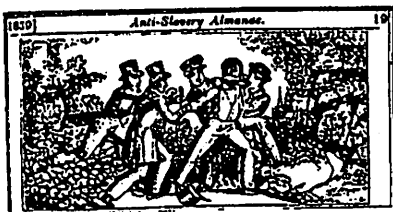


Cockrell

September 1992
VOLUME VI #414



Earle P. Barron, D. Min.
Greenwich Presbyterian Church
15305 Vint Hill Road
Nokesville, Virginia 22123

TAR AND FEATHERS

A hot August sun burned through the haze on a peaceful second Sabbath, August 1840. The Rev. Mr. Thomas S. Kendall's chest and back burned also; he couldn't find relief because tar and feathers covered him front and rear. Any effort he made to get the thick mess off his skin pained him all the more. He not only suffered physical discomfort but considerable embarrassment. Safety remained at a distance and anyone who saw him would know that citizens somewhere had run him off. He wondered what he would do. He also wondered about the events which led up to the vigilante wrath he'd just undergone.

Controversy

In 1831, in the Presbytery of the Carolinas in whose boundaries Kendall was tarred and feathered, the Presbyterian Associate Synod of North America had 8 ministers and 24 churches. Many members of the Seceder churches had slaves; some only a few; others a large enough number to be considered planters.

In the beginning these Scotch-Irish had altogether opposed slavery. But cotton and the invention of the cotton gin changed everything. The "white wool" became King and slavery became very profitable. In reaction, large numbers of families who opposed slavery left for Ohio and other northern states. Some who objected to slavery remained.¹

As elsewhere most of those who practiced slavery and lived in the South Carolina Upcountry community defended their position. Preachers found Scriptural justification and insisted that slavery was only a political matter. Dissenting insiders kept a low profile. A small number spoke out against slavery at least among themselves.

Slaves belonging to these Seceder Church communicants fared better than some others. Many of them, not permitted to listen to black preachers, were members of the white congregations. In The Rev. Thomas Ketchin's charge at Shiloh and Neely's Creek there were 365 slaves. All but about 60 of these had been taught to read even though educating blacks was against the law of the land. Still many of the white church members experienced a "fundamental moral anxiety." Also Southern whites were always nervous about slave uprisings.

In May, 1831 the Reformed Synod of North America tried to clamp down on churches whose members owned slaves. Slavery "is clearly condemned by the law of God," said the Synod. Emancipate them or else, they threatened. Right now! Even those that may have been inclined to give up slavery could not precipitously end it. Five ministers who could not enforce the act of Synod left their congregations and went North. The Rev. Thomas Ketchin, with Shiloh and Neely's Creek Churches, pulled out because the Synod had "unscripturally interfered in civil matters and had sowed seeds of rebellion in the civil community." In 1833 most of what was left of the Presbytery united with the Associate Reformed Synod of the South.

The Militant Missionary

Belatedly, the Reformed Synod of North America decided to send someone South to explain the ruling and also to enforce the act. The Seceder Synod sought to recover some of its members and keep within the fold others who might be weakening. It undertook the challenge with missionary zeal. The venerable fathers and brothers asked for volunteers. The only minister or elder willing to take such a hazardous trip was the moderator, Rev. Mr. Thomas S. Kendall. "He was by no means anxious to do so, but as his motto was to go wherever duty called, he consented." The Synod, or the abolitionist society to which he belonged, raised \$50.00 to defray his expenses. The society reported some seven or eight thousand dollars on hand at that time.

Kendall had been born near Xenia, Ohio in 1809. He studied at Jefferson and Canonsburg and was ordained by Miami Presbytery in 1834. He pastored Pistol Creek, Fork Creek and Big Spring Churches near Maryville, Tenn.

Barron, Tar and Feathers

Anti-slavery sentiment ruled strongly in Appalachia where the "peculiar institution" was not profitable. Kendall was in touch with Presbyterian Maryville College where half of the 30 students who had been preparing for the ministry espoused ardent abolitionism. Some professed to be willing to die in a holy cause.²

While preparing for his trip Kendall mailed ahead some anti-slavery literature to a Mr. R. Harris in York District, South Carolina. Harris became uneasy holding such material, decided not to distribute the propaganda and gave directions to get rid of it. He may have known that a young Lane student named Amos Dresser had carried such writings to Nashville where locals discovered it on him. An angry crowd gave him twenty lashings. He knew that town meetings through the South put up rewards to catch persons circulating inflammatory leaflets. Vigilantes sought to keep outsiders from destroying the peaceful coexistence between slave and master, they said. Even though only a third of the white owned slaves, most persons resented interference in local matters and winked at the violence. Violence was common throughout the nation, not just in the South.

The Trip South

Kendall, started on his way through the Presbytery of the Carolinas. The minister kept one eye behind him everywhere he went. He followed an itinerary that included persons he believed would protect if not support him. He didn't tarry in one place long on his route. For the most part he took the church people by surprise and they did not have time to act in concert for or against him.

Whenever possible he read the official document which declared that "We have been saying for forty years past that slave-holding is a moral evil...condemned by the word of God...We have judicially declared that no member of the Associate Church could be tolerated in 'holding a human being in the character and capacity of a slave...'." The letter called for legal emancipation. Another prospect offered was for the slave holding family to "arise and remove all his household, or cause to be removed the enslaved part thereof, to one of the free states of the Union..." A third possibility was moral emancipation whereby the master would not treat his slave as property but as a laborer to be paid for his work.

When Kendall read Synod's letter to a Virginia congregation where Negroes were in attendance, certain of the blacks, after hearing the missionary, "demanded to know of their owners, what wages they were to receive - otherwise they would not work." Kendall was later accused of intruding into houses where he was not known and asking about the standing of neighbors and clergymen as well as pressing home his Synod's requirement to free slaves.

Eventually he made his way through North Carolina and organized a sympathetic party in the upper part of Iredell County. He made an attempt in a second place but didn't have much success. In the same county he succeeded in drawing off about a third part of the male members of one congregation to support abolitionism.

Encounters in South Carolina

Kendall soon arrived into the bounds of Neely's Creek Church in York County, S. C. This congregation had shortly before sent to the Reformed Synod "communication adjuring their jurisdiction."

While in the area Kendall enjoyed the hospitality of the Reverend Mr. Archibald Whyte at Nation's Ford on the Catawba River. The Synod had earlier suspended Whyte (and Horatio Thompson of Virginia) for his pro-slavery views until he "acknowledged his sin and returned to his duty." Instead of repenting Whyte turned planter and politician.

Barron, Tar and Feathers

Kendall found no support from Whyte and only a few abolitionists in the area so he made an appointment to preach at Little River Church, commonly called Sterling's Meeting House, twelve miles north of Winnsboro, S. C.³ Jackson Spencer, elder from Neely's Creek, accompanied him.

Whyte had an appointment to preach at Little River about the same time as Kendall planned to be there. He did not want to be associated with Kendall so he wrote and warned John L. Youngue, T. M., who lived in sight of Little River Meeting House and near to John Stirling about Kendall's visit.

Church members at Little River refused Kendall permission to speak. He decided to move on the next day and try at Smyrna, known also as Stively Meeting House, five miles east of Chester, S. C.

While at New Lebanon church in Virginia, Mr. Richard Dixon "advised him to give up the further prosecution of his mission, stating to him that if he preached the sermon in the South which he had preached in New Lebanon Church that he would involve himself in trouble." When warned, the zealous abolitionist said, "He had heard too much of such stuff, to regard it, even if it cost him his life." At Neely's Creek several citizens had told him plainly that he was subjecting himself to danger. Critics told the preacher from Tennessee that he might bring upon himself a coat of tar and feathers, but he "opened his bosom, expressing a readiness to receive it." Finally a citizen near Smyrna wrote him a note and "assured him, that unless he left District by Monday morning, he would be apprehended." But when Kendall received the letter he went to a muster where the men who had advised him to desist were present "and gave public notice that he knew what he was about, and would not be diverted from his purpose, and if it was supposed he had infringed upon the laws, he was ready to abide the consequences."

Kendall may have felt safe in the Smyrna area. In a letter to The South Carolinian the writer who was from Nation's Ford said, "I suppose there is not as hot a bed of Abolitionist, in the North or South, as in that part of Chester...Indeed, one of the Millers on Saturday, being informed that it was dangerous for an Abolitionist to preach expressed himself in these words: 'He would like to see the man that would interrupt him: he would be one of a party to pull the jail down, and go to the death for his principles...'"

Kendall determined to follow through on his mission and proceeded to Smyrna. Supporters advertised his arrival throughout northern Fairfield County. Some sympathizers gathered to hear him speak. Six or eight unfriendly persons of the area met on the public road and decided to go to the church and apprehend Kendall. They stopped by Little River Church where Whyte was preaching. They sent a very small boy inside to get some others. Most persons did not realize what was happening. The party then organized outside of the church lot and started for Kendall before the service at Little River was finished. They waited until he finished his discourse and then they "arrested" him.

Supporters of Kendall at the Smyrna congregation resisted the intrusion. At least two men and several females attempted to recover the abolitionist's saddle bags. The women were braver than the men. One of the vigilantes "received a severe blow with a stick, from another female." One woman slapped her brother for being in the crowd of abolitionists. Another woman asked "Why we did not carry her too, as she was an Abolitionist, and as much opposed to slavery as anyone could be." A "rescue of Kendall that night was meditated by the residents of the hotbed of Abolitionist in which he was taken."

The "Trial"

The vigilantes took the captured Kendall "like felon" and started towards the house of John Cockerell about four miles below Youngue's place at what is now White Oak, S.C. On the way Kendall and his captors met the Rev. A. Whyte who was with Mr. Keenan his host. (It may have been that while the bold abolitionist had delivered a fiery sermon at Smyrna denouncing slavery, the preacher turned planter had proclaimed the Biblical basis for the Negro's bondage at Little River.)

Barron, Tar and Feathers

Mr. Henry Castles had told Whyte and Keenan during intermission at Little River that a party had gone in the direction of Smyrna Church to arrest Kendall. Some thought Whyte had directed them to Kendall but he claimed he did not. Whyte later that day wrote that he was willing "to procure the proper security for Kendall if he were remitted for trial," assuming he would agree to desist from abolitionist activities in the area.

Kendall was locked in a room and kept overnight at the home of Cockerell. During this time Cockerell notified citizens of Winnsboro to come out and decide what to do with the instigator. "About thirty of the most respectable citizens of the Dist. attended." Later one apologist referred to these men as "some of the baser sort," claiming they were not church people. Most of them were "reckless young men," said another. The next morning after the vigilantes conferred with each other they examined Kendall. They found nothing in his bags but some clothing and a sermon. Never-the-less "after mature deliberation [they] concluded on tarring and feathering him with orders to leave the State forthwith."

Kendall "was taken peacefully to 'a shady grove and caused to strip off his shirt and receive a coat of tar and feathers on his back and breast.'" Spencer and the Mr. Miller who had bravely asserted the defense of Kendall were not present. Neither was Whyte. Kendall was lucky. He might have had the tar poured and brushed all over him, including his hair and face, and suffered as the Tory is described to have done in the first chapter of Kenneth Roberts' Oliver Wiswell. He could have also been ridden out of the community on a rail, another painful procedure often linked with tarring and feathering.

J. L. Youngue, to whom Whyte wrote, replied that the "thing was done by the unanimous consent of all present, it appeared to hurt the feelings of all. But they believed that it was necessary to do something with him, and this was a mild course, as they could think of." He was too much potential trouble for the area. They were not aware that he had actually contacted any Negroes but they were concerned since the slaves usually discovered everything that was going on. Kendall might spark an insurrection. Then he added, "and I will venture to say that should any more ever come this way on the same business, they will not get off on as easy terms - He was not hurt in any way. And as soon as the sentence was inflicted, the company left."

Kendall headed back to the cooler mountains of Maryville, Tenn. hoping for a friendly place with lard and coal oil to get at the tar and feathers. The Rev. Mr. Flenniken met him and "administered to his comfort."

Aftermath

The incident was the subject of much conversation in the community for a long time. Mostly there was little sympathy for Kendall. But one preacher, W. F., a "foreigner" dared to speak of prosecution in behalf of the abolitionist. Others indicated some shame over the incident.

The problem of slavery continued to dominate the area as well as the entire South. The question, bondage or freedom, became the one significant issue and absorbed church meetings as well as politics. In the 1850's the strife intensified to fever pitch and many arrests and vigilante assaults occurred. Upset citizens tarred and feathered Elijah Harris, a school teacher in Clinton, S. C. Locals imprisoned Dr. Larkin B. Coles, a physician, in Columbia, S. C. Tension escalated until the Civil War erupted. Towards the close of the bloody strife Sherman's troops marched through the land.

Soon after the abolitionist incident, Smyrna, which never went into union with the A.R.P.'s, ceased to be a regular preaching point, "After the tarring and feathering of Mr. Kendall a blight seemed to fall on the church, and though efforts were made by various denominations to build up a church there, every effort failed."⁵

At the time of the affair there were 8 families and 16 members at Little River. Soon afterwards the church ceased to exist. It was not long before only the old graveyard marked the site of the church.

Barron, Tar and Feathers

In Cockerell's community, before the war, "Jeriah Cockerille [who] had a store just in front of his home, about the site of the parsonage, fell dead whipping a slave." After the war the Cockerells and others left the area. Around 1870 John R. Patrick and family of Bullucks Creek, S. C. bought up much of the land and moved in. And in 1877 members of the community, mostly Patricks, founded and built the White Oak A.R.P. Church on the "very spot or near the spot" where the vigilantes had tarred and feathered Kendall.

Kendall Goes West

Kendall became a hero to the Synod of North America and to the abolitionists of East Tennessee where he remained until 1842. He later went to churches in Illinois and then to West Point, Iowa. He joined a small party of Seceders emigrating overland to the Territory of Oregon, April 1845. They suffered great hardship. He finally separated from the others and procured ponies from the Indians to carry his goods and "two little motherless daughters." He travelled on and crossed the mountains into Oregon. The family was on the brink of starvation when wading a mountain stream he succeeded in kicking a large salmon onto land.

Kendall who was poverty stricken labored at splitting rails for his neighbors. He preached where ever he could assemble a few hearers. When the gold fever broke out in California he started for Sacramento. He found gold but loaned out his earnings. He got together a herd of cattle to convert to money and was compelled to spend the summer and autumn butchering beef. But after 15 months absence he returned to Oregon with \$9000, enough to live on in ample comfort for the rest of his life. He organized congregations in Oregon as soon as he returned and pastored them as long as he could. In the Spring of 1870 The General Assembly elected him moderator. Shortly after returning home the intrepid missionary died.

Whyte Stays Home

Whyte was a prominent and respected citizen of the state. He was Post Master at Nation's Ford where he lived. His house was a stage coach inn on the Old Saluda Road. He was also a school master. He helped the young city of Rock Hill, S. C. and promoted it whenever he could. The first troop to go to war for the Confederacy there was called the "Whyte Guards" in his honor. He served one or two terms in the S. C. Legislature and many times in State and Congressional conventions. He understood law and was a magistrate many years. He wielded considerable influence and was considered one of the most polished political orators in the state.

Whyte continued to supply churches. One cold Sabbath he was scheduled to preach at Neely's Creek. He imbibed a little cherry brandy to warm his inwards. On the way up to the steps of the pulpit Elder Theman Wylie smelled the odor of alcohol, grabbed him by the coat tails and said "Come doon Mr. Whyte; Ye canna preach the day." According to William White of Rock, S. C., old squire John Roddey's wife was present, and she heard Wylie, her father, speak these words.

At or about 1841 or 42 "his Pres. had felt constrained to depose him from the ministry for drunkenness." Whyte did not give up drinking but he never lost faith in nor affection for the church of his ancestors. "Whether at home or abroad, sober or otherwise, he insisted upon the observance of family worship." "As the great civil struggle, '61-65, was closing, the struggle of his old self, his better nature, his godly training, drove away the clouds. He yearned to put on the harness, and was taking steps to be admitted a minister in the First Presbytery, A.R.P. when death claimed him August the 8th, 1865."

One wonders if Whyte made peace with his father who was also a Presbyterian minister named Archibald who lived to be 94. The elder Whyte had itinerated from Vermont to South Carolina and from the Connecticut to the Ohio River on horseback. He had received a call to be pastor from a South Carolina congregation but refused because he was opposed to slavery.

Footnotes

1. (page one) "A great horde" of slave holding families after depleting the soil also left for more fertile cotton lands further west. The two migrations decimated the churches in the Piedmont. By 1860 96.6% of persons in S. C. were born there. But 42% of persons who had been born there had moved away. It was 90 years later before pine trees and soil conservation practices stemmed the devastating erosion of up country land.

Just prior to the tar and feathering incident there were two ministers A. Whyte, Jr. and Horatio Thompson. Churches included Ebenezer, Timber Ridge, Old Providence, and Broad Creek in Virginia. In North Carolina churches were New Lebanon, New Stirling, Cambridge, Virginia Springs, Nob Creek, McGalliard's, Chocran's Vale, Piedmont and Steel Creek. In South Carolina churches were Bethany, Sharon, Neiley's Creek, Smyrna, Little River, and Sardis in Union County. New Stirling had 50 families, the largest number.
2. (page 2) The Rev. Samuel Doaks who founded Washington College and Tusculum Academy a little further north in East Tennessee also opposed slavery. He freed his slaves and sent them to Ohio. He trained a host of preachers, most of whom had abolitionistic views and who with evangelistic zeal sought to convert others.
3. (page 3) John Stirling, elder, had some time before walked out of the Concord Church at Woodward, S. C. There had been a controversy over whether to sing Psalms or hymns. Other members joined him in establishing a new congregation.
4. In 1859 a mob captured a fleeing Yankee Irish stonecutter working on the new Statehouse in Columbia. They said he was a foe far worse than a black, hauled him back to Columbia, and threw him in a jail cell. They brought him out, lashed him, lit a bonfire, heated a kettle, and poured boiling tar in his wounds. They then stuck chicken feathers in the tar. They finally put the agonizing "foreigner" on a train to Charleston, but when he arrived there a mob flung him into jail. For several days they came to jeer and threaten him before finally putting him on a train to New York.
5. Smyrna had never prospered. The only regularly installed pastor had been the Rev. James Lyle who was also pastor of Bethel in Winnsboro and Little River. He had demitted his charges in 1834. In his latter days "his life was out of tune." He deserted the ministry and was suspended in 1837. He shortly moved to Texas where he was accidentally killed by the discharge of a gun in 1840.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Herbert Aptheker, Abolitionism A Revolutionary Movement (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1989).
2. Robert Lathan, "Associate Reformed Presbyterian, "November 22, 1888.
3. Rev. Robert Lathan, D.D., History of the Associate Reformed Synod of the South to which is Prefixed a History of the Associate Presbyterian and Reformed Presbyterian Churches (Harrisburg, Pa: Published for the Author 1882).
4. William W. Freehling, The Road to Disunion, Vol. 1, Secessionists at Bay 1776-1854 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).
5. Al Roseboro, "Notes on 'White Oak.'" March 9th, 1937. Papers of Killough H. Patrick, Winnsboro, S. C.
6. James Brown Scouller, A Manual of the United Presbyterian Church of North America 1751-1887, Second Edition (Pittsburg: United Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1887).
7. James Brewer Stewart, Holy Warriors the Abolitionists and American Slavery (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976).
8. Ernest Trice Thompson, Presbyterians in the South Volume One: 1607-1861 (Richmond: John Knox Press 1963).
9. C. Webster, Editor, The Religious Monitor and Evangelical Repository Vol. 17 Minutes of the Associate Synod of North America June 1840" (Philadelphia: William S. Young 1840-41)
10. Rev. Archibald Whyte, Jr., "A Narrative of Slavery, Tar and Feathering of Rev. Thomas S. Kendall and Consideration of Union Between the Associate and the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Churches" Title and pages 1-16 missing, Papers of Killough H. Patrick, Winnsboro, S. C.
11. "The Abolition Missionary," Yorkville (S.C.) Compiler 17 October 1840.
12. The Centennial History of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church 1803-1903 (Charleston, S. C.: Presses of Walker, Evans & Cogswell., 1905).