848), p. 196.
14Methodist Conference Minutes, op. cit., Col. 23565.

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year he was assigned to the Cumberland circuit (in Virginia) along with a William Heath. The following year he served the Mecklenburg circuit in Virginia under James O'Kelly. It was this Rice Haggard who made the suggestion that the name Christian be adopted by the O'Kelly group (1794). In the minutes of 1793 he is listed as having withdrawn with O'Kelly.

Eventually Rice journeyed to Kentucky and bought land near his brother in Cumberland Co. On May 16, 1804, he performed a marriage ceremony in that county. He is said to have settled on Haggard's Branch, near Burkesville about the year 1803 or 04 and to have attended the meeting of the Springfield Presbytery of Stone's group in June of 1804.

Stone in his history says, "Three valuable elders who had a few years before separated with James O'Kelly from the Methodist connection about this time united with us (Oct. 1804). Their names were Clement Nance, James Read and Rice Haggard. Of Haggard, Stone said in another place,

With the man-made creeds we threw it overboard and took the name, Christian—the name given to the disciples by divine appointment first at Antioch. We published a pamphlet on this name written by Elder Rice Haggard, who had lately united with us.

Haggard's pamphlet was published in Elias Smith's Herald of Gospel Liberty but without his name so that its contents became lost to view as no copy of the tract was known until recently. Now that it has been found it is revealed that it contained not only a defense of the name Christian, but a six-point platform for Christian Unity through restoration—a program not unlike the 13 points of Thomas Campbell in the Declaration and Address. Rice Haggard, fresh from the O'Kelly battles, is thus revealed to have had a decisive part to play in the Stone program.

Nor does he stand alone. Others such as those mentioned with him came. Clements Nance (earlier spelled Nantz) began preaching for the Methodists in Virginia in 1782. He joined O'Kelly in 1793 or soon thereafter. He moved to Kentucky in 1803 and worked with Stone. In 1805 he moved to Indiana and settled in Floyd County, where he became the first preacher of the Christians in that state. He preached powerfully for many years. A good list of preachers

15 Ibid., p. 24544.
16 Wells, op. cit., p. 42.
18 Ibid., p. 278.
21 His obituary is in the Christian Messenger, Aug. 1828, p. 239. His story is told quite fully, with that of his descendants in The Nance Memorial (Bloomington, Ill., 1904) by Geo. W. Nance.
who had stood with the Eastern Christians and who later preached for the Stone and Campbell groups could be compiled. Besides those mentioned one remembers, e.g., Joel Hayden of Kentucky and Missouri and John O’Kane of Indiana.

Nor were the preachers alone. Scant records exist, but there are indications. J. Berkley Green, a student of Rice Haggard’s life, travelled west to find material about his subject. He says, “I have a list of 25 congregations in the field of Haggard’s labor that existed before 1831.” According to him, the oldest church in Cumberland Co. was Bethel on Marrowbone Creek. Many of its members had been Christians in North Carolina. He heard one who when called a Campbellite laughed and said, “My mother was a Christian before Alexander Campbell was born.”

**INDEPENDENT OR “FREE” CHURCHES WHICH JOINED STONE**

Another type of circumstance which provided a base for the Stone movement was a number of independent or “free” churches, which adopted a Restoration attitude of building upon the Bible alone. Some of them may have been influenced by ideas from the Eastern Christians, but this is not documented. They merged with the Stone movement over a wide territory.

We know of a free Presbyterian church at Franklin, Tennessee, by 1805.22

In Indiana a John Wright established a Free Baptist church which took the Bible alone. By 1813 the movement had grown so that the churches formed an association, but soon dropped the name Baptist, and in 1814 they dissolved their association and agreed simply to meet annually for worship and fellowship. They then joined hands with fifteen German Baptist congregations (Dunkards). Joseph Hostetler led the German Baptists. This whole group, in turn, united with the Stone Movement in 1815.23

Typical of this group was the church between Rockwood and Kingston in East Tennessee (Roane County). A group moved from far East Tennessee from Hawkins County after the Treaty of Tellico in 1805 opened the Territory to the white man to this place. The group included Isaac Rice, his brother-in-law Wm. Matlock, and Joseph Mee. They settled near Rockwood where Rice built a cabin on a small hill above a spring which now supplies Rockwood its water. The others built nearby. The three built a log house and organized a church in 1812. Rice preached and his views caused attack, but he was successful in converting families like the Randolphs (who

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22*“fallen prey to Mr. Stone and his emissaries from Kentucky.”* Diary of John Lyle. Quoted by C. C. Ware, *op. cit.*, p. 157.

later became prominent in the churches), the McElwees, and Thomas Blakes. The church burned\(^{24}\) and the congregation dispersed. Rice moved to McMinn Co. (Riceville) and soon afterward died. Most of the group became members of the old Post Oak Springs church where Rice had also preached, which church has come down to later times. Isaac Mulkey later preached for this church. He reported to the *Christian Messenger* Sept. 1834, p. 282:

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\text{I moved to this place 8 or 9 months ago. There were 16 or 17 disciples, who had been congregated 15 or 20 years ago by bro. E. D. Moore [This would be about the time Rice left—JWR]. Last Sept. we organized as nearly as we could with our knowledge on primitive grounds. . . .}
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Both E. D. Moore and Isaac Mulkey will be met again later. As we shall see, East Tennessee was to become a conference area of Stone churches.

**The Mulkey Movement.** Another auspicious circumstance was the rise of the churches under the leadership of the Mulkey brothers in Kentucky and Tennessee, on the eastern edge of what is called the “Barrens” (east of Tompkinsville, Ky.). John Mulkey was born in South Carolina, January 14, 1772. His father, Jonathan, moved into East Tennessee and established probably the first Baptist church in Tennessee (Buffalo Ridge) in the 1770's. Jonathan had three sons who all became Baptist preachers: John, Philip, and Isaac. John began preaching in East Tennessee at the age of 20, studied hard and soon won a reputation as a fine preacher. He and his brother Philip moved to Kentucky and preached. He located at Mill Creek but extended his labors beyond the Green River.

One day in 1809 while preaching on election he saw that his reasoning was not logical and became confused, to the obvious dismay of his listeners. After close study of his Bible he announced his change of views on unconditional election and other points of Calvinism. In August of 1809 he was cited for heresy and the church called five sister Baptist churches to assist them in determining the issue. But the majority of the group present which met the following October voted for Mulkey. Another meeting was held in November:

Mulkey proposed to drop all disputes and bear with each other. They replied, “Never, till you come back to the very ground from which you started.” He then proposed a dissolving of the church, to which there was not a dissenting voice. Those that were determined to stand on their old ground were called to have their names enrolled as the church. But John Mulkey called on all who were determined to withdraw from all human creeds and stand on the Bible, to give place for the others to act in their own way. They met on the next Saturday and,

\(^{24}\)Wagner, *op. cit.*, gives many more details of the later group, including court record mention of Rice’s burnt meeting house, p. 34, etc.
after solemn prayer to Almighty God, organized themselves into a church on the Bible alone. 25

The two brothers joined hands in preaching their newly-found gospel and from a small beginning they gathered "a mighty host." With Mulkey went the Brimstone and Martin's Fork churches, parties of Middle Fork, Sinking Creek, and Big Spring churches. Spencer says that the Stockton's Valley Association (formerly Green River Association) lost nearly one-half of its numerical strength. 26

Mulkey's preaching affected many churches. The writers have examined the unpublished minutes of the Salem Baptist Church in Cumberland Co., Ky., for these years. Numerous instances of withdrawal from members for attending the preaching of Mulkey or "joining his churches" are found in these minutes.

In the year 1810 Mulkey's forces were visited by Joseph Thomas, a young preacher from the Christians in the East who called himself the "White Pilgrim." Thomas was born in 1791 and lived in North Carolina. He was a convert of William Guirey. He had been "poured" by O'Kelly at Raleigh, N. C., Oct. 24, 1807. He had met Rice Haggard, who lived at Norfolk, Va., briefly in 1807. He began preaching and having heard of the Christians in the West undertook to visit them, riding across the mountains into Kentucky-Tennessee the winter of 1810-11. In his journal The Life of the Pilgrim 27 he says that he was "in Tennessee December 1 and 2 and held a 2-day meeting on Stone's river (N. E. Nashville was on Stone River). He mentioned a Bro. Adams, a Christian preacher and a man of learning and reformation with whom he went home and preached to people gathered there. The brother lived at Hopewell, Tennessee. "Thence to the Barrens of Kentucky."

In Kentucky Thomas says,

December 15th and 16th 2 day meeting at brother Mulkey's. Here brother dooley met me. The people felt the weight and power of truth. A sister gave a discourse, which discovered a strong mind, and a zealous soul. I preached in the region round about till December 29th. In which I had some happy seasons with the people of God, and met with some trials and distresses.

Together at Mill Creek: Reuben Dooley, Joseph Thomas, and John Mulkey!

Not long after this Mulkey joined hands with the Stone group. John Rogers later said of Mulkey,

He had been a popular Baptist preacher, but became satisfied of the correctness of our ground and united with us, and was extremely useful in promoting the cause. He subsequently made a visit or two to this part of Kentucky, and was with me at Old Concord and Cane Ridge. He was quite an orator. He had a splendid voice, and sang, and preached, and prayed most admirable. 28

25 Isaac Reneau, Millennial Harbinger, 1845, p. 380.
26 History of the Kentucky Baptists, Vol. 1, p. 214.
27 The Life of the Pilgrim (Winchester, Va., 1817), pp. 59f.
28 W. C. Rogers, Recollections of Men of Faith (St. Louis, 1889), p. 186.
Among others whom Mulkey baptized was Mansel Matthews, son of James E. Matthews, who later was to preach powerfully in North Alabama, West Tennessee, and Texas. Mulkey died in 1845 leaving sons who were to become great preachers. One John Newton Mulkey is the subject of a biographical sketch by H. Leo Boles.

Joseph Thomas continued his trip into the region of Cane Ridge. His visit helped to cement the forces of Mulkey and Stone. Upon his return East, Thomas voiced his conviction recently learned from the Stone group that immersion was baptism and obeyed his Lord in the act near Philadelphia in July, 1811.

Churches in Holston and Watauga Valleys in East Tennessee. Another movement, which may or may not have been introduced from the Stone group, was that of the Christian churches around Washington County in Far East Tennessee. Jeriel Dodge had been a member of Severn's Valley Baptist Church in Harden County, Ky., where he may have known Stone. Some time before 1817 he moved to Blountsville, Sullivan County, Tenn., and then moved to Boone's Creek in Washington County. Dodge became associated with James Miller, another former Baptist minister who had been converted by Stone in Ohio. When the church of which he was a member, the Baptist church on Sinking Creek, refused admittance to a woman who had been baptized by Jeriel Dodge (April 16, 1825), Miller asked for and received a letter of dismissal. Shortly after this Miller conducted a great revival among the people of Washington County during which he received many converts from the Sinking Creek and Buffalo Ridge Baptist churches. The story is told from the Baptist side in Taylor's Early Baptists of Upper East Tennessee. It is interesting that these Baptist churches had been under the oversight of Jonathan Mulkey.


30Thomas, a youth of twenty at this time, was called at Cane Ridge the “beardless boy.” He is said to have fanned the smoldering embers of the Kentucky revival into flames with his passionate evangelism (Ware, op. cit., p. 184). He preached across Kentucky at Stone churches: Adair Co., Mt. Tabor, I. Elmore’s, and at Lexington on several occasions. At Lexington he tells of a man who dropped a half dollar into his hand, whispering, “give me the worth of this in love.” He replied that he loved him without pay. He then was told to take it for interest. Of the Stone group he said, “The Christians in his country appear to be the most happy of any people that I ever traveled among, and their conduct most consistent with the Gospel which they profess. Their preachers are generally hard working men, and with their own hands they provide for their own house. But the preachers who travel and do nothing but preach the brethren think they should live of the Gospel; and where they are able, they are willing to give them a decent support; that is food and raiment.”

31See Darst, op. cit., pp. 30f.


33Ibid.

34Nashville, 1957.
These East Tennessee churches united with Christian churches which had been established by Virginia Christians, especially R. M. Shankland, Samuel Bailey, and James Fitzpatrick.

These Christians all joined in 1829 in establishing a conference in East Tennessee-Virginia. That year the conference met at Boone's Creek and reported some 472 members.\textsuperscript{35} The conference reported frequently during the next several years in Stone's paper.

\textit{Group in Northern Alabama.} A group of French Huguenots and Scotch Irish were located in Northern Alabama in Jackson County just after the American Revolution. Where the Huguenots got their ideas is not definitely known. But through their influence the religious group meeting in the community was led to drop all human names and creeds and agreed to take the New Testament as its only rule of faith and practice. The date of this decision also is not clear. Mansel W. Matthews, who had been in Kentucky in 1806, taught school here. From the group he came in contact with the Restoration Plea (one of his students was the girl who later became the mother of Addison and Randolph Clark of Texas fame), which had a tremendous appeal to him. He obeyed the Gospel, being baptized by John Mulkey in 1822, and determined to preach. He returned to visit his family, all of whom followed him in becoming Christians. Matthews was to preach in a powerful way in West Tennessee (McNairy County) and later in Texas (where he led the famous "church on wheels" in 1835 settling at Clarksville). With him from the original Huguenot group were the D'Spains and the DeFee family.\textsuperscript{36} DeFee himself went to Texas as early as 1833, whence he wrote to Stone that he was preaching in the Sabine region.

It is the conviction of these investigators that much fruitful research could yet be done on the phases of the early Christians in the West who became associated with the Stone movement. Certainly there was much more movement of settlers and preachers across the mountains than has been previously indicated.\textsuperscript{37} Next we will take

\textsuperscript{35}Christian Messenger, Vol. 7 (1830), p. 216.
\textsuperscript{36}This background beckons for further investigation. The details are set forth in the Matthews family papers in the Library at Texas Christian University. See also an article by J. Porter Wilhite, "When Did We Have Our Beginning in America?" Gospel Advocate, 1955, p. 992.
\textsuperscript{37}The travelling back and forth of preachers from both sides has already been mentioned. Reuben Dooley is another example. He united with the Restoration in Kentucky in 1806. In 1808 he moved to Preble Co. Ohio. In 1809 he travelled extensively in Kentucky, Virginia (in Virginia he met Rice Haggard again), and North and South Carolina. In 1810 he and Stone began preaching together on trips. In 1817 he preached in Missouri and in 1821 in Virginia again. He died in 1822. Frazee, Reminiscences and Sermons, pp. 57-59; see also Purviance, op. cit., p. 197.

The Rogers Brothers in the 1820's preached extensively among the Christian churches established by Elias Smith and O'Kelly in Virginia (Darst, op. cit., pp. 26ff.). Other visits such as those of Joel
up the actual history of the Stone preaching after the establishment of the independent churches in Kentucky.

(to be continued)

Hayden will be mentioned later.

In 1810 John Mavity of Kentucky (probably an associate of Stone) preached for churches in the Shenandoah Valley in Virginia among the Christian churches established by Elias Smith (Darst, *ibid.*, p. 20, quoting the Walnut Springs Church Minutes).