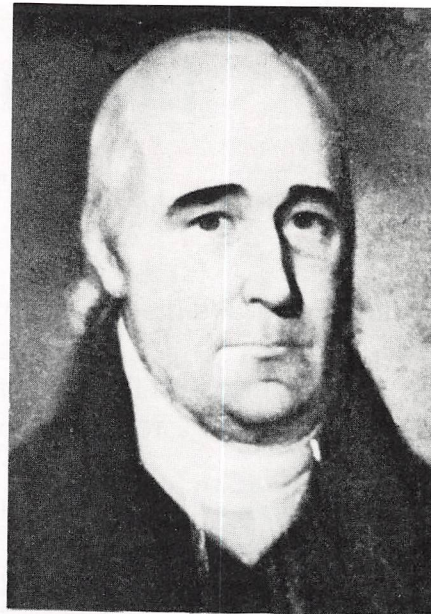


On a sultry August day in 1825, a solemn procession wound through the cobblestone streets of Charleston. In ranks six abreast, behind a horse-drawn hearse, marched the civic and social leaders of the city—the aristocratic, the powerful. Behind them, still six abreast, the humbler folk came in a line that stretched nearly three city blocks. When the procession reached St. Michael’s Church, it halted momentarily, then proceeded again, and the bells in the tower began to toll—an honor reserved for very few.

The man they honored was Richard Furman, a Baptist preacher, a holy and humble man of God. That he was holy could be attested by the hundreds whose feet he had, by tireless effort, guided on the path to a better life, and his humility was evidenced by a remarkable lifetime of service to man and to God. Yet the mourners who crowded forward that day were only adding their last, silent respects to the multitudes of honors that had been heaped upon him during his lifetime. He was a remarkable man, a preacher whose eloquence in the halls of Congress had brought the nation’s lawmakers to their feet, yet one who could preach with the same devout emotion to the simple backwoods farmer; he was a polished and cultivated gentleman who moved with ease through the rarified society of Charleston, yet had grown up in the Carolina backcountry, an area inhabited by people described as “dissolute” and “idle”, who were mostly illiterate and who still lived in fear of Indian attacks. He was a scholar whose literary attainments were legendary and who had been awarded three honorary degrees, yet who had never had one full year of formal education. He was more: an author, educator, missionary, farmer, medical practitioner, hymn writer, surveyor, journalist, organizer and agitator. He was a devoted husband, the father of 17 children, and the progenitor of a remarkable body of descendants that includes a high percentage of clergymen, to which can be added eminent scholars and educators, scientists, doctors, lawyers, bankers, authors—men in whom achievement seems to be foreordained. He was a man of peace, who, when Alexander Hamilton was killed in a duel, preached a moving appeal for the abolition of that practice; yet in his youth, he had been forced to flee for his life with a price on his head, accused of inciting rebellion against the government of George III.

The mourners in Charleston on that hot summer day knew that they had lost one of their most distinguished and versatile citizens. Historians of today, with perspective gained by the passage of time, call him the greatest Baptist preacher since Roger Williams. His monument stands in the burial ground of his church in Charleston where he served for 38 years. But if greater monuments are needed, the educational institutions into which he breathed life—



Richard Furman, Pastor and Educator

By JAMES L. HAYNSWORTH

among them Furman University, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and George Washington University—stand, perhaps, as the monuments which he would have preferred.

Records indicate that Richard Furman’s emigrant ancestor, John Firmin, was a native of Stoke-by-Nayland, a village in Suffolk, the center of Puritan agitation. It is more than coincidence, then, that the great Baptist had a nonconformist background. John Firmin came to Salem with Endicott in Gov. Winthrop’s fleet in 1631. With his brother Giles, he settled at Watertown, Mass.

Josiah Furman, son of John, who had come to America with his father, was living on Long Island before 1650. In 1712, a great-grandson of Josiah, Wood Furman, was born. Following the Puritan tradition of his family, he was well educated; he seems, in fact, to have been accomplished in many fields, though not very successful in business. He entered the mercantile profession in New York City and married Rachel Brodhead, a descendant of both Dutch patroons and of their English conquerors.

Perhaps at her urging, and possibly in the hope of securing better business connections, he moved to Esopus (now Kingston), N. Y., and there his second son, Richard, was born on Oct. 9, 1755.

The frontier settlements of South Carolina were far removed from the neat Dutch farms of the Hudson Valley in 1755. Yet, like his great-grandfather, the restless Wood Furman heard the siren call of those who sought new settlers in their land, and with his teen-age son Josiah, made the overland trip during the summer of 1755. His wife, with their 3-year-old daughter Sarah and infant son Richard, followed by sea to Charles Town the next spring. What Wood Furman found was not entirely to his liking. True, he had obtained a large grant of excellent land, situated in the Wateree Valley on the slopes of the beautiful High Hills of the Santee, which rise sharply and unexpectedly from the flat, sandy plain and give the area a look of the far-off Appalachian foothills. Though he found some demand for his services as a surveyor, he must have been appalled by his neighbors. The life of the pioneer was hard, and—isolated as they were by the almost total absence of roads—the struggle for survival occupied their every moment, leaving no time for the intellectual pursuits that Wood Furman enjoyed. They lived in cabins with earthen floors and no windows and probably worked with their slaves in the fields and forests, if, indeed, they had slaves.

There was still some danger from Indian attack. In 1736 a family of white settlers had been murdered by Indians on Pine Tree Creek, about 15 miles north of Wood Furman's grant. As late as 1760 Indians murdered a white family about 30 miles beyond Pine Tree Hill. It may be that Wood Furman found these conditions too primitive for his tastes. He knew that such an existence would soon demoralize even a well-bred gentleman. It may be, as has been suggested, that he did not find sufficient educational opportunity for his children. Whatever the reason, he soon moved closer to civilization and became a schoolmaster in the parish of St. Thomas and St. Denis in Berkeley County. The school was established by an endowment fund known as "Beresford's Bounty." The Beresford Bounty, named for Richard Beresford, whose will established it in 1721, is the only colonial endowment for public education still of any importance. Even today it provides a substantial income that is administered by the Episcopal Diocese of South Carolina. Since good public schools are established in that area now, it is used to provide camp scholarships and to help with the work of the Sunday school and the diocesan mission there.

For five years Wood Furman taught the poor children of St. Thomas Parish, then decided to try his hand at agriculture. He moved his family to Daniel's Island, within sight of Charles Town. Here Richard Furman spent his boyhood.

By May 1770, Wood Furman had proved his ability as a planter, so he again pulled up his stakes, and this time moved back to his lands in the High Hills of the Santee. Here he pursued the occupations of planter, surveyor and Judge of Ordinary in Camden District. He was the first county judge after the organization of the county court system in the Camden Election District. He was a vestryman of the church and a member of the Assembly which formed the State Constitution. Thus, in his latter years, he seems to have acquired the prosperity and respect which had eluded him in his youth.

Upon their arrival on the Wateree, the Furmans found that many changes had taken place in their absence. The area was well populated, roads had been cut and plantations had replaced the forest clearings of the pioneers. The greatest change, however, had occurred in the religious life of the people.

It is a historical certainty that there were Puritans among the first settlers of South Carolina, and the Baptists themselves had arrived by 1696. Because of the infamous Munster debacle, the Anabaptists were unwelcome even in some American colonies; and regarding them as dangerous to government and religion, Massachusetts Bay in 1644 and Virginia in 1659 passed laws against persons refusing to have infants baptized. After 1670 such persons could find peace in Carolina, where, in matters of religion, toleration was the attitude of the provincial government towards all sects (except the Roman Catholic faith) dissenting from the Anglican Church. The province had several dissenting governors between 1670 and 1700.

The Baptists of the Charleston church were Particular (Orthodox Regular) Baptists who were in the main Calvinistic, holding to election and close communion of the elect only and using the congregational type of church organization. Whitefield preached in Charleston, and for a time, a Separate Baptist congregation blossomed there. But these eventually lost ground and were absorbed by the Particular Church, which lacked the evangelical zeal of the Separates. So when the Rev. Philip Mulkey led a group of New Lights (Separate Baptists) into the backwoods of South Carolina in 1759, he found fertile territory in which to sow his seed. He founded a church on the Congaree River in 1766, and one of his early converts, Joseph Reese, became a minister himself.

Like Mulkey, Reese aroused religious enthusiasm by his peculiarly effective preaching in widely separated localities. One of these was the High Hills of the Santee, where a church was soon organized. Young Richard Furman—then only 16—heard the preacher and was overwhelmed by what he heard. He had had a mild interest in religion before, but the exhortations of the evangelist filled him with apprehension of instant destruction. His youthful mind

became constantly filled with the terrors of God's wrath, but the experience which he sought—the rebirth in Christ which was promised—somehow eluded him. His son describes his conversion experience thus:

Attending a meeting appointed as a sacramental season for hearing experience as introductory to the administration of Baptism, he was urged by Mr. Reese to come forward; but though desirous of submitting to the ordinance, he was deterred by doubts and diffidence. In great anxiety, he retired to the woods and prostrating himself in prayer to God, received such manifestations of divine love as induced him to return immediately and presented himself as a candidate, at the same time saying that he had no experience to relate but came as a sinner willing to accept the free grace of the gospel.

We do not know what manifestations he received in the woods, but it is not hard to understand his diffidence. His Church of England background and his gentle upbringing could only have produced conservatism and decorum in his manner. His education and his associations in Charleston could only have made a display of emotion unseemly in his eyes. Indeed, throughout his ministry he maintained a serious deportment and discouraged any overly enthusiastic religious expressions in others.

After his conversion, it was, perhaps, inevitable that he should feel compelled to enter the ministry; his education and new-found religious conviction would prompt it. But he was, after all, only 16 years old, and his father counseled him to bide his time for a while. Wood Furman remained loyal to the Church of England throughout his life, but Rachel, his wife, became a Baptist with her son. She probably felt more at home in the Baptist Church than the Anglican, having been brought up in the Dutch Reformed Church in New York.

Young Richard stayed at home and helped his father on the plantation. He learned agriculture and surveying, and often aided his semiliterate neighbors with his knowledge of the latter; but he could not stay out of the pulpit. After the sermon of a visiting minister, he was soon accustomed to the task of adding some words of exhortation. But there were other boys of less conviction and maturity in the congregation, and he became the object of their derision. They held mock religious meetings to mimic and embarrass him, but the participants failed to discourage him. He persisted in his course with dignity and devotion, and they soon began to pay him the respect that he was earning.

After two years of occasional ministrations, the members of the High Hills church felt that he was qualified, in spite of his age, to become their regular pastor. In spite of the difficulties brought on by his youth and his father's objections, he assumed the post, thus beginning his ministry, unordained, at the age of 17. He intensified his efforts to fit himself for

the role which he had chosen; he studied his Bible intensely, struggled to improve his method and delivery, and traveled to other settlements to hold services, all the while continuing his farming and surveying. In December 1773, a great camp meeting took place in the High Hills, and it was attended by both laity and clergy from far and near. One of the ministers attending was the Rev. Oliver Hart, of the First Baptist Church of Charleston, and he heard the young Furman preach. A friendship developed between the two men which was to play an important part in Richard Furman's subsequent career. In May 1774, possibly at the urging of Mr. Hart, Furman was ordained by the Rev. Messrs. Evan Pugh and Joseph Reese, and he officially took charge of the High Hills Baptist Church. It must have been a great satisfaction to him, shortly after his ordination, that the first person he was called upon to baptize was his only sister Sarah, now married to Henry Haynsworth. In November of the same year, shortly after his 19th birthday, he was married to Elizabeth Haynsworth, Henry's sister. Whatever persuasions he used on Elizabeth in winning her hand, however, were to no avail in winning her soul. Except for his children and second wife, his sister Sarah Furman Haynsworth was the only member of his family that he ever converted. Their correspondence indicates that they were devotedly attached to each other throughout their lives. Like her brother, Sarah was beautifully educated. She seemed to share his religious convictions, and she served as church clerk at the High Hills for more than half a century—an unusual accomplishment for a woman in those days. During the 13 years that he was pastor at High Hills, she was his right hand. After he went to Charleston they kept in close touch with each other by correspondence and visits.

His pastorate began in stirring times. Richard Furman studiously avoided discussing political matters in his pulpit, but as war approached, he knew that he could not ignore the activities about him. He soon developed the conviction that his country was, even in its embryo state, destined by Providence to be a powerful instrument in advancing His cause throughout the world—a theory which harked back to his Puritan ancestors. He decided that since he had been called to his mission at a time when attempts were being made to crush this cause, he was also called to defend it with all his might. Having come to these conclusions, he threw himself into the fight with all his energy and began preaching the cause of the Revolution.

When invasion threatened, Furman enlisted in his brother Josiah's newly formed company and marched off to Charleston to fight. But Gov. John Rutledge, having heard of his services, urged him to go back and continue his work of enlisting the colonists, assuring him that he could thus serve his country better than by shouldering a musket. His agitation had not gone

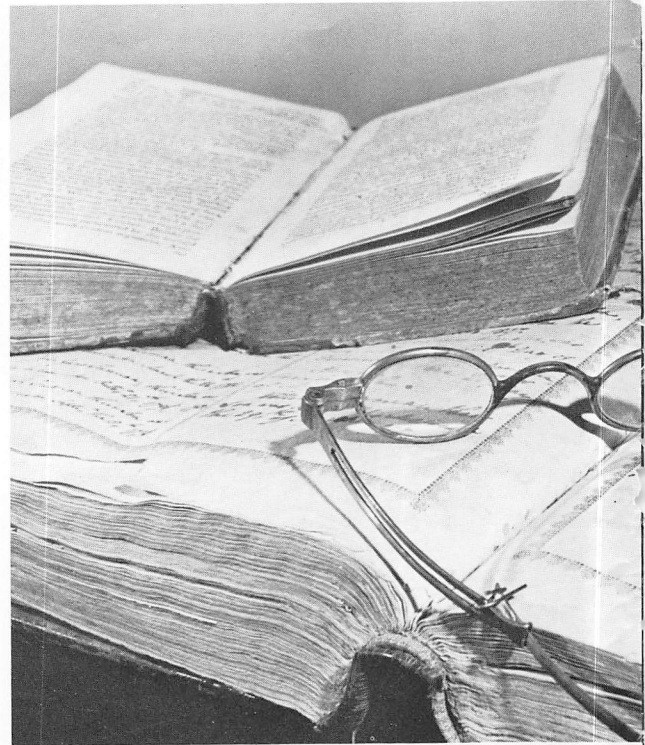
unnoticed in the British camp, and measures were taken to silence him. James Monroe, in later years, described the incident thus:

It seems young Furman was not only an enthusiastic Baptist preacher, but an ardent advocate of rebellion, and everywhere, on stumps, in barns, as well as in the pulpit, prayed and preached resistance to Britain and alarm to the Tories. Urged by the latter, Lord Cornwallis who had been made aware of his influence and daring, offered a thousand pounds for his head. Ascertaining that the Tories were on his track, young Furman fled to the American camp, which, by his prayers and eloquent appeals he reassured, insomuch that it was reported Cornwallis made the remark that he feared the prayers of that godly youth more than the armies of Sumter and Marion.

It was after the capture of Charleston in 1780, when general possession of the state became untenable to the Americans, that Furman, with his wife and two children, fled to safety in Virginia. Except for occasional secret visits to the High Hills, he remained near the border of North Carolina and Virginia until after the victory at King's Mountain. Here he became friendly with Patrick Henry, who frequently came to hear him preach. From Gov. Henry he received a gift of an English work on rhetoric, Ward's *Oratory*, the volumes of which are still treasured by his descendants. In the fall of 1782 he returned to the High Hills church to resume his pastoral duties. His parents were safe and well: Wood Furman had taken an active part in political affairs and had been an elected representative to the famous Jacksonboro Assembly, which re-established self-government in South Carolina. But in February 1783, Wood Furman died. Since Richard was the only minister available, it became his mournful duty to officiate and preach his father's funeral oration.

Furman returned to South Carolina to find that all the denominations had suffered from the impact of war. Public worship had practically ceased during that time. The British were particularly careful to destroy the meeting houses of the dissenters as "schism and sedition shops." The Rev. James Jenkins, later a Methodist circuit rider, relates that this "was a dark day indeed in this region of the country. During the space of nearly ten years I do not remember to have heard more than two sermons."

Furman set about to do his best to rebuild the forces of religion. He took every opportunity to instill in his fellow ministers a regard for education and encouraged them to apply themselves to self-improvement. In a number of instances, he provided the necessary books at his own expense; indeed, throughout his life, he continually ordered books from abroad for the use of the clergy. He had some spectacular results. One example is the case of a visiting preacher from Georgia who, though he was a man of unusual ability and piety, was prejudiced against learning. After an interview with Furman, however, he became convinced of its value, and



became an exemplary student. The man was Silas Mercer, and the principles which he instilled in his son, Jesse, made that young man one of the leading exponents of education in his state.

In 1786, Furman, together with Gen. Thomas Sumter and other gentlemen of the neighborhood, organized the Claremont Society, which opened a school and a library in the High Hills. The school was called Claremont Academy and provided a boarding house for the pupils who came from a distance. Two men were employed to instruct the boys, and a separate department for girls was also provided. Unfortunately, the school did not prosper and closed in 1788. About the same time a newspaper appeared in the neighborhood called the *Claremont Gazette*. In November 1786, copies of the paper were sent to Charleston by the Rev. Mr. Furman, and we may safely assume that he had a hand in its publication.

After repeated calls, Furman left the High Hills and became pastor of the First Baptist Church in Charleston in 1787. Shortly before, his wife Elizabeth had died, as had one of their infant children. But in 1789 he persuaded Miss Dorothea Burn of Charleston that they might help forward each other on their journey to Canaan, and they were married on May 5th of that year. He was to serve in the Charleston church for the remaining 38 years of his life.

The Charleston Association had carried on work in missions and ministerial education from its beginning. In 1757 a fund was started to aid worthy students in their theological training. With the coming of Richard Furman to the Charleston church and to a recognized position of leadership in the association, the maintenance of the education fund received renewed impetus. In 1791 he was instrumental in founding the General Committee for the Charleston Baptist Associ-



Richard Furman's spectacles rest on the large, ornate Bible from which he read to his many congregations. These artifacts and other Furman memorabilia are located in the Richard Furman Room at Furman University.

—Photos courtesy Rick Hays, Furman University

ation Fund, whose purpose was to aid in the education of ministers. Despite indifference and lack of support, by 1825 the fund had assisted some 32 students, several of whom had graduated from Rhode Island College (now Brown University): it had aided others, such as Jesse Mercer, with books and money; it had sent other students to Roberts Academy in the High Hills (where it also provided a theological and scientific library); and an account of its other benefits would fill a volume.

Richard Furman's greatest opportunity to advance the cause of education came in 1814 at the first national Baptist convention, afterward called the "Triennial." He had been especially invited to attend and, encouraged by his flock, made the journey to Philadelphia overland. He had become, by this time, the most eminent and influential Baptist minister in America and was unanimously elected president of the convention at the first session. The conclave had been called to discuss the possibility of a combined missionary effort, and had been inspired by the conversion of two prominent missionaries—Judson and Rice—to the Baptist persuasion. The convention gave Furman an opportunity to put forward his "Plan of Education," and as a result, the agenda was expanded to include educational organizations. The plan provided for the assistance of ministerial students in various institutions of learning, preparing them for advanced training and, when there should be enough money, for the establishment of a theological seminary. The plan was adopted by the convention, but almost immediately was seized and distorted by Rice who made rash and irresponsible decisions. A theological seminary was established in Washington, and Rice traversed the country from New England to the Gulf of Mexico, preaching the crusade of mission and

proclaiming, at the same time, the crusade of education. His management of the project, however, was inept, and he involved the institution in financial difficulties from which it never recovered. The Columbian College, as it was called, was later absorbed into George Washington University.

As his fame grew, Furman maintained an humble and kindly manner. Children loved him, and in addressing them, he used the prefix "Master" or "Miss" to their proper names. Although he mingled with the rich and powerful, he could gently reprove their haughtiness by greeting, in their presence, a pious Negro slave with an outstretched hand and the words, "How do you do, Sister Clarinda?" He himself was a slave owner, but he recognized an equality of souls in those who professed the religion of Christ.

He was loved and respected by rich and poor, master and slave. Both Gen. Pickney and Col. Robert Barnwell, distinguished members of the Episcopal Church, sought his counsel on matters of religion. During his ministry of 54 years, he, more than any other person, was instrumental in gaining respectability for the Baptist Church and its clergy. The high position which the Baptists have attained in South Carolina—that church having more members in the state than all others combined—was largely due to the patient, dedicated work of Furman.

On Aug. 25, 1825, Richard Furman died. He suffered greatly in his last days, and his daughter attributed his death to "iliac-passion," which we now know as an intestinal block. His death, though foreseen by himself, came as a shock to his friends and relatives. In her diary, a young church member wrote at the time:

Oh! where is my precious pastor—my spiritual father? The tomb has been opened, but he is not there. The body will moulder; the grave cannot retain the immortal soul. He is gone, and we shall see him no more on earth. Those dear feet will never tread the aisles of the sanctuary again. And those dear hands which so often dispensed the emblems of the body and blood of Christ are now cold and lifeless. His death was sudden and unexpected. Multitudes of his spiritual children gathered to mourn around his placid, sweet face, so beautiful even in death. Sobs and sighs are heard from thousands. Oh, my Father, my Father!

James L. Haynsworth is an advertising artist and is currently Public Information Director for the State Division of General Services.