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states such as North Carolina and Maryland. In 1748, a small number of Brethren families from Conococheague, Maryland settled in Beaver Creek, South Carolina.<sup>11</sup> Later Hans Waggoner and Rev. George Martin came with their wives.<sup>12</sup> 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.<sup>13</sup> French Creek was the home of a Quaker Seventh Day Baptist society formed by the Keithian schism with the Quakers,<sup>14</sup> 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.<sup>15</sup> 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.<sup>16</sup> 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.<sup>17</sup> 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.<sup>18</sup> 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."<sup>19</sup> Pearson has been referred to as Martin's exhorter. Underlining the fluidity of religious affiliation, Pearson was a member of the Sabbatarian group.<sup>20</sup> 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."<sup>21</sup>

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.”<sup>22</sup> ←

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.<sup>23</sup>

### **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.<sup>24</sup> 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."<sup>25</sup> 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.<sup>26</sup>

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'Neill, 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.'"<sup>27</sup>

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."<sup>28</sup>

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.<sup>29</sup>

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.<sup>30</sup> 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."<sup>31</sup>

### **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.<sup>32</sup> 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.<sup>33</sup> 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.<sup>34</sup> Frieze, a skilled Universalist minister from New England, soon began publishing a periodical called *The Liberalist*.<sup>35</sup> More significantly, in June 1827, North Carolina Universalists formalized their statewide religious activity in an organization called the Southern Convention of Universalists.<sup>36</sup> 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: