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TENNESSEE BAPTIST HISTORY

Tennessee Baptists and the Restoration Movement

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"O, LORD, HEAR THE CRIES AND SEE THE TEARS OF THE BAPTISTS": GARNER McCONNICO MEETS ALEXANDER CAMPBELL

McGarvey Ice

ature seems to measure her works on a different scale on the opposite sides of the Appalachian mountains," wrote Daniel Smith in early spring 1796.¹ After describing the rich natural resources, temperate climate, ample supply of fresh water, wild game, easily navigable streams and rivers, he notes since the first permanent white settlement the population along the Cumberland River in the environs of Nashville alone numbered nearly 15,000. By the time Smith's map and survey were published, the natives were defeated at Nickajack, a census completed, and a constitution ratified forming the Union's sixteenth state. To facilitate settlement, a 183-mile wagon road was cut through the Cumberland Mountains from Knoxville to Nashville in 1795. It saw between thirty and forty wagons its first year and more than three hundred the next.² Population across the territory steadily increased—that of Davidson County alone tripled between 1795–1800—as settlers ventured west chased new opportunity, be it in the form of land and crops, or in the production of any and "every article that grows in the Atlantic states."³

Garner McConnico, with his wife Mary, son Jared (age 5) and daughters Nancy and Elizabeth (ages 3 and 2), were squarely among that stream. While most of their traveling companions sought land or fortune beyond the Cumberlands, all appearances suggest troubled Garner McConnico, like the biblical Jonah, was running from a call to preach. The youngest child of Jared and
Keziah McConnico's nine children, Garner was born July 20, 1771, in Lunenburg County, Virginia.

The most formative religious influences on young Garner came from his mother, "a woman of great piety from whom he received many admonitions" and a Baptist preacher whose name was long ago lost to the passing years. The pair converged upon Garner in a religious revival he did not initially want to attend. Yet when Keziah prevailed as only a mother could do, Garner went. The preacher opened the meeting with such fervency in prayer that he seemed to Garner to bring "the very heavens and earth together." He was still preaching—he had not yet invited mourners to prayer—and he had seventeen-year old McConnico up on his feet standing before the pulpit in a "flood of tears." Unlike many conversion narratives of the period, there is no indication Garner underwent any prolonged period of anguish or despair. Having embraced religion, he was baptized and received into the Baptist Church at Tuskeiah, Lunenburg County, Virginia, on September 20, 1788.

With 140 members, Tuskeiah was by a fair margin the largest of the county's four Baptist churches in the early 1790s. As a Particular Baptist congregation, Tuskeiah was Calvinistic and Garner never wavered from this basic orientation as nurtured by Pastor Thomas Crymes. Crymes, "a faithful and diligent servant of God" who by "saint and sinner . . . was esteemed a good man," died suddenly and untimely in 1789. In the absence of his leadership the congregation maintained monthly meetings "to wait upon the Lord, to see whether any would be divinely impressed to exercise any public gift. Leaving to each member to sing, pray, exhort, or preach, as were his impressions." Garner was among those so impressed. On November 20, 1789, he married Mary Walker and "soon thereafter commenced exercising in public which he continued to do being very zealous but almost entirely illiterate." It appears Garner's preaching continued well past May 1790 when William Ellis was called to the Tuskeiah pastorate. At some point he may have been licensed, perhaps under Ellis's tutelage, at the Tuskeiah church though no definitive record of the particulars has been preserved. The extant record, on the whole, seems to indicate that McConnico was a competent speaker whose gifts the congregation not only welcomed but encouraged him to improve. By the early 1790s
Garner and Mary had all the appearances of normalcy and joy one might hope were present in a small, growing family. However, one of Garner's older brothers, who

was not a professor [of religion] opposed his preaching asking him what college he had received his education. His reply was ‘in bush college, upon my knees’ or ‘in the school of Christ.’ But his brother's opposition was so great on account of his being young and illiterate that he emigrated to Davidson County, Tenn. in the year 1795, hoping to get clear of the impression where he resided for two years, having previously promised never to preach again.11

Garner McConnico liquidated his holdings in Lunenburg County, set his face towards the Cumberlands and simply pulled out. The twenty-four year old illiterate would-be Baptist preacher, young family in tow, waded deep into the current of that streaming throng of hopeful entrepreneurs. McConnico, though, was trying his best to outrun the call of God and the derision of his own kin.

Though the wagon road terminated at the river in present day East Nashville, the McConnico's did not stop. Crossing the Cumberland they moved past Nashville to the farthest fringes of white settlement. They were deep in West Tennessee as it was known then, finally stopping near the northern terminus of the Natchez Trace in what is today southwest Davidson and northern Williamson Counties. They settled among the massive old-growth hickories, oaks and maples, amid the cane-brakes and hollows, where for two years the refugee preacher labored with his hands. He buried his intentions to preach so deeply that he bound his wife to secrecy.

"May the Glory of His Conquest Be Felt on Big Harpeth"12

However, tracking a lost horse through the dense cane, he found himself on the cusp of a new day's dawn. Finding his way back to the road he met John Dillahunty who in the previous year established at Richland Creek in western Davidson County the first Baptist church south of Nashville. In the course of conversation with the diminutive Dillahunty—he reckoned his appearance to be like the apostle Paul—McConnico was simply unable to keep his secret. Not only did he reveal his past, he made
an appointment to preach at Richland Creek meetinghouse.

"Before the sermon was half delivered," wrote Jesse Cox, "the venerable old [Dillahunty] arose and ran to him and embraced him in his arms and wept aloud for joy to find a young man in the frontier that preached the same faith."\textsuperscript{13} Perhaps McConnico remembered the day not long past when his weeping interrupted a preacher in mid-sermon. Dillahunty's tears not only melted McConnico's hard secrecy, they emboldened him to persevere in the light of his earlier calling. It was some time in the spring of 1797 and McConnico's resolve was set.

By the fall he moved east, nearer to Franklin, where he cleared hundreds of acres that would amply sustain the family for forty years. He owned and farmed at least 100 acres just east of Franklin on Donelson's Creek. Perhaps Dillahunty, who likely enjoyed the educational benefits his wealthy upbringing could have provided, tutored McConnico. At any rate, in 1807 McConnico served as one of the founding trustees of Harpeth Academy in Franklin.\textsuperscript{14} Nearby he also built in May 1800 the third Baptist congregation south of Nashville, the Big Harpeth Church, which he served as pastor until his death three decades hence.

\textbf{The Big Man of Big Harpeth}

If Dillahunty was McConnico's chief mentor, James Whitsitt was his closest colleague. Born the same year, they labored together among the same congregations in supply and missionary capacities and provided leadership to the Mero, Cumberland, and Concord Baptist Associations.\textsuperscript{15} Across the ensuing two decades, McConnico came into his own as an accomplished and effective evangelist, an organizer among the several congregations in Middle Tennessee, and as a wealthy and prosperous landowner. Cox details how

by his industry he not only supported his family but acquired considerable property but being a natural genius he improved himself that although illiterate at the commencement he obtained a stand that truly be said to have ranked with the very best speakers of his day.\textsuperscript{16}

Contemporaries described McConnico as an imposing man: tall, stout, robust, commanding, with black hair, and piercing dark eyes set in a "finely chiseled face" below a broad, high and smooth forehead.\textsuperscript{17} His powerful voice, "singularly manly and
pleasing although a little harsh and sonorous, could hold forth "like a trumpet" even across a swollen river as congregants on the other side heard distinctly every word.

The Tusekiah congregants would scarcely recognize the illiterate boy who left with the westbound wagon train. He was now not only a "most diligent student of the Bible, but his reading of standard theological works, with which his library was richly furnished (considering the place and the period), was quite extensive." Denson remembers his favorite books were "Gill's Body of Divinity, Boothe's Reign of Grace, and the works of Andrew Fuller." Denson immediately moderates McConnico's "Predestinarian" tendencies, calling particular attention to how he followed Fuller on the atonement before explaining how keenly he supported ministerial education and "the cause of missions." Cox, however, describes McConnico in a very different manner. "As to his doctrinal views," he says, "he was an unyielding uncompromising consistent predestinarian . . . ." As to Andrew Fuller, Cox says McConnico "discarded Andrew Fuller's views of a general provision and special application as being inconsistent." Cox then argues McConnico's influence in Middle Tennessee is behind "the greater proportion of old school Baptist than in any other state in the union."

Big Harpeth Baptist Church, under McConnico's leadership, was vitally active in local evangelism and revivals, as well as in regional associational affairs, first within the Mero, then the Cumberland and Concord Associations. When controversy forced the closure of the Mero body, McConnico emerged as the leader of the newly formed Cumberland Association in 1803. Consisting of thirty-nine congregations and 1,900 members by 1806, it was the dominant association in Middle Tennessee.

The influx of new settlers and the formation of congregations to serve them led to the creation of Red River Association in 1806 and Concord in 1810. Of the congregations forming Cumberland Association, Big Harpeth with 265 members was the second largest and one of the largest in the state. An active congregation, it served as "nursery" to at least seven new congregations and frequently raised up from within the ministers to serve them. The network of congregations spread across the environs south of Nashville: Wilson's Creek, Big Flat Creek, West Harpeth, Leper's Fork, Cool Spring, Franklin, and another which disbanded prior to 1848.

One of the oldest continuously meeting Churches of Christ
in Tennessee, the South Harpeth congregation, could have been one of those nursed in the early days by Big Harpeth. On May 13, 1812, Joseph Davey deeded one acre of land for a meetinghouse for “publick worship” to a group of men, one of whom was a Jared McConnico. Located on the Harpeth River in far southwest Davidson County, it is a few miles past the old Richland Creek Baptist Church in the general area where McConnico first settled in 1795–97. The surviving documentation from South Harpeth church, though, is not conclusive that this was a Baptist congregation. In fact no denominational affiliation can be determined from the earliest deeds. David Lipscomb's understanding that the South Harpeth congregation was “planted” by Tolbert Fanning in the early to middle 1830s could be read as the congregation voted to dissolve its Baptist identity and reconstitute itself as an independent congregation under Fanning’s teaching and leadership.26

Unyielding as he was in doctrinal convictions, McConnico took special notice of “sound” young ministers in a personal way no matter how “illiterate” or “feeble” they may have been. He trained Jesse Cox, who succeeded him at Big Harpeth and left a substantial legacy among Primitive Baptists. He ordained Daniel Parker, most notable for his ‘two-seed-in-the-spirit’ doctrine27 and counted many preachers among his children in the faith some who left Baptist ranks under the influence of Alexander Campbell. In these cases, including Parker’s, if McConnico thought a preacher unsound, he was “ready to meet and oppose [them] even though they were found in high places as for instance the Man of Bethany. He withstood him to the face, he even while he professed to be an old Baptist.”28

The Man of Bethany meets the Big Man of Big Harpeth
Alexander Campbell’s reputation as a debater, editor, and preacher preceded his first visit to Nashville in 1827. By then Garner McConnico had established himself as a trusted leader among Middle Tennessee Baptists—committed to maintaining Baptist distinctives, effective in the pulpit and among the congregations, and fearless in the face of heterodoxy. The battle was joined almost immediately upon Campbell’s arrival in the mid-state.

While Baptists enjoyed a strong presence in the environs of Nashville, they did not establish a congregation in the city itself until the summer of 1820. James Whitsitt and Mill Creek Baptist Church led the effort, sharing adjunct preaching duties with McConnico until a settled pastor could be obtained. The congregation immediately sought admission to the Concord Baptist As-
Their first choice for pastor was Philip Slater Fall, who declined, choosing to remain instead in Louisville. As Fall first encountered the writings of Alexander Campbell in Louisville, the Nashville church, too, began reading Campbell. It was likely little surprise when the congregation's clerk, upon the untimely death of pastor Richard Dabbs, invited Fall to again consider the Nashville pulpit and assured him "You need have no apprehensions on this ground [that the Nashville church would consider him an unsound Baptist] and you will find enough here to support you who are tied to no doctrines but those that are indubitably scriptural." Among mid-state Baptists the Nashville church was by 1827 in the avant-garde of Campbell's reform movement.

If McConnico read Gill, Booth, and Fuller, he also carefully read Campbell; not only was he unimpressed, he found the man from Bethany "very objectionable." Campbell's debates with John Walker and W. L. Maccalla first aroused his suspicions, particularly "his views of John's baptism, and of the commencement of the gospel dispensation" as articulated in the Walker debate "raised [McConnico's] doubts" while the "debate with M'Calla still heightened [his] fears." Upon receipt of the prospectus for Campbell's Christian Baptist, he immediately subscribed and read each issue closely.

He thought Campbell an "able disputant, but a bad divine" and remarked to some that "Alexander the Great, and Alexander the coppersmith, and Alexander Campbell of Brooke County, were brethren." Campbell's New Testament, in which McConnico detected Unitarian infidelity, incensed him most acutely. "In this New Testament," lamented McConnico, the divinity of Christ, the work of the Spirit, gospel repentance, gospel faith, regeneration by divine grace, and the effectual calling of the sinner, and of the minister of Christ, could not be so well sustained as by the common translation of the Testament. And religion is now made (according to this) a mere human science—and consequently all the standing religious sects are wrong, and a new theory falsely called the ancient gospel is introduced. What a Pope!!

Equally disconcerting to McConnico was the favorable reception Campbell enjoyed in local Baptist circles, namely
Philip Slater Fall in Nashville, Peyton Smith, Calvin Curlee, Clark Hubbard, James Barry and William Bomer in surrounding counties. They were elated with the prospect that Campbell's visit to Nashville might allay McConnico's fears and mitigate his vigorous opposition. By then the Nashville church was "fully engaged in the reformatory movement." During Campbell's first visit to Nashville in the early months of 1827 he "spent some weeks there, preaching frequently, to the great delight of the Church and community, amongst whom the welcome strangers formed many agreeable acquaintances and found many warm friends." 

Campbell certainly encountered warmth from Garner McConnico, but it was by no means friendly. The two met at the court house in Franklin, which was "literally filled with spectators and hearers." Before the packed house they engaged in a conversation of twelve hours duration "with but little intermission." McConnico was no more persuaded by evening than he was that morning. Campbell extended an invitation to the next days' preaching. McConnico accepted, sitting behind Campbell in the pulpit. They engaged in three additional hours of discussion and argument, debating predestination and Campbell's proposal of the "ancient order." By the end of the day McConnico was satisfied, in his words, that Campbell "was not a gospel preacher." 

Though Campbell returned to Bethany in April 1827, the situation among the Middle Tennessee Baptists was in no way settled. The Nashville congregation reported in January 1828 their affairs went on "smoothly and quietly thus far." They felt "no cause to repent in consequence of any departure from Baptist customs, or opinions, which has taken place." They received a brother who had been excluded from the Baptists. When an unimmersed person burst forth during one of their now-weekly communions taking bread for himself, they in turn offered him the cup. No doubt this stirred opposition among local Baptists.

In July 1830 McConnico composed for The Columbian Star a scathing letter, several portions of which are quoted above, surveying the local influences of the Campbell movement. Published by Abner W. Clopton in October 1830, the article was a major volley in the ongoing war of words. In it he detailed his reading of Campbell, his chief criticism of Campbell’s Testament,
All authority is given to me in heaven and upon the earth; go, convert all the nations, immersing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit; teaching them to observe all the things which I have commanded you: and behold! I am with you always, even to the conclusion of this state.


and the impact of Campbell's views among local Baptists. "My beloved brethren," he said,

Campbellism has carried away many whom I thought firm. These wandering stars and clouds without water, ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth, make proselytes much more the children of the devil than they were before. O, Lord, hear the cries and see the tears of the Baptists: for Alexander has done them much harm. The Lord reward him according to his works. Look at the Creaths of Kentucky. Look at Anderson, Craig, and Hopwood of Tennessee. See them dividing churches, and spreading discord, and constituting churches out of excommunicated members. Such shuffling—such lying—such slandering—such evil-speaking—such dissembling—such downright hypocrisy—and all under the false name of reformation.42

McConnico's letter illustrates how the summer of 1830 was likely the critical juncture for the Baptists and Campbell's Reformers not only in Middle Tennessee but across Kentucky and Virginia as well.43 By then Campbell's fame increased through the pages of the Christian Baptist, the newly launched Millennial Harbinger, and his debate with Robert Owen.44 The points of debate were well known among those who read the church papers. The central theological issues clustered around
Calvinism and Unitarianism as reflected in McConnico's charge against Campbell's Testament. Prosecuting their respective doctrinal positions were two quite capable men, both of whom enjoyed the high regard among Middle Tennessee Baptists. Both were persuasive in argument and personality; both were commanding orators, able debaters, and effective evangelists. At play in the debate were thousands of congregants in countless Baptist congregations comprising numerous associations across the Ohio and Tennessee valleys.

One of those congregations was the “Baptist Church of Jesus Christ” in the center of Nashville. Though Philip Fall remembered how it “never dreamed at the time of separating itself from what was known as the Baptist denomination,” it was in the midst of a division. First Baptist Church of Nashville was re-organized by five persons on October 10, 1830. McConnico had preached some of the first sermons that fed this congregation a decade earlier. Helpless to stop the Nashville congregation, McConnico could only watch from a distance, and submit his report to the press.45

Campbell, though, had the advantage of a printing press and a busy corps of composers and typesetters. As part of his ongoing discussion with Abner Clopton, he reprinted McConnico's letter in the December issue of Millennial Harbinger. Prefacing it, Campbell characterized McConnico as that “good, old, high-toned Gillized Calvinist”46 and then said:

there was not a monk in the cloisters of the Mother of Harlots, who could not have written many such letters against the Lutheran Reformation. And many a Jew could have defamed Paul full as well as the children of Calvinism and Fullerism have defamed me . . . . I am just about starting to their own country, and will join them in a crusade against Campbellism.47

He returned to Nashville fully prepared to advance in person the battle already engaged in print. He stayed with his daughter, son-in-law, and grandchild, who were members at Fall's downtown congregation. Almost all of the Nashville clergy heard his first address at Fall's congregation, which was on December 10, 1830. After preaching twice, Campbell immersed ten persons in the Cumberland River before an "immense crowd" while Jacob Creath immersed another three the following morning.48

A few days later, in the company of Philip Fall, Campbell returned to Franklin. He described the climate, both meteorologically and theologically, in vivid terms,

In Franklin we found ourselves among the icebergs of Calvinism.
Garner Mc'Connico who has sublimated every thing in religion, except the practice which is yet carnal, is the bishop of this dioceses [sic], and lives unfortunately within three miles of the town. To help the matter, the thermometer got down nearly to zero, and even below it, an unusual degree of cold for that place. We tried to speak in the Baptist meeting-house, which had a stove without a pipe to it. We were first smoked out of our eyes, and then chilled out of our feelings; just emblems of the system of things ecclesiastic in that diocess [sic]. The next day we retreated to the Presbyterian meeting-house, in which there were two stoves and their appendages. But some of the windows were out. An effort to warm the house under such circumstances, was as fruitless as Fullerism; which, while it displays great generosity in the beginning, is in the end as churlish as Calvinism.49

In an earlier day a Presbyterian minister might not have come to the defense of an uneducated Baptist pastor, but controversy sometimes makes for strange bedfellows. Nashville Presbyterian minister Obadiah Jennings defended McConnico:

Campbell's insinuations against the Rev. Garner McConnico, who has long been esteemed a faithful laborer in the Lord's vineyard, I have good grounds to believe to be unfounded, as they are base and unmanly, and such as no magnanimous and generous approach would make, however he might be sensible of religious obligations.50

If McConnico opposed Campbell to the face on this visit, as he did in 1827, no record of it survived. As Campbell's reform gained momentum across Middle Tennessee, McConnico lamented that many of his children in the faith, some of whom were ministers he personally baptized, were swayed by Campbell. In addition to Peyton Smith, Calvin Curlee, and others mentioned above, Jacob Creath, Joel Anderson, Andrew Craig, Willis Hopwood, all capable Baptist ministers, went on to lead at the forefront of Campbell's reform in Middle Tennessee and Kentucky.

Locally, the Lieper's Fork and Big Harpeth in Williamson County, Nashville in Davidson County, Rock Spring in Rutherford County, Liberty and Zion churches in Bedford County, and Robertson's Fork Baptist churches in Giles County suffered divisions. Among the Campbell orbit, Church Street in Nash-
ville and South Harpeth, Sycamore, and Philippi congregations in Davidson County gained strength as did Rock Spring and Murfreesboro in Rutherford County, plus others at Columbia and Gallatin besides the newly established Christian Church in Franklin, which included some former members of McConnico's Big Harpeth congregation.51

After describing in detail the exclusion of Peyton Smith and others from the Concord Association, and the subsequent "discord of Concord," F. E. Becton provided Campbell with intelligence, dated October 8, 1832, from the ground in Middle Tennessee about the reception of Obadiah Jennings's posthumously-published book. Terming it "75 cents worth of slander," Becton noted how in spite of its popularity among the orthodox opposers [sic] of the Campbell reform, "not one of them will meet any of us in public discussion of any thing . . . ." He concluded saying the Murfreesboro congregation met weekly in "great harmony" and that "the cause of the Redeemer is unquestionably gaining rapidly the attention of the thoughtful and the reading part of the community."52

A similar situation obtained in the Nashville congregation. "It was not Calvinism, nor Arminianism, nor Campbellism," that characterized their public assemblies, wrote the anonymous informant. Peace and goodwill prevailed. He then noted how in the previous six months "perhaps from three to five hundred have been baptized in five or six of the adjoining counties."53

Peyton Smith, writing from Rutherford County, noted in December 17, 1832, that in spite of high persecution he immersed "for the remission of their sins and introduction into the kingdom of God about 140 persons." He went on to say to Campbell, "Dear brother, I never knew what it was to be so abused, and I never knew what it was to be so happy!"54

**Conclusion**

Garner McConnico's strength in advocating Baptist principles seems to have never abated, though no further articles came from his pen, or about him from Alexander Campbell's. He may have concurred with R. B. C. Howell's sentiments about Campbellism: "Knowing that this system has been fostered and kept alive by opposition, we have avoided for some time past, noticing neither the inconsistency nor progress of what is termed the reformation."55 If Cox's tribute to McConnico, apparently in reply to Denson's tribute in The Baptist, is what it seems, McConnico's attention may have been averted from the Campbell reform to growing concerns over missionism.56

The tide of Campbell's reform swelling around him, McConnico persevered in his ministry at Big Harpeth Baptist Church.
and in local associational and national Baptist affairs. In 1833 he was the only director from Tennessee of the Baptist Home Mission Society.57 He continued preaching and mentoring young ministers until the very end.

One wonders if in the early summer of 1833 McConnico’s mind wandered back almost forty years to the cane break in which he met John Dillahunty. Just as “Father Dillahunty” forever altered the course of his life and ministry, Garner had a similar impact on Jesse Cox. Young Cox was deacon in Big Harpeth congregation. He, too, resolved to preach but kept it a secret and lived with the angst for some time. In July 1833 McConnico discerned Cox’s desire, approached him with an invitation and prevailed upon Big Harpeth to allow the young man to “exercise his gift in public.” When the appointed day arrived, McConnico suddenly fell ill but Cox continued on. “And what is very [sic] remarkable,” he wrote:

At 3 of the clock, we being some 15 miles [away?] while I was preaching, he died . . . When I reached my appointment, I ventured to take [my] text . . . , “Strive to enter in at the straight gait, for many I say unto you, will seek to enter in and shall not be able.” I was more at liberty than I expected. And some of the sisters (as they afterward told me) in view of the death of their long and beloved pastor, Praying that a double portion of his spirit might rest upon me, believed that they saw some indications of it. Just at the close they commenced shouting, [sic] and continued until they were completely exhausted. And it seemed truly as if the presence of the Lord was with us, and this induced me to make another appointment . . . .”58

Garner McConnico stepped on the stage and played his part with vigor. Then quite unexpectedly, in his sixty-second year, on August 17, 1833, he died.

Alexander Campbell continued preaching, teaching, writing and debating for another three decades. The 1820s were a feverish decade for Baptists in and around Nashville.

Garner McConnico and Alexander Campbell both loomed larger than life to their contemporaries who witnessed the heat of battle. Among their admirers in history, their legacy as champions endures. It was left ultimately to their successors to carry forward the principles they embraced and defended. In time, the divide between the Baptists and the Disciples, later Christian Churches and Churches of Christ, not only persisted but widened.

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Notes

1. [Daniel Smith], A Short Description of the State of Tennessee, Lately Called the Territory of the United States, South of the River Ohio; to Accompany and Explain a Map of That Country (Philadelphia: Printed for Matthew Carey, 1796), 10.

2. Edward Swanson, ca. 1823, cited in Paul Clements, Chronicles of the Cumberland Settlements, 1779-1796 (Privately published, 2012), 475. Smith, 14, notes “several thousands crossed the Cumberland Mountain in September, October, and November last [1795], in detached families, without a guard, and without danger. The Indians treated them with kindness, visited their camps at night, and supplied them plentifully with venison.” For a summary description of overland travel on the wagon road see Walter T. Durham, Before Tennessee: The Southwest Territory 1790-1796 (Piney Flats, Tenn.: Rocky Mount Historical Association, 1990), 236-38.


4. [Jesse Cox], “Sacred to the Memory of Elder Garner McConnico” manuscript appended to Big Harpeth Primitive Baptist Church, Williamson County, Tennessee, Records, 1886-1909; Microfilm Accession 937; Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee, 1. McConnico left neither manuscript nor published autobiography. I attribute the authorship of this fourteen-page handwritten sketch to Jesse Cox, who on page 14 is listed as both moderator of the Cumberland Baptist Association and pastor of the Big Harpeth Church on the “Friday before the 4th Lord’s day in May 1845” when this document appears to have been written and drafted into the association minutes to “correct any false report that may have gone out.” Cox likely authored this sketch contra William Denson, “Rev. Garner McConnico,” The Baptist 1:8 (October 12, 1844), 113-15. Additional biographical sketches are R. B. C. Howell, “Garner McConnico” in William B. Sprague, Annals of the American Pulpit; or Commemorative Notices of Distinguished American Clergymen of Various Denominations, from the Early Settlement of the Country to the Close of the Year Eighteen Hundred and Fifty-five (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1865), 6:852-54; James Ross, The Life and Times of Elder Reuben Ross (Philadelphia: Grant, Faires and Rodgers [1882]), 147-52, which generally follows Cox and was reprinted in J. H. Borum, Biographical Sketches of Tennessee Baptist Ministers (Memphis: Rogers and Company, 1880), 470-72; William Cathcart, ed. The Baptist Encyclopaedia. rev. ed. vol. 2. (Philadelphia: Louis H. Everts, 1883), s.v. McConnico, Garner, 765-66, which closely follows Howell; and J. J. Burnett, Sketches of Tennessee’s Pioneer Baptist Preachers. 1st series (Nashville: Marshall and Bruce, 1919), 1:359-64, which follows both Ross and Howell. Ordained a deacon at McConnico’s Big Harpeth Baptist Church in 1821, Jesse Cox succeeded McConnico as pastor of the congregation in 1834, serving until 1850; see Big Harpeth Records, TSLA, p. 5, and Cox, Jesse (1793-1879) Diary 1834-65, Accession 789, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Microfilm #86.

5. [Cox], “Sacred,” 2.


8. [Cox], "Sacred," 2; Cf. John Vogt and T. William Kethley, *Lunenburg County Marriages, 1750–1853* (Iberian Publishing Company, 1988), 160, who have the marriage occurring on November 27, 1789. Performing the ceremony was Baptist preacher James Shelburne who in 1771, at Meherrin Baptist Church in Lunenburg County, opposed the adoption of the Philadelphia Confession of Faith on the grounds that it was a human creed. Later, with his son, Silas (born June 4, 1790, and later nicknamed the “Raccoon John Smith of Virginia” due to his extensive evangelistic activity), Shelburne became one of the most prominent Baptists to promote the Campbell reform in Virginia; see Frederick Arthur Hodge, *The Plea and the Pioneers in Virginia* (Richmond: Everett Waddey Company, 1905), 30ff and 265–68; and John T. Brown, *Churches of Christ, A Historical, Biographical, and Pictorial History of Churches of Christ in the United States, Australasia, England and Canada* (Louisville: John P. Morton and Company, 1904), 288–89. For a biographical sketch of James Shelbourne that mentions neither his opposition to the Philadelphia Confession nor his son Silas; see James B. Taylor, *Virginia Baptist Ministers. Series 1* (New York: Sheldon and Company, 1860), 262–72.

9. Cf. Howell, *Annals*, 853, against Ross, 148 who attributes McConnico’s move west as much to his own feeling of “disgust” at his preaching as to his brother’s ridicule. There is no indication in Cox’s manuscript that McConnico was anything other than tormented by his older brother. Cox, 5, and Ross, 151, state McConnico was ordained to the ministry in 1800 when Big Harpeth Baptist Church was organized. Howell, 853, claims he was ordained in Virginia, presumably at Tusekiah church. Denson, 113, acknowledges the date of McConnico’s ordination was unknown to him, but speculates it occurred prior to his arrival in Tennessee, which he dates to 1799. Meanwhile the majority of the Tusekiah congregation later embraced the Campbell reform plea. In time this majority “appears to have been dissipated by the ‘Thomasite’ struggle and became extinct” while the remainder of the Baptist congregation continued and still exists as of this writing; see H. Jackson Darst, *Ante-bellum Virginia Disciples: An Account of the Emergence and Early Development of the Disciples of Christ in Virginia* (Richmond: Virginia Christian Missionary Society, 1959), 70–71.


11. [Cox], “Sacred,” 2–3.

12. “My Beloved Bro. Fort, I rec’d your kind favour yesterday the Contents of which Afford Great Satisfaction. When I hear of the Good work of God on the souls of men I can but Rejoice and say Bless God O My Soul and praise
him all within me—May the King of Saints rise triumphantly until all nations and kingdoms and tongues are his, and may the Glory of his Conquest be felt on Big Harpeth . . .” Garner McConnico to Elias Fort, January 9, 1819. Fort Family Papers, 1710–1962; accession 1968.203; Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee, box 2, folder 7. It is possible that this is the only extant letter written by Garner McConnico.


14. John Wynne, “Our McConnico Family,” vertical file, Tennessee State Library and Archives, s.v. McConnico, Garner, Nashville, Tennessee, pp. 16–17; [Cox], “Sacred,” 5–6, notes McConnico’s “industry” as does Alexander Campbell in the midst of controversy: “But while Calvinists in faith, the citizens of this place [Franklin, Tenn.] appear to be Arminians in the affairs of the present world. In raising cotton the prophet Mc‘Connico [sic] is not a Calvinist; but in converting souls the work is altogether God’s”; Alexander Campbell, “Incidents on a Tour to Nashville, Tennessee. No VI,” Millennial Harbinger (2:3) March 7, 1831, 111.


16. [Cox], “Sacred,” 5–6.


18. [Cox], “Sacred,” 5.


21. Denson, 113. John Gill, Gill’s Complete Body of Practical and Doctrinal Divinity: Being a System of Evangelical Truths Deduced from the Sacred Scriptures (Philadelphia: Printed for Delaplaine and Hellings by B. Graves, 1810) is the first American edition of Gill’s Body and could have been easily available to McConnico; Abraham Booth, The Reign of Grace: From its Rise, to Its Consummation (Leeds: Printed by Griffith Wright, 1768); Andrew Fuller published several books and tracts. This compilation could have been available to McConnico: Andrew Fuller, The Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller . . . : to which Is Prefixed a Memoir of the Author (London: B. J. Holdsworth, 1824).

22. Ibid., 113–14.

23. [Cox], “Sacred,” 6.

24. Ibid., 7.

25. See David Benedict, A General History of the Baptist Denomination in

26. David Lipscomb, "Tulbert Fanning's Teaching and Influence," in James E. Scobey, ed. Franklin College and Its Influences (Nashville: McQuiddy Printing Company, 1906), 49, and Brown, Churches of Christ, 283, which states South Harpeth was established in 1834. Brown also states the Rock Spring Church, Rutherford County, was established in 1835, though it "was previously a Baptist church." The view among Disciples at that time emphasized how a new congregation could emerge from an existing one by virtue of laying aside the Baptist name and distinctive doctrines. On this basis, the South Harpeth congregational could claim both 1812 and 1834 as "birth dates." On the same basis it seems plausible that Benedict could claim the (Baptist) congregation "disbanded." No extant evidence suggests it was Jared whose torment drove Garner out of Lunenburg County. Garner had three older brothers. His parents (and some siblings) followed him from Lunenburg County; his parents died in Williamson County, Tennessee. The elder Jared, Garner's father, died in 1803; the younger, Garner's brother, died in 1816; see Wynne, "Our McConnico Family," 4–5.


28. Ibid., 8.


31. Alexander Campbell, Debate on Christian Baptism, Between Mr. John Walker, a Minister of the Secession, and Alexander Campbell, held at Mount-Pleasant, on the 19th and 20th June, 1820, in the Presence of a Very Numerous and Respectable Congregation, to Which is Added a Large Appendix. 2nd ed. (Pittsburgh: Eichbaum and Johnston, 1822).

32. Alexander Campbell, A Debate on Christian Baptism, Between the Rev. W. L. MacCalla, A Presbyterian Teacher, and Alexander Campbell, Held at Wash-
ington, Ky., Commencing on the 15th and Terminating on the 21st Oct. 1823, in the Presence of a Very Numerous and Respectable Congregation (Buffaloe: Campbell and Sala, 1824).

33. The Prospectus is in The Christian Baptist, published monthly, ed. by Alexander Campbell, vol. 1 (Buffaloe Creek: Solomon Sala, 1823); see letter from McConnico to Abner W. Clopton in "Mr. Clopton's Review of Campbellism. No. 6" The Columbian Star, and Christian Index, 3:16 (October 16, 1830), 244.

34. "Mr. Clopton's Review," 244; the reference to Alexander the coppersmith is from Paul's warning to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:14-15: "Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works: Of whom be thou ware also; for he hath greatly withstood our words" (KJV).

35. Ibid, 244; see The Sacred Writings of the Apostles and Evangelists of Jesus Christ, Commonly Styled the New Testament, Translated from the Original Greek by George Campbell, James Macknight, and Philip Doddridge, Doctors of the Church of Scotland, with Prefaces to the Historical and Epistolary Books, with an Appendix Containing Critical Notes and Various Translations of Difficult Passages, by Alexander Campbell (Buffaloe, Brooke County, Va.; Alexander Campbell, 1826); for an incisive summary of Baptist reaction to this work see James L. Gorman, "From Burning to Blessing: Baptist Reception of Alexander Campbell's New Translation," Stone-Campbell Journal (16:2) Fall 2013, 177-92; the standard summary is Cecil K. Thomas, Alexander Campbell and His New Version (St. Louis: The Bethany Press, 1958), 67-83.

36. Besides the reforms instituted in the Nashville congregation, Smith and Curlee were "fully committed to Campbell's teaching" and led half of the Concord Association to renounce Calvinistic tenets of the Association's constitution. See J. H. Grime, "Association History," Concord Baptist Association, 14-15 (an undated excerpt from a published centennial history prepared by Grime in 1910); See Rolater, Concord 200, 22-28.

37. Richardson, 168.

38. All quotes in this paragraph are from "Mr. Clopton's Review," 244.


40. When James Whitsitt deeded land for the Mill Creek Baptist Church (the mother church of the Nashville congregation) on March 18, 1806, he inserted a restrictive clause stating "no Person have a right to Commune at the Lord's Table before they are Baptized [sic]." Dillahunty served as a witness to the transaction. See full text at Stephen duBarry, "James Whitsitt's Deed to the Mill Creek Baptist Church" Baptist History Homepage, data base (http://www.baptisthistoryhomepage.com/whitsitt.james.deed.chrch.html : accessed March 21, 2012); and Stephen duBarry, "Mill Creek Baptist Church" containing the transcribed constitution of the Mill Creek Church, at data base (http://www.baptisthistoryhomepage.com/whitsitt.james.deed.chrch.html : accessed March 21, 2012).

41. McConnico, "Mr. Clopton's Review," 244ff.

42. McConnico, "Mr. Clopton's Review," 244; see also P. Donan, Memoir of Jacob Creath Jr. (Cincinnati: R. W. Carroll and Company, 1872).

43. Errett Gates, The Early Relation and Separation of Baptists and Disciples

45. [Philip Slater Fall], "Remembrance. A Fond Good-Bye to a Venerated House," The Daily American (March 28, 1887, 5; May, 29-37).


47. Ibid., 545.

48. Campbell, "Incidents on a Tour," 111.

49. Ibid.

50. Obadiah Jennings, Debate on Campbellism; Held at Nashville, Tennessee in which the Principles of Alexander Campbell Are Confuted, and His Conduct Examined (Pittsburgh: D. and M. Maclean, 1832), 77.


52. F. E. Becton Jr. in "Progress of Reform," Millennial Harbinger, 4:2 (February 1833), 90-91.

53. "A Brother in the Lord" in "Progress of Reform," Millennial Harbinger, 3:11 (November 1832), 572; on the same page of that issue Campbell reprinted the 'Dover Decree,' the decree published by the Dover, Virginia Baptist Association calling for the exclusion of any who embrace Campbell's reform.

54. Peyton Smith in "Progress of Reform," Millennial Harbinger, 4:2 (February 1833), 93; contra Becton and Smith see the 1843 letter from John M. Watson, also of Murfreesboro, to David Benedict detailing additional details about Peyton Smith, Missionism, Arminianism and related matters among Middle Tennessee Baptists in The Christian Doctrinal Advocate and Spiritual Monitor, 6:11 (July 1843), 331-41, which invokes the memory of Garner McConnico as one who stood firm and resolute against the Campbell inroads. Smith's story, and to some degree McConnico's legacy among Baptists, both beyond the scope of this paper, should prove to be a fruitful illumination of how the internal debate about Calvinism played out in Baptist contexts into the 1840s. For a suggestive survey see Albert W. Wardin Jr., "Primitive Baptists in Tennessee," Tennessee Baptist History, Fall 2007, 39-45, especially 39-40.

55. Quoted in Norton, Tennessee Christians, 43.

56. Both Cox and Denson claimed especially close working relationships with McConnico, and both claimed to know his mind on these matters. Denson claims McConnico as a hero of Missionism, but Cox is sure that McConnico


58. Jesse Cox, Diary, 6–7. After preaching only three sermons to Big Harpeth church, they licensed him, and the following year he accepted their call to the pastorate.

Pictures from the Annual Meeting
September 10, 2015