

MSBC Church History 3-29

The following is a brief history of Mill Springs Baptist Church (MSBC).

The story of this Church begins some 50 years prior in 18th century America with the work of Shubal Stearns. Stearns was a Baptist Separatist from Connecticut, who believed that salvation was not obtained through infant baptism, but by conscientious decision of the convert to accept the free gift of salvation in Jesus Christ ([Ephesians 2:8](#)). Stearns moved to Sandy Creek NC in and around 1750 and founded the Sandy Creek Baptist Church,



and subsequently the Sandy Creek Baptist Association. At this time (per Wikipedia) *Baptists began forming regional associations and societies to foster cooperation in missionary, benevolent, and educational work.* As aggressive European settlers plunged across King George III's Proclamation Line of 1763 looking for greater fortunes in the west, the early Baptist Churches in TN were the products of this Association. In the 18th century, the land to the east of the continental divide (Proclamation Line) was heavily Anglican. But Protestants were making inroads ... on both sides of that divide.



Here, on good advice from the Sandy Creek Association, new Baptist associations (based on geography) were formed in the western reaches of NC. In 1786, seven of these churches, one of which was the Lower French Broad Baptist Church (founded jointly with the Association), came

together to form the Holston Baptist Association. Elder Tidence Lane, pastor of what is considered Tennessee's first Baptist Church (Buffalo Ridge (above)) was elected moderator.

After Tennessee became a sovereign state in 1796, the Holston Association grew such that the churches in the southwestern portion formed a new association, The Tennessee Association, in 1803. This included Lower French Broad Baptist Church and daughter church, Dumplin Baptist Church (1797), both of Jefferson County.

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In 1814, encouraged by William Carey, Adonirum and Ann Judson, and Luther Rice, the *General Missionary Convention of the Baptist Denomination in the United States of America for Foreign Missions* (GMCBDUSA) was founded in Philadelphia PA. Since the convention met every three years, the name was practically (and thankfully) shortened to the Triennial Convention ... America's first nationwide Baptist Convention. It was natural, then, that shortly thereafter local associations tied in to this national organization. This new organization had an old (1742) confession known as the Philadelphia Confession of Faith consisting of 32 articles. Most all regional associations subscribed to this confession.

In 1828, a young Baptist minister named Duke Kimbrough served as pastor at French Broad Baptist Church below Dandridge TN as well as a daughter church, Dumplin Baptist Church. Both of these churches were members of the Tennessee Baptist Association, which in turn, was part of the organization of East Tennessee Baptists, which in turn, worked with the Triennial Convention and subscribed to the Philadelphia Confession. Kimbrough utilized the title Elder ... which was common at the time.

Elder Kimbrough was very much committed to active Gospel evangelization in accordance with Baptist doctrine. The "frontier" of Tennessee spread all the way to the Mississippi River, and the race was on to not only evangelize the unsaved, but also to train the newly converted the "right" way ... Methodist, Presbyterian, Campbellite, or Baptist.



Consistent with the times, Kimbrough, from his position at French Broad Baptist (known today as Dandridge First Baptist Church), pastored newer Baptist churches at Antioch, Dumplin, Rocky Valley and Mill Springs in Jefferson County. Amazingly, considering the transportation situation of the time, he pastored these 5 related churches simultaneously from 1833 - 1841.

We are uncertain as to the first meetings at Mill Springs, but we do have evidence that the plant began in the spring of 1828, and that the Church was chartered in November 1828, and there were 26 charter members ... one of whom was likely black (*Thomas Neal of color*).

November was the month of charter in likely conjunction with a) the construction of the first building, AND b) the chartering of the Nolachucky Association, yet another Baptist association formed by a growing number of churches in proximity to the river.

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The Nolachucky Association had a couple of interesting features. First, it was initially a conglomeration of relatively widely dispersed Baptist churches ... from Hawkins to Grainger to Cocke counties. Mill Springs was the only church from Jefferson County. Second, Whitesburg's Bent Creek Baptist Church hosted the inaugural meeting. The then pastor of Bent Creek? Elder Tidence Lane! Today, Bent Creek is known as Whitesburg First Baptist Church. Third, the new association came with its own confession of faith. This confession was written and adopted by the Association, and was comprised of (among others) the following tenets: The Divine inspiration of the Old and New Testaments, the permanent salvation of man through belief in Jesus Christ, the concept of original sin, the equality of men before God, and Baptism by immersion. In addition to the confession of faith, the association drafted and approved their own rules of order for the conduct of business!

A number of Jefferson county churches did not join at the same time. Among them, Lower French Broad, and Dumplin. Based on the fourth tenet above, it is likely at this time that battle lines were being drawn between slavery and manumission churches. It is also intriguing to note that the association was also known as the Primitive Association. Mill Springs representatives were James Bruce and Joseph Ore (Orr?).

Another church of interest in the charter members was Bethel South (Hamblen County). Today this is known as Morristown First Baptist Church.

The MSBC building sat on a promontory overlooking the eponymous spring at the base, by which the Mill Springs Road then ran.

Elder Kimbrough was clearly a man of grand energy, and highly engaged with East Tennessee Baptists. Kimbrough is credited as being the first (in 1833 representing Mill Springs) to make an official pitch to the regional association for an academy whereby young Baptist males might receive training in the ministry. This idea, shortly thereafter in 1851, evolved into Mossy Creek Baptist Seminary ... today known as Carson-Newman University (C-N).



By the time Mossy Creek Baptist Seminary came into being, Kimbrough had been succeeded at MSBC by Elder C. C. Tipton. Tipton became the first treasurer at C-N.

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Exercise A

- A1. The Proclamation Line of 1763 coincided with ...
- a) the eastern continental divide
 - b) the Virginia/NC border
 - c) the great Cherokee hunting highway
 - d) the Cumberland Gap
 - e) the Chesapeake Bay
- A2. Which of the following are key figures in 18th century Baptist work in the American South?
- a) King George III
 - b) Tidence Lane
 - c) George Washington
 - d) Charles Stanley
 - e) Billy Sunday
 - f) Duke Kimbrough
 - g) Shubal Stearns
 - h) John Sevier
- A3. The first Baptist Church in TN was ...
- a) Sandy Creek
 - b) Lower French Broad
 - c) Bethel North
 - d) Antioch
 - e) Buffalo Ridge
 - f) Bethel South
- A4. With which Baptist Association was MSBC founded simultaneously?
- a) Tennessee
 - b) Holston
 - c) Nolachucky
 - d) Sandy Creek
 - e) Philadelphia

Exercise A Answer Key

A1 a; A2 b,g; A3 e; A4 c

Sources

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