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In the Beginning: Origins of Universalism in South Carolina, 1780-1900

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Introduction

God is eternal love. Such an utterance in late eighteenth-century South Carolina would have been made only in hushed tones and private conversations. While the idea of a loving God can be found in all Christian faiths, the Universalist belief in a loving God who offered universal salvation to all was deemed a heresy in a society dominated by Calvinist orthodoxy. A truly benevolent God, reasoned the Universalists, would never condemn any of His children to eternal damnation. Such reasoning flaunted prevailing social and religious reliance on a God of judgment, considered necessary to maintain social order. The embrace of a God that offered universal salvation threatened this keystone of religious theology. If that keystone should fail, lawlessness, licentiousness, and depravity would surely run unchecked. More importantly, the "universalists"—those who believed in universal salvation—were turning centuries of Christian doctrine upside down. What was the value of orthodox religion with its demand for repentance when redemption was God's divine plan after all? Universalism, with its God of eternal love, was at its best a misguided idea and at its worst a threat that could not be ignored.

Despite religious and societal opposition, the message of universal salvation slowly found adherents in South Carolina, beginning in the coastal city of Charleston and spreading over time to the interior. Universalist societies flourished, floundered and then repeated the cycle of rebirth and demise. Eventually, roots were set down. Of the ten Unitarian Universalist congregations active in South Carolina today, one traces its history to these early Universalist roots. That history begins with the German Baptist Brethren.

German Baptist Brethren

George de Benneville, a European immigrant who arrived in America in 1741, was identified by Thomas Whittemore in 1830 as the spark in spreading the "divine word" to the German Baptist Brethren who had settled in eastern Pennsylvania.[1] The German Baptist Brethren and other related religious sects in eastern Pennsylvania were predisposed to accept de Benneville's message. The Brethren were devout, pious people and some may have privately held a belief in universal salvation. Roger E. Sappington observes critically in *The Brethren in the Carolinas* that the "Brethren's emphasis on the New Testament and its pattern of God's love through Christ had made the Brethren susceptible to the wiles of Universalism in the first place."[2] The preaching of universal salvation, however, was not generally part of the Brethren's religious practices.[3]

The German Baptist Brethren had formed in Germany in 1708 under the leadership of Alexander Mack as the Schwarzenau Brethren. Seeking to practice true Christianity as revealed in the New Testament, and rejecting church liturgy, Eucharistic practices, and infant baptism, Mack broke away from the Anabaptists. The practice of adult baptism via a three-time immersion, consistent with New Testament scripture, gave rise to the term Dunkards, a name that became synonymous with Mack's followers. Persecutions propelled Mack and his followers to emigrate to Pennsylvania. Peter Becker, a Brethren elder, led the first wave of emigration in 1719. Soon after his arrival, in 1723, Becker established the first Brethren society in Germantown, and by 1750, the Brethren had been fully transplanted to America.[4] Over time, the society has been known as the Fraternity of German Baptists, German Baptists, or Church of the Brethren.

The Brethren in America were not immune from their own internal conflicts. A schism led by Conrad Beissel in 1728 gave rise to a semi-mystical sect called the Ephrata Society. Beissel was born into poverty in 1690 in Germany but acquired skills as a master baker and accomplished musician, putting him in high demand for weddings and parties. At age twenty-five, he was seized by the "spirit of penitence." Restless and full of high ambition, he sailed to Boston in 1720 and soon made his way to Germantown, where he was warmly received. Becker baptized him into the Brethren in 1724. Beissel's restlessness

and ambition were unabated, however, and he broke from the Brethren to form the Ephrata Society, also known as the Ephrata Cloister, Ephrataites, Sabbatarians, German Seventh Day Baptists or Seventh Day Baptists.

The Ephrata Society retained many Brethren practices such as the method of baptism, foot-washing, and the celebration of a love feast (a communal meal reflecting early Christian practices).[5] Beissel, however, introduced new practices such as the renunciation of marriage, a doctrine of celibacy for all, and the observation of Saturday rather than Sunday as the holy Sabbath. This latter doctrine most likely was borrowed from the Quaker Baptist Society, sometimes referred to as the Keithian schism within Quakerism.[6] Henry Holsinger, in his history of the Brethren, observed that from 1730 to 1740, the Ephrata Society was more influential than the Brethren. He stated, "Had it not been for the prominence they gave to the errors of celibacy and the seventh day, they might have held their hard-earned prestige." He went on to say that the Ephrata Society's devotion, piety, spirituality, and constant worship in prayer and song were so "rapturously inspiring as to be almost irresistible."[7] George de Benneville was a frequent visitor to the Ephrata Society, where his message of universal restoration found acceptance.[8]

One aside about the Ephrata Society is the little-known role it played in the dawning of American Universalism. Rev. John Murray, who is credited with establishing the Universalist Church in America, was an English Methodist clergyman (formerly an Anglican) who, once he adopted Universalism, was excommunicated from his church. He set sail from England and landed in New Jersey in 1770. When Murray came ashore, he was greeted by Thomas Potter, who implored him to preach a sermon of universalism. Murray was amazed that Potter's faith in universal salvation was so well established.[9] What Murray did not know was that itinerant Ephrata Brethren preachers had earlier traveled to New Jersey and elsewhere, spreading a message of universal hope.[10]

New Jersey was not the only colony influenced by pious Germans from Pennsylvania. South Carolina's adoption of Universalism was less influenced by followers of the Ephrata Society than by the main body of the Brethren. Some Brethren made their way south directly from Pennsylvania; others migrated after first having settled in other

states such as North Carolina and Maryland. In 1748, a small number of Brethren families from Conococheague, Maryland settled in Beaver Creek, South Carolina.[11] Later Hans Waggoner and Rev. George Martin came with their wives.[12] Their Beaver Creek Dunker Church in the northwest corner of the Fairfield district (now Fairfield County) laid the foundation for the eventual emergence of Universalism in the state.

Six years later, in 1754, and again in 1757, a group of Seventh Day Baptists (sometimes referred to as Sabbatarians) also arrived in the Beaver Creek area. Members of this group were originally from French Creek, Pennsylvania, but apparently had previously settled in Conococheague, Maryland before migrating to South Carolina.[13] French Creek was the home of a Quaker Seventh Day Baptist society formed by the Keithian schism with the Quakers,[14] and it is reasonably assumed that these Seventh Day Baptists were from that sect. Having initially arrived in South Carolina without a minister, they conducted services in the homes of their community leaders, Thomas Owen and Victor Naley. This English-speaking group later called as their preacher Seymour Israel, a minister who had served both the Ephrata Society and the Seventh Day Baptist communities in Pennsylvania.[15] Since I have found no evidence that this group played any role in the advance of Universalism in South Carolina, this study offers no further research on these Sabbatarians.

The Brethren in South Carolina

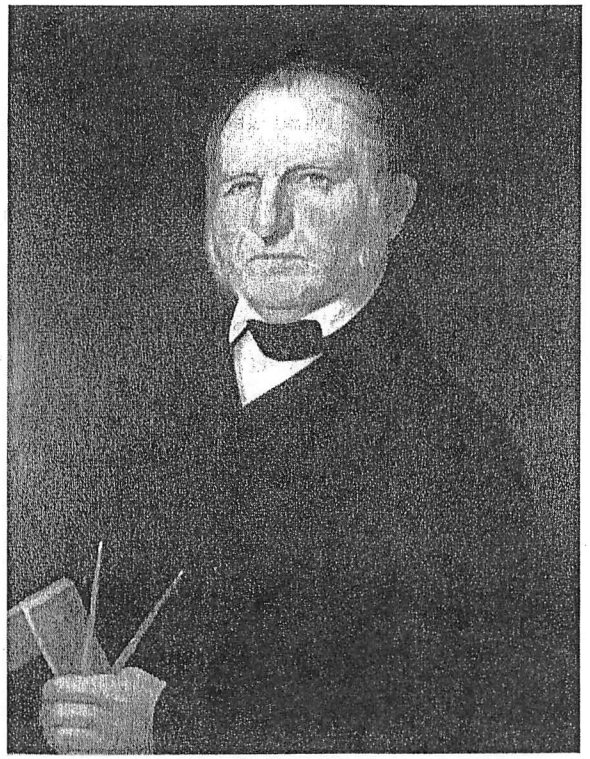
The individual who eventually led the South Carolina Brethren community to Universalism arrived in Beaver Creek in 1754. David Martin (1737–1794) was born on October 8, 1737 in the Brethren community of Conestoga, Pennsylvania.[16] Sappington's work on *The Brethren in the Carolinas* contends that David Martin was the son of the Rev. George Martin who had arrived with Hans Waggoner in Beaver Creek in 1748. Sappington argues that the Rev. George Martin was actually George Adam Martin, an influential brethren preacher in the German Baptist community in Pennsylvania.[17] Reliable and independent information regarding the relationship of David Martin to Rev. George Martin is not available, nor is there any record that Rev. George Martin was actually George Adam Martin.[18] These "loose ends," intriguing as

they may be, fortunately do not alter the course of events regarding the origins of Universalism in the state.

As a Brethren preacher, Martin's work in South Carolina was prodigious. Despite the lack of a meetinghouse (the preferred term among Brethren for a church building), Martin's Beaver Creek congregation included twenty-five families and fifty baptized members by 1772. Martin also preached to non-German-speaking settlers. He formed a congregation of English Dunkers and Seventh Day Baptists in the Clouds Creek area. Since Martin could only preach occasionally at this congregation, James Warren was implored to come serve as an exhorter (lay preacher). Martin also organized a Brethren society on the Edisto River (assumed to be the North Edisto River) with sixteen baptized members from eight families.

In 1770 Martin was ordained as an elder by Daniel Leatherman and Nicolas Martin, important elders in the Brethren community. It can be reasoned that Martin provided religious support for both the Brethren and the Seventh-Day Baptist congregations. In 1772 Morgan Edwards, a Baptist minister who wrote a history of the Baptists in South Carolina, described David Martin in the following way: "he bears an excellent character and has John Pearson as his assistant."[19] Pearson has been referred to as Martin's exhorter. Underlining the fluidity of religious affiliation, Pearson was a member of the Sabbatarian group.[20] We know from Edwards' description of Martin's ministry that "there were three Dunkard-Baptist churches, 82 communicants, 63 families with a total of 315 souls, two exhorters and one minister."[21]

Other Brethren who became active in the establishment of Universalism in South Carolina were also migrating to the state at this time. Giles Chapman emigrated from England to America in 1725, initially settling in Virginia. Sometime after the birth of his son, also named Giles, in 1748, the family migrated to the Newberry district in South Carolina. Joseph Summers, a native of Maryland and sometimes referred to as a Quaker, also migrated with his family to Newberry district. Joseph Summers' daughter Mary married the young Giles Chapman, who preached the Brethren faith with Martin and later followed Martin into Universalism. An 1892 reflection in the *Annals of Newberry* included the observation, "we meet with only the relics of



John Feaster

the Dunkers [and]... of this persuasion were originally the Chapmans, Summers, Lynches, Prathers, and Martins." [22]

Among other people instrumental in the establishment of Universalism in South Carolina was David R. Coleman, who settled in the Fairfield district. Coleman migrated with his family in 1765 from Halifax County, North Carolina. Andrew Feaster (a.k.a. Pfister), born in Bern, Switzerland, emigrated to America in 1754 and moved his family from Pennsylvania to Beaver Creek in the Fairfield district in the late 1770s. John Feaster, son of the elder Andrew Feaster, donated land for the Liberty meetinghouse, the site of the first Universalist society in South Carolina.[23]

Brethren Adopt Universalism

Around 1780, David Martin was led by the works of the English clergyman William Law to doubt the validity of the doctrine of endless punishment.[24] Martin may also have been influenced by the preaching and writing of Rev. Elhanan Winchester. Winchester, who would later become a leading voice for Universalism, was the pastor of the Welsh

Liberty Universalist Church, Feasterville, SC

Neck Baptist Church (1775–1779) on the Peedee River in South Carolina. Winchester dropped the Calvinist principle of "election of the few" from the church's creed and preached instead a message of universal restoration. Many of the church elders did not welcome Winchester's deviation from the church's established doctrine, and after Winchester departed for a new church in Philadelphia, the elders excommunicated his followers.

As with de Benneville's message delivered to the Brethren in Pennsylvania, the Universalist ideas of William Law and Elhanan Winchester may not have been lightning bolts of discovery for David Martin. The Brethren, as Sappington observed, were predisposed to the "wiles of Universalism." Alexander Mack, founder of the Brethren, alluded to this predisposition in an imaginary father-son conversation in his 1715 *Rights and Ordinances*. The father, after outlining a particularly vivid picture of the punishments of hell, was asked by the son, "Do tell me, are these torments and tortures to last for eternity, without end?" The father responded that Holy Scripture did not support eternal punishment but added, "even if at some time the torments should end after long

eternities, [the damned] will never attain that which the believers have achieved in the time of grace through Jesus Christ if they obey Him."[25] In other words, outright believers in God's grace would achieve a purer state of salvation than those whose salvation was earned after a period of severe purification. The Brethren, thus, generally discouraged the preaching of universal restoration (i.e., a final state of blessedness achieved for sinners after an "in-between" period of punishment) and rejected outright (Ultra) Universalism (i.e., blessedness realized for all at death).

Without a direct declaration by David Martin himself, we cannot know the reasoning behind his decision to begin preaching Universalism. What we do know is that Universalism was being preached to the Brethren in the Carolinas. Indeed, Mack and other Brethren leaders in Pennsylvania became alarmed that "strange doctrines were cropping up among the southern brethren." The Brethren's 1794 Annual Meeting addressed this issue. In particular, the focus was on John Ham from North Carolina, who, like Martin, was preaching a universalist message to the Brethren. The discussions spanned several annual meetings. In the end, Ham was disfellowshipped as were his followers.[26]

Despite the resistance from local orthodox churches and the Brethren leadership, Martin gradually turned the Brethren in South Carolina toward the adoption of universal salvation, beginning in 1780 until his death in 1794. Giles Chapman (1748–1819), Martin's fellow Brethren preacher, also turned to Universalism and joined Martin in preaching the hopeful message. John O'Neall, a contemporary of Chapman, wrote, "[Chapman] began to preach in 1782... He was beyond all doubt an eloquent and a gifted preacher... [who] taught 'God is love.'"[27]

Although Martin and Chapman preached universal salvation, they and their Dunkard followers did not consider themselves Universalists. In *Universalism in America,* Richard Eddy illustrated the ambivalence of the Brethren.

> "If I were to say to my neighbors," said a Dunkard preacher, who the writer once visited, "I have a Universalist preacher stopping at my house." They would say, "How do you dare to have such a character under your roof?" But if I should say, "I have a friend with me who preaches Universal Restoration," they would say, "Have you? I am glad. I would like to come in and see him."[28]

This ambivalence may be explained by observing that the Brethren stressed religion as a way of living rather than conformity to a creed or alliance with a denomination. Another factor was the sheer isolation of the Brethren. A story about Chapman's final days conveys the sense of isolation among South Carolina Universalists; the details of the story, however, might very well be apocryphal.

> Neither Mr. Chapman nor any of his brethren knew of the existence of any Universalists in the United States besides themselves; nor did he become acquainted with the fact, until on his deathbed, when a friend accidentally procured and read to him Ballou's *Treatise on Atonement*. The dying man was in ecstasy; and so strong was the effect upon his feelings it is said to have allayed his bodily pain, though his suffering had been extreme.[29]

Elijah Linch (1773-1842) (alternatively Lynch) next took up the leadership in preaching Universalism. Linch was also a transition agent for the Brethren in their evolution to a public embrace of Universalism. In 1794 when Elijah Linch united with the Dunkards in the Newberry district, he did so as a Universalist. He was the last member to be received with the ceremonies of the Dunkards.[30] By 1805 Linch joined

Old Dunkard Cemetery, Newberry, SC
Burial ground for Rev. Elijah Linch, Giles Chapman, Joseph Summers
founders of the Liberty Universalist Church

Chapman in preaching Universalism in Fairfield, Newberry, and other nearby districts. By this time, there were no Brethren ministers in these districts. Nonetheless, the spread of Universalism was slow. Whittemore observed that after twenty-five years of preaching, Linch's "labors, though faithful and approved, have not been as extensive as those of his predecessors."[31]

Public Profession of Universalism comes to South Carolina

The spark that ignited the spread of Universalism in South Carolina was first struck in North Carolina. This paper does not explore all the dynamics of Universalism's arrival in North Carolina, but rather relies on two events to illustrate how once-closeted South Carolina Universalists were awakened to become more public by the activities of their neighbors immediately to the north.

The first event occurred in 1824 when Rev. Abner Kneeland of Philadelphia acceded to a request to preach in Wilmington, North Carolina. His preaching raised "considerable excitement," and Kneeland returned to preach in other parts of the state.[32] His highly publicized debate with Rev. McCauley in Philadelphia on "the point whether a part of the human race will be eternally damned or the whole ultimately saved" was widely reported in the North Carolina newspapers [33] The idea of ultimate salvation of all people had entered the public discourse in the South.

Two years later, at the request of Hosea Ballou – then the spiritual leader of the American Universalist movement – Rev. Jacob Frieze relocated to Wilmington.[34] Frieze, a skilled Universalist minister from New England, soon began publishing a periodical called *The Liberalist.*[35] More significantly, in June 1827, North Carolina Universalists formalized their statewide religious activity in an organization called the Southern Convention of Universalists.[36] Specific factors motivating North Carolina Universalists to formally organize at this time likely point to the urging of Frieze. Regardless of the motivation, the impact of this action was consequential. Three years later, South Carolina Universalists modelled their own formal organization on the actions of their neighboring Universalists, whose constitution and profession of faith they followed. The preamble of the constitution stated:

> Believing in the doctrine of God's impartial grace and universal benevolence, manifested in the salvation of all men, we the subscribers, on behalf of ourselves and the Societies we represent, hereby solemnly covenant and agree, in the presence of Almighty God and with each other, to associate ourselves together under the name and style of the Southern Convention of Universalists, under the following rules and regulations.[37]

The rules and regulations stated that the convention had the power to grant letters of fellowship, ordain preachers, admit societies, and perform other administrative duties. A profession of faith was included, which stated in part:

> We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ the Son of God; ordained to be the Saviour of men through the medium of the gospel and the power of resurrection and by and through whom our Heavenly Father has irrevocably decreed to reconcile all men to himself, and thus render them holy and happy in the world to come.[38]

Despite the noble intent of their public profession, North Carolina Universalists conceded that they faced significant headwinds. "We have many difficulties before us to contend with; persecution and unhallowed opposition await us on every hand."[39]

Six months later, the Universalists of South Carolina publicly organized, forming the Association of Universalists of Charleston on December 31, 1827. They did not write a public profession of faith, but their trinitarian view was evident in their 1830 publication, a *Guide to Trinitarian Universalists*.[40] Establishing this association had been considered as early as 1824, but the city's Universalists had abandoned the idea. It was understood that in Charleston, the doctrine of Universalism "being found very unpopular, motives of prudence ... prevented several from acceding to the proposition." The Association "was privately formed of three members, who, resolving on braving every opposition, accepted the rules, and from thenceforth, constituted a regular weekly meeting at the office of Doctor Shecut."[41] Dr. John L.E.W. Shecut, an eminent physician and literary figure, was elected president. Shecut would also be the initial link between Charleston's Universalists and the Universalists in the rural hinterland of the state.

The game was now afoot. According to Russell E. Miller in *The Larger Hope: The First Century of the Universalist Church in America,*

1770-1870, two South Carolina Universalist societies were formed in 1830. The first society was in Feasterville in the Beaver Creek area in the Fairfield district, where Martin had served as a preacher to the Brethren and later to the Universalists.[42] Information from contemporary periodicals provides additional details on the second society, formed in October of that year at the Hartford meetinghouse in the Newberry district. Rev. Linch opened the meeting with a prayer and later put forth a motion that the attendees should organize a society to be called the First Universalist Society of Newberry District.[43] After adopting a constitution and profession of faith similar to those adopted in North Carolina, they passed a resolution to follow the North Carolina example and organize a statewide convention.

A month later, on November 26, 1830, Universalists again gathered at the Hartford meetinghouse in the Newberry district and organized the South Carolina Convention of Universalists. This local ecclesiastical body now united the Martin, Chapman, and Linch societies with the larger Universalist denomination. The organizers paid homage to Martin, referring to him as "the father of the cause in this vicinity" for his pioneering work in bringing Universalism to the area. They conceded, however, that "the doctrine of universal benevolence has been dispensed among us, for the last age, with but little success," due in part to the lack of a body to govern church affairs.[44]

Attending were Jacob Feaster, David R. Coleman, and Bowling Wright from the Fairfield district; Rev. Elijah Linch, Edward Hawkins, and Joseph W. Summers from the Newberry district; John Quattlebaum and Russell Gunter from the Lexington district; and Joshua Teague and Thomas Wright from the Laurens district. Also in attendance was L.E.W. Shecut, president of the Charleston Association of Universalists.

Linch, Wright, and Teague were chosen to draft a constitution and a profession of faith. The constitution of the South Carolina Convention was an exact copy of what the Southern Convention of Universalists had adopted in North Carolina.

It is important to pause here and note two observations. First, in forming their convention, the South Carolina Universalists were motivated by a desire to constitute their own locally controlled body by which to manage their religious affairs. In the circular letter announcing the formation of the convention, the organizers stressed the need to have

a structure to manage their religious affairs: "Time and experience have fully convinced us that all institutions must be reduced to system and order." They sought the "influence of church government" but, reflecting their desire for self-determination and independence, added that they must "shun the destructive vortex of corruption" of any organizational influence contrary to their interests and beliefs.[45] These southern Universalists could now grant letters of fellowship, ordain preachers, admit societies, and perform other administrative duties. They neither desired nor sought the intervention of the Universalist denomination in such affairs. This desire to locally manage their religious affairs was a recurring priority in the actions of the South Carolina Convention.

Second, although South Carolina Universalists initially mimicked the North Carolina Universalists, even re-using the language in their constitution and profession of faith, we learn that two years later, in 1832, South Carolina Universalists discarded everything they had adopted from the North Carolina Universalists. Once freed from their second-hand constitution and profession of faith, South Carolina Universalists found their own voices, which reflected the pious beliefs of their Brethren roots and their fierce sense of self-determination.

For the next fifteen years, South Carolina Universalists witnessed modest, if not hopeful growth. Additional societies were formed in the districts of Lexington, Laurens, Anderson, and Abbeville. Continuing to use the language of the Brethren, they referred to their churches as meetinghouses, of which the Universalists claimed the use of nine, including the meetinghouse in Charleston. No information has been found regarding the total number of members, but it is assumed to have been small.

The 1832 convention discussed inhibitors to growth, focusing on a concern that dissimilarities in the rules of the Fairfield and Lexington societies had a negative impact on attracting members. Whether this issue was solely responsible for the lack of growth is not known, but in 1832, the Convention completely revised the constitution it had adopted just two years earlier. The new constitution significantly liberalized its rules on membership, dropping the need to subscribe to a profession of faith and requiring only that a person be "actuated by right motives." Baptism became optional. The right to participate in communion, not addressed in the original constitution, was opened to "all who *confess*

Christ and obey him" [italics in the original text], on the belief that "persons are required to judge for themselves when they are worthy to come to the Lord's table." Further language stated, "We disclaim any right to judge the consciences of others."[46] This new constitution provides remarkable insight into the deference South Carolina Universalists gave to the right of individual conscience in the practice of their religious beliefs. Absent in the published deliberations of this new constitution is any mention of the Winchester Confession of Faith formalized in 1803 by the General Convention of Universalists in Winchester, New Hampshire. It is likely that South Carolina Universalists were in sympathy with the tenets of this profession of faith, but their sense of religious practice relied on the pious nature of each individual and on people's ability to judge their own worthiness "to come to the Lord's table."

South Carolina Universalists, however, did not isolate themselves from the wider Universalist denomination. Despite the small size of its societies, the Convention engaged with the wider national Universalist denomination. At its inaugural convention in 1830, a committee was formed to correspond with our "brethren in the Northern States" requesting the service of speakers and imploring that consideration be given to settling in the South. Two years later at its 1832 convention, South Carolina Universalists affirmed that they were "decidedly in favor of forming the proposed" General Convention of Universalists in the United States "provided the powers invested in it are only advisory."[47] This desire to retain independence and local control over their religious affairs was again voiced at the 1836 convention. South Carolina Universalists went on record opposing the formation of a seminary by the Universalists of the United States. In their expression of disapproval, the Convention offered an appreciation for learning and intelligence, yet reasoned that the "plainness and simplicity of the truths of the Gospel" were sufficient to spread the word of universal salvation. More significantly, the opposition reflected the deep pious Brethren roots of the South Carolina Universalists. They were concerned that theological credentials might become a substitute for the moral character of ministerial candidates and therefore "prevent worthy people from becoming public advocates for the truth."[48]

South Carolina's participation in annual general conventions, however, was inhibited by the inability of Universalists in the state

to muster the number of ministers required by the General Convention's Constitution. In 1837 South Carolina Universalist delegates were charged to "use their influence so to alter the Constitution, as to allow all visiting brethren to take part in deliberations."[49] None of the lay delegates, however, attended the national convention to register their protest. South Carolina delegates only attended four national conventions, held in 1838, 1839, 1845, and 1848. In 1845, Henry Summers of South Carolina was appointed Assistant Clerk of the convention held in Boston, Massachusetts.[50]

Without question, the single greatest impediment in the spreading of the gospel of universal salvation was the lack of preachers. At the time of the formation of the South Carolina Convention of Universalists in 1830, Rev. Elijah Linch was the only Universalist preacher in the state. At their second convention in 1831, delegates drew on their constitution's authority to ordain preachers and invited Thomas Wright, Jacob Feaster, Jr. and John M. Feaster to "exercise their gifts publicly" and become preachers. There is little in the public record indicating whether these invitations were accepted. Fortunately, in that same year, Allen Fuller answered the call made at the 1830 convention for "brethren in the Northern States" to relocate to the South.[51]

Allen Fuller, born in 1798 in Massachusetts, was an ideal fit for the newly organized South Carolina Convention. In his home state he had become a member the Old Colony Association formed in 1827, an organization similar to the South Carolina Convention. Fuller joined the Old Colony Association in 1828 and was ordained in 1830.[52] Health and personal reasons, in addition to the call of the South Carolina Convention, motivated Fuller to relocate there. After his arrival he married into the Worthington family, ardent South Carolina Universalists.[53]

Fuller's charge by the South Carolina Convention was to provide circuit-preaching services. His initial efforts were concentrated in the Lexington and Laurens districts, with occasional preaching in the Fairfield, Edgefield, and Union districts, as well as in the city of Columbia. Fuller's preaching in these districts augmented the ongoing work of Rev. Linch in the Fairfield and Newberry Districts.[54] For several years, Fuller also assumed leadership positions at the Convention, serving as the clerk or moderator.

Additional ministerial capacity was added when James Mullikin was received into fellowship by the Anderson district in 1834 and ordained four years later. Progress appeared to be underway. The 1839 Convention was attended by thirty-two laymen and five preachers (Philo Brownson, Albert Case, Allen Fuller, Elijah Linch and James Mullikin).

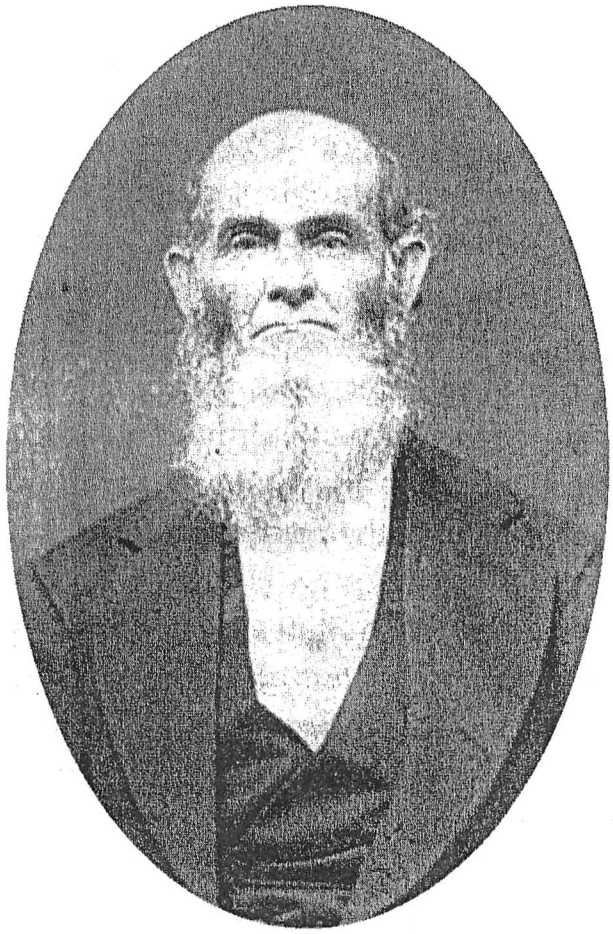
One might infer from this that a sufficient number of preachers had now been recruited to serve the Universalist societies in rural South Carolina, but Brownson was a visiting minister from Georgia, and Case was from Charleston. Linch was aging and ill and would die three years later. Thus, nearly ten years after the organization of the South Carolina Convention, there were only two active ministers, Fuller and Mullikin.

This dearth of preachers was discussed at the 1839 convention, and the convention's circular letter implored that in the absence of a preacher, whenever people can meet for "religious improvement," they should do so.[55] Two years later, in 1841, the Convention met at the Harmony meetinghouse in Anderson where John A. Chapman, grandson of Rev. Giles Chapman, received fellowship.[56] Yet even the ministry of a scion of a pioneering Universalist minister was short lived. Only a few years later, Chapman returned his letter of fellowship and became a follower of Emanuel Swedenborg.[57]

Fuller remained active in South Carolina, preaching and participating at the annual convention. He took several extended preaching trips outside that state but did not end his South Carolina ministry until he moved to Alabama in 1851.[58] The leadership of Universalism in South Carolina eventually fell to a native South Carolinian born in Spartanburg in 1817. Raised in the Baptist faith, he was utterly destitute of any knowledge of Universalism, but a sermon by a Massachusetts transplant to South Carolina would change that.

At age 21, Daniel Bragg Clayton was engaged in the teaching profession when he heard Rev. Fuller deliver a sermon that had a profound impact on him. The young Clayton severed his ties with the religion of his birth and dedicated his life to spreading the message of universal salvation.[59] He divided his missionary efforts across the states of South Carolina, Mississippi, and Georgia, leaving an impact on South Carolina that should not be minimized.

Clayton attended his first South Carolina Convention at the Fredonia meetinghouse in the Newberry district in 1842.[60] This conven-



Daniel Bragg Clayton

tion marked the passing of the Rev. Elijah Linch, who had been laid to rest only a few days before the meeting. Many now hoped that Clayton would replace Linch and carry forward his ministry. Two years later, however, Clayton would turn down an invitation to serve as a circuit preacher for the South Carolina societies, since he planned to move to Mississippi.

Decline

The 1840s was a crucial time for South Carolina Universalists. In the 1820s and 1830s, the position of the Universalist denomination on slavery was generally cautious, stating only that it was inconsistent with their idea of an "all-inclusive human family." Denomination-wide action on abolition was deemed too divisive to pursue. This level of caution did not last, however, and by 1840 a more open expression

of opposition had developed. In that year, the Universalist Anti-Slavery Convention held in Lynn, Massachusetts issued resolutions directly condemning slaveholders "in the sight of God; guilty of theft and robbery."[61] In 1843, in Akron, Ohio, the General Convention of Universalists issued resolutions against slavery that reflected the new thinking of the denomination. Specifically, "the holding in bondage of our brethren for whom Christ died, or the treatment of any human being with obloquy harshness, or any indignity on account of his color or race," was "contrary to righteousness, inconsistent with Christianity and especially with that doctrine of Universal Grace and Love which we cherish as the most important of revealed truth."[62]

At the 1841 meeting of the South Carolina Convention, delegates expressed disapproval "of any interference with the subject of negro Slavery by the people of those States where it does not exist." They further stated, "We *solemnly protest* [italics in the original text] against any action on that subject by the brethren of our order." In his circular letter, Rev. Fuller urged northern Universalists "to heed the admonition" or risk the unity of north and south Universalists.[63]

The *Universalist Watchman and Christian Repository,* reprinting comments from the *Primitive Expounder,* upbraided Fuller in 1845 for his myopic grasp of the disconnect between Universalism and slavery. In a letter to the *Primitive Expounder,* Fuller lamented that he was disheartened by the prospects for Universalism in the South. In a rebuke, the *Expounder* struck back, stating that Universalism "teaches that all mankind are brethren born with equal rights and privileges ... With this doctrine, slavery can never be reconciled." The *Primitive Expounder* concluded that slavery "will sink into oblivion."[64] Fuller was a slaveholder.[65]

In the midst of the rift opening between northern and southern Universalists, South Carolina Universalists had a more immediate problem before them. In 1845 the sale of raw cotton witnessed the lowest price ever recorded.[66] A travelogue published in the *Universalist Union* echoed this situation. "Cotton and rice, upon which South Carolina depends, are very low, and it can hardly be expected that these articles will ever again attain the price they were wont to command."[67]

Universalist statistics for South Carolina in 1846 included the following observation: "By removals and death our societies in this

State have been greatly reduced in strength and numbers."[68] Over the next thirty years, the situation for Universalists in South Carolina saw little improvement. The movement continued to decline. In the years between 1847 and 1857, the number of active Universalist meetinghouses in South Carolina fell from nine to four. By 1854, information on the South Carolina societies simply ceased being printed. The number of preachers varied from a high of five to a low of one. A bright spot was the fellowshipping of Rev. S. M. Simons, a former Baptist minister, and Rev. N. P. Walker at the 1847 Annual Convention.

There were overt efforts in the second half of the 1850s, primarily by the Fairfield society, to recruit outside preachers. "Preachers Wanted," ran the advertisements in the *Universalist Herald,* and a subscription drive to raise $800 was launched to finance those services. [69] Rev. A. Gage, recently of the Universalist Society in Louisville, Kentucky, in consideration of a pledge of support, provided circuit-preaching services along with Elbert H. Feaster, a local society member in Feasterville.[70] Additionally, Rev. E. H. Lake was recruited to provide circuit preaching in Fairfield, Newberry, Edgefield, and Laurens districts for one year.[71] Born in Massachusetts, Lake had served northern churches, but had relocated to the South, where he was serving churches in Alabama and Mississippi when he was called to South Carolina. Lake served less than a year in South Carolina, retiring to North Carolina due to health reasons.[72] Despite best intentions, the $800 subscription drive proved unsuccessful.[73] As in the early days, the lack of preachers plagued local Universalist societies. The 1858 South Carolina Convention that took place in Fairfield was attended by five preachers: McMorris (Mississippi), Fuller (Alabama), Burruss (Alabama), Strain (Georgia), and Lake (North Carolina). None of the attending preachers was from South Carolina. To help remedy the lack of preachers in South Carolina, the Convention recruited two preachers: J. C. C. Feaster and J. L. C. Griffin (the latter had recently resigned a teaching position in the North). Unfortunately, this effort seems to have been of no avail, and the high hopes envisioned by the South Carolina Convention back in 1830 were soon to reach their nadir.

The South Carolina Convention of Universalists met for the last time in Feasterville in August 1860. Eighteen laymen attended who were primarily from the existing churches in the Fairfield and Laurens

districts. Clayton recalled that Fuller, who died shortly afterward, fittingly provided the closing sermon.[74] A few months later, in October 1860, the South Carolina and North Carolina Conventions met in a General Convention at the Williams' Church in Pitt County, North Carolina. J.C.C. Feaster presided as moderator. No meeting minutes have been found, but with multi-state southern representation by J. C. C. Feaster and J. L. C. Griffin (South Carolina), E. H. Lake (North Carolina), D. B. Clayton (Mississippi), J. M. H. Smith (Georgia), and A. Bosserman (Maryland), it may be reasoned that these Universalist delegates were considering their organizational options. The General Convention agreed to meet the next year in Alabama and in North Carolina.[75] This decision was made less than one month before a national election would bring Abraham Lincoln to the presidency and witness the onset of a war between the nation's northern and southern sections. The collective attention of southern Universalists on religious organization was relegated to a lower priority.

Despite the war, Clayton maintained his preaching efforts. He returned from Mississippi to Feasterville in the fall of 1863. The next year he taught classes at the Feasterville Academy. He also preached once a month at the Liberty meetinghouse. Later, Clayton ceased teaching but continued to provide monthly preaching at the Liberty meetinghouse until 1867. He and his wife then relocated to Columbia, South Carolina, where they ran a boarding house for twelve years.[76]

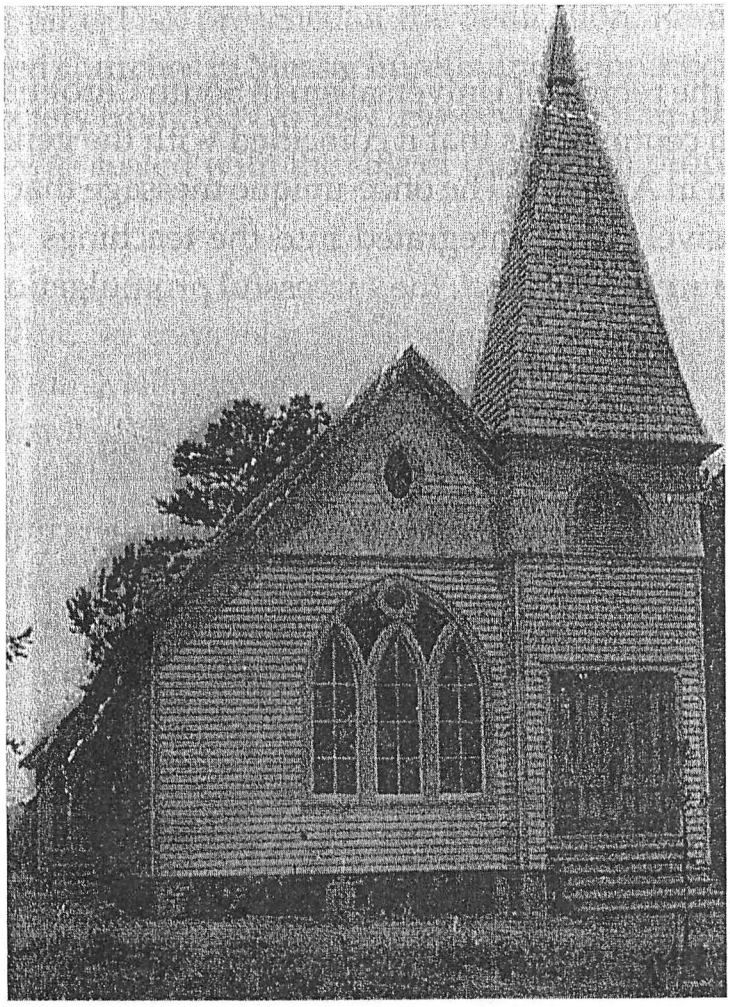
The post-Civil War years for South Carolina's Universalists were bleak. Clayton assessed the situation in a report to the national Universalist organization, dated October 13, 1870. He noted that the only church building owned by the Universalists in South Carolina was in Feasterville, and added, "I cannot say there is an organized church or society in the state." He went on to report that there were only two Universalist ministers in South Carolina, Rev. S. M. Simons and himself, and he was focusing most of his energies in North Carolina.[77]

Rebirth

Seven years later, in 1877, Clayton returned to missionary work in South Carolina and re-organized the Feasterville Church. By 1883, the church had thirty-five members and an active Sunday school. Preaching was

still limited, with Clayton providing services only six to eight times a year. Membership growth in the only Universalist church in the state showed modest gains, rising to 58 by 1887.[78]

Additional hopeful signs of rebirth were seen that year with the organization of the Bethel Church in Chappells in Saluda County. Among its charter members was Thomas Chapman,[79] who was ordained by Clayton.[80] Perhaps more importantly, in the revitalization of Universalism in the state, both churches had active Sunday school programs. Clayton and Thomas shared preaching responsibilities for the Feasterville and Bethel churches as well as for the small society in Mountville until 1892. Chapman then departed South Carolina but continued active Universalist ministry in other southern states until his death in 1944.



Universalist Church, Mountville, SC

Momentum in South Carolina continued, nonetheless. A chapte of the Young People's Christian Union (Y.P.C.U.) was established ir 1895. The Y.P.C.U. was a youth program organized in 1889 by the Universalist Church to harness the energy of the church's youth and tc develop future leaders. South Carolina delegates attended the Y.P.C.U national convention in New Jersey in 1896.[81] The South Carolina Convention that had ceased operations in 1860 was revived in 1895 The convention held its first meeting at the Bethel Church.[82]

As the nineteenth century drew to a close, a fourth church wa added in the state, located in Columbia. Membership among the fou South Carolina Universalist churches totaled 153 divine souls, with 7(children enrolled in Sunday schools and future leaders filling activ Y.P.C.U. unions.[83]

Universalism had again come to South Carolina.

Conclusion

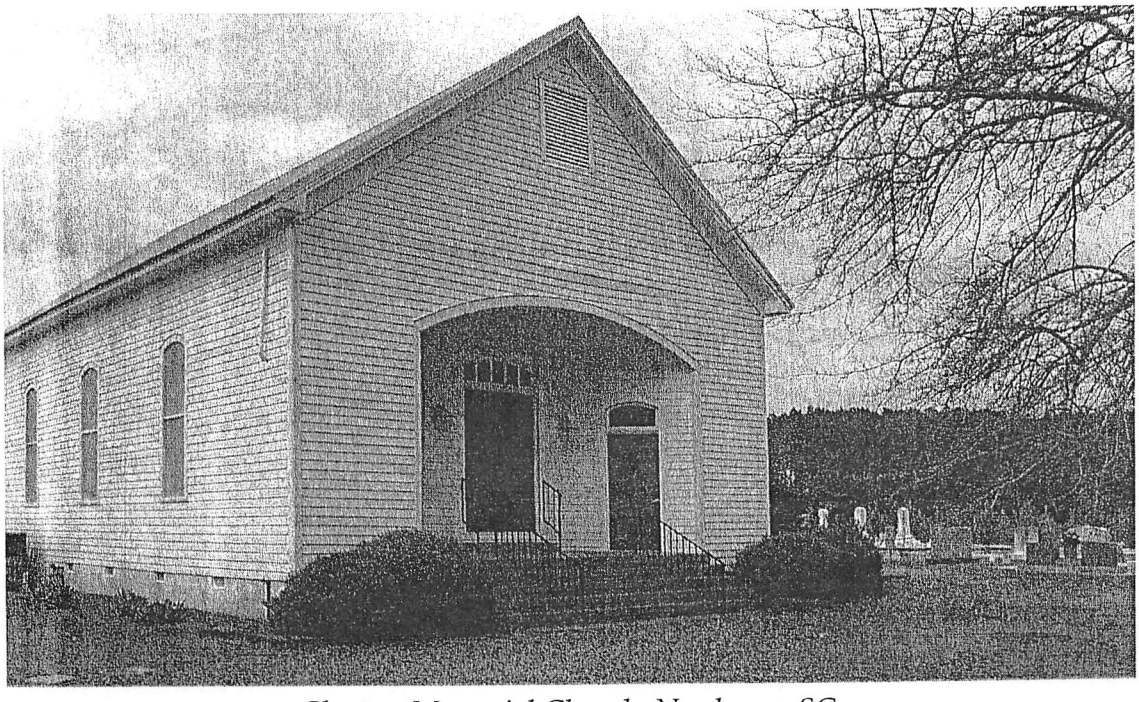
The irony of the rebirth of Universalism in South Carolina at the start o the twentieth century was that it coincided with the general decline o Universalism in America. The once-unique message that "God is love' had progressively been integrated into the teachings of mainstrean Protestant churches. In effect, the successful promulgation of universa hope and salvation undermined the relevance of Universalism as distinct denomination. By 1961, the Universalist Church of Americ merged with the American Unitarian Association to form the Unitaria Universalist Association.

Even during periods of growth, Universalist churches in Sout Carolina were historically small and drew members from a limited loc population. That limited population was frequently intertwined wit family alliances formed by marriage. Thus, when one family left th area, other related families would follow, robbing a church of its cor membership. Additionally, opposition from hostile traditional Christia neighbors was ever present. It was not uncommon for local preache to issue "zealous warnings to the people" when a Universalist preache was scheduled to spread the message of hope.

As noted, the lack of preachers was the greatest impedimer in the spread of Universalism among the isolated population pocket

Absent a preacher, potential adherents were left to cultivate their Universalist faith among themselves or seek spiritual sustenance from preachers in other denominations.

Even the bustling coastal city of Charleston had its own cycle of birth, hope, growth, and demise. In 1830, six years after the formation of the private Association of Universalists, Rev. Paul Dean, a prominent minister from New England, arrived in Charleston. He publicly preached a Universalist message under the auspices of the officially chartered First Universalist Society. Per a loan arrangement with his home church, Dean preached only five weeks. His brief tenure was followed by the four-week stint of another temporary New England minister, Rev. Lemuel Willis. After Willis left, a scattering of ministers held the pastorate including L. F. W Andrews, Theophilus Fisk, John Gregory, T.L. Harris, Albert Case, and M. B. Newell. During the pastorate of L.F.W. Andrews, a church building was erected in 1836 at the corner of Anson and Laurens Streets. Theophilus Fisk preached at the dedication. Rev. Albert Case, who had served churches in Massachusetts and Connecticut, served the Charleston society from 1839 to 1844. However, the fate of Charleston's Universalists was sealed with the sale of the church property in 1856.

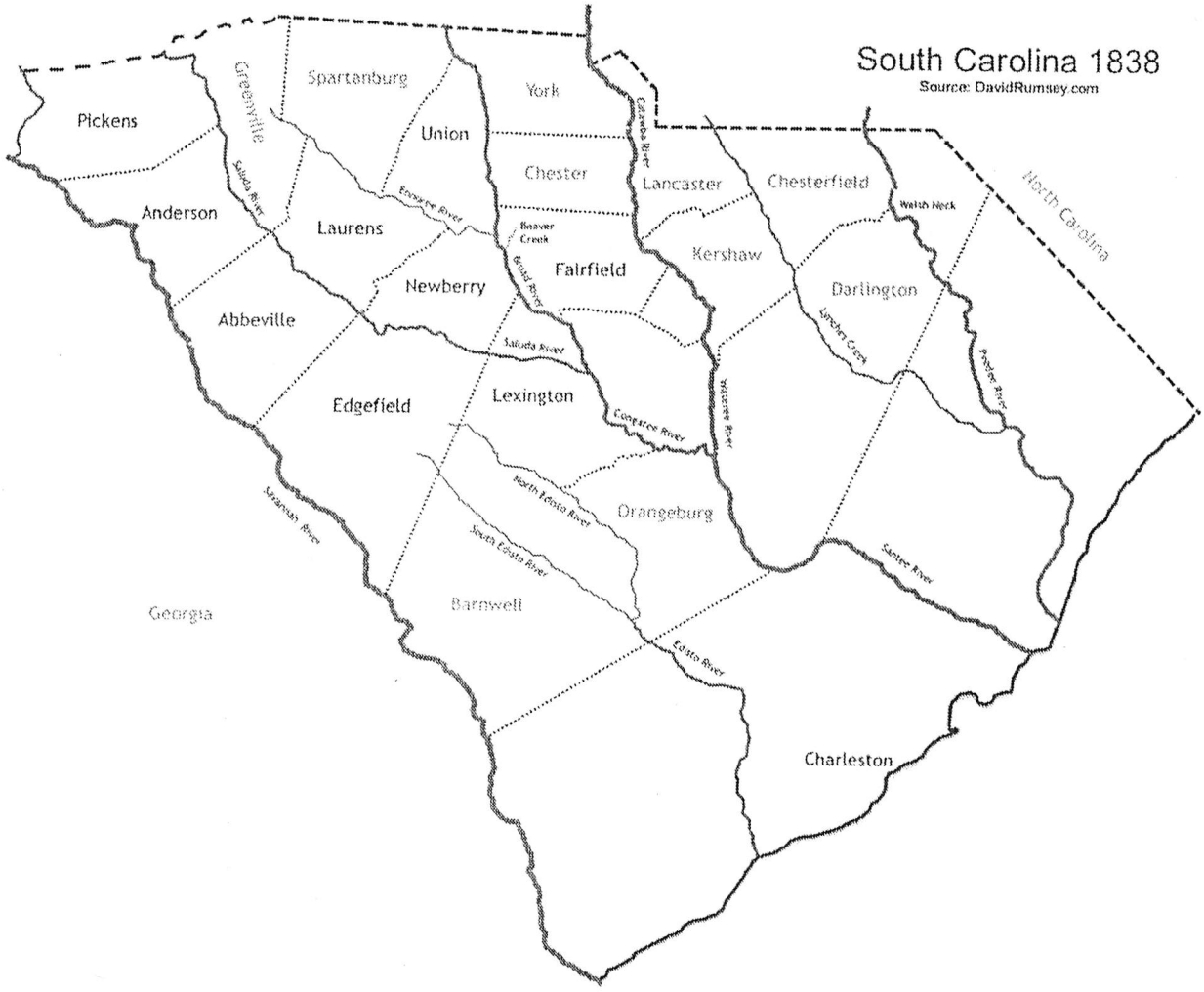


Clayton Memorial Church, Newberry, SC

Finally, the Civil War and the issue of slavery severed ties between southern Universalists and any support they might have received from their northern sisters and brothers. Following the war, economic turmoil lingered. It was more than a decade after the close of the Civil War that the rebirth of Universalism was made possible with the efforts of Rev. D.B. Clayton. In honor of his accomplishments, the Clayton Memorial Church was posthumously organized on August 20, 1905, and is still an active Unitarian Universalist congregation. The Feasterville church, known as the Liberty Universalist Church, ceased religious services altogether. The church building is now the venue for yearly family reunions of the descendants of the people who settled the area. The Mountville, Bethel, and Columbia Universalist churches no longer exist.

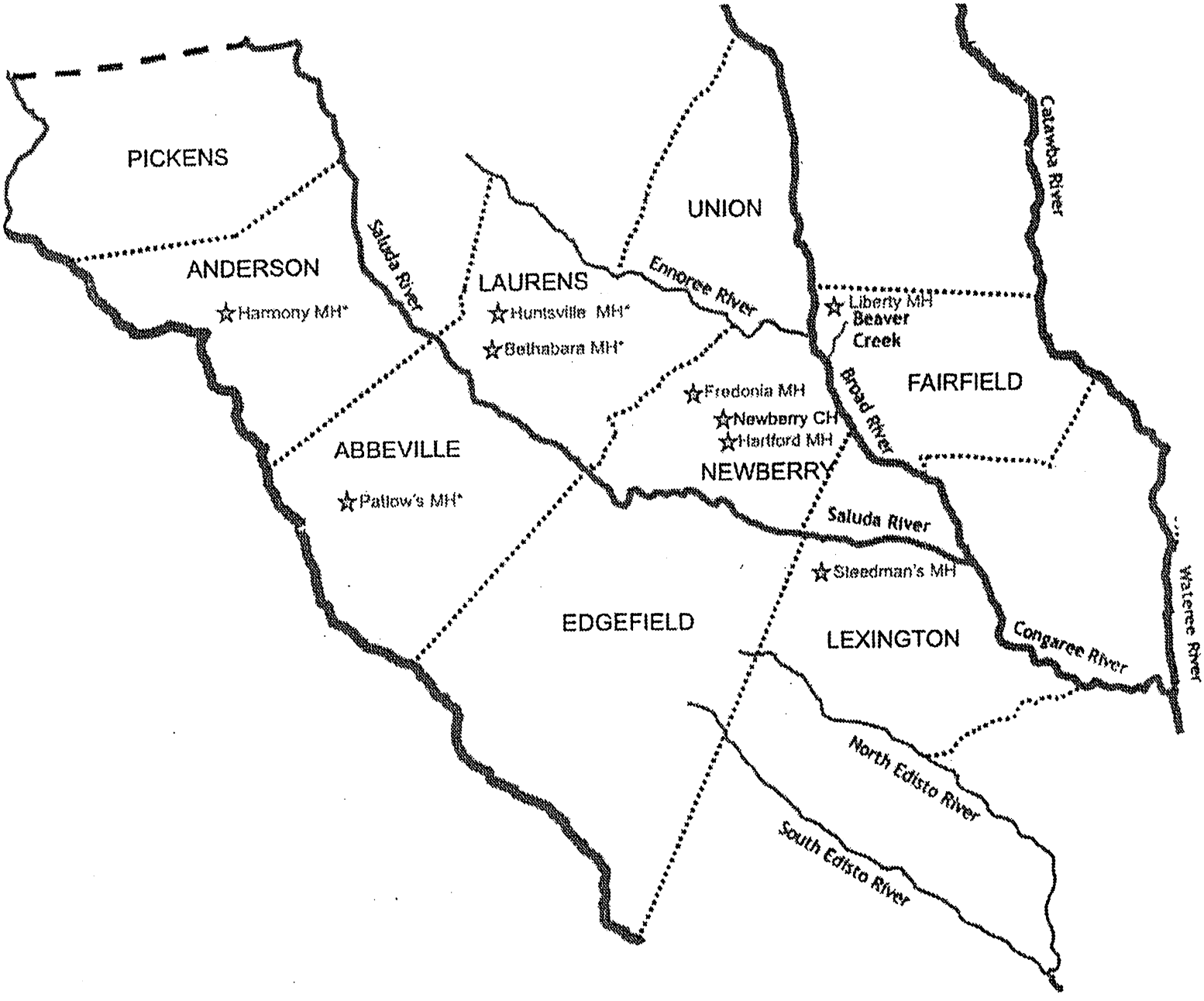
This history is evidence that the Universalist message, carried forward in varied forms through multiple threads of migration and religious affiliation, developed tenuous yet persistent roots in South Carolina. This was the result of an undaunted few who believed that "a God of eternal love continues to reconcile all human beings to holiness and happiness."

Appendix A: Maps



Map 1: South Carolina Counties and Rivers
(Not all counties and rivers are shown.)

Appendix A: Maps



Map 2: South Carolina Universalist Meetinghouses