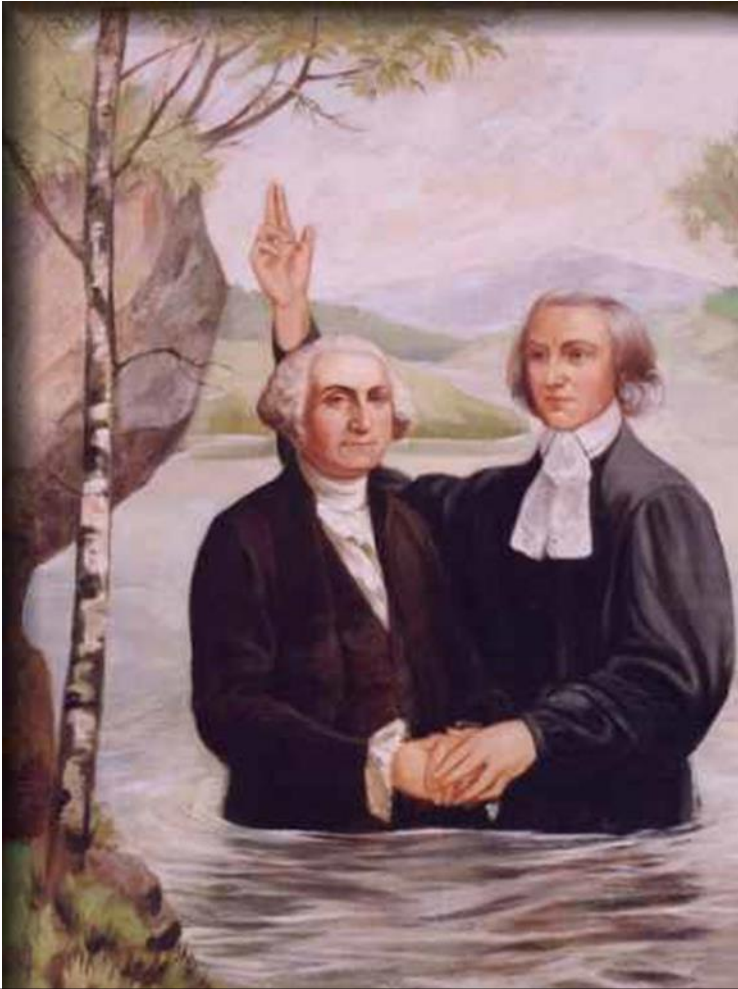




George Washington's Baptism

By Lemuel Call Barnes -

Richard St. James, Editor

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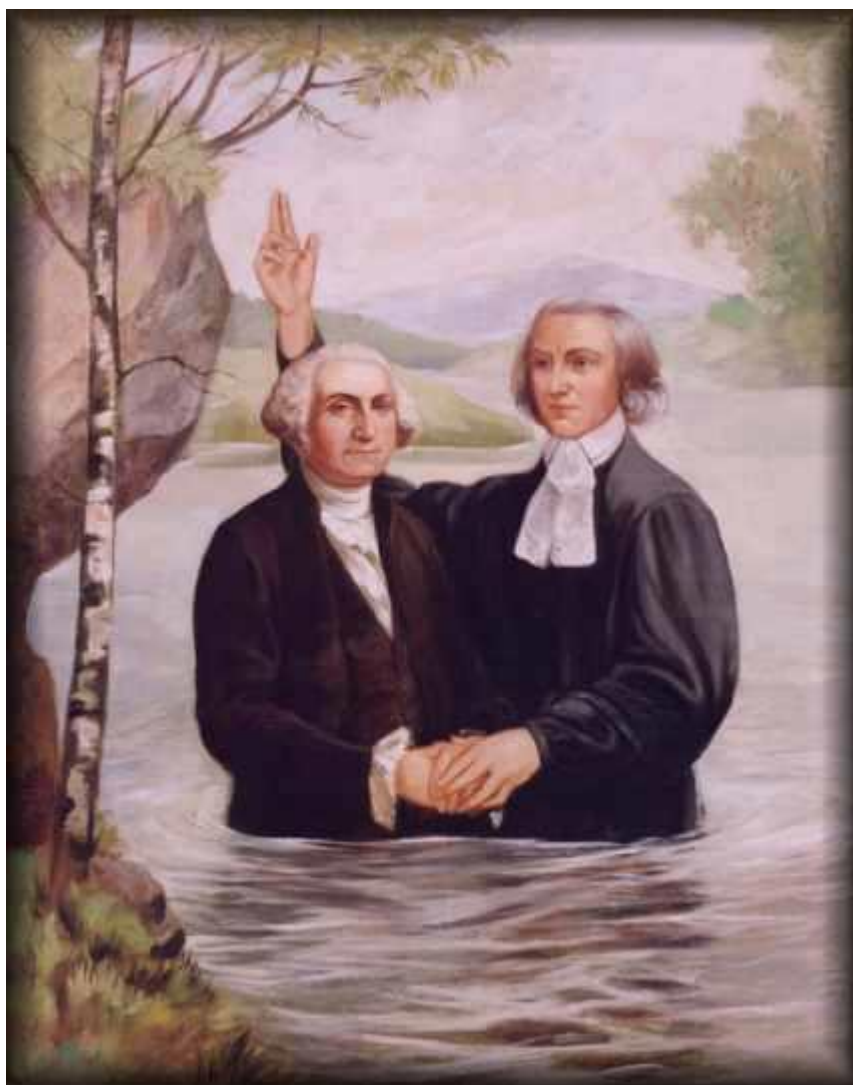
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[The Direct Evidence](#)

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1. In the first of the three lines of transmission there are two testimonies, as follows:

Georgetown, Ky.
Aug. 16, 1889

“I am the grandson of Rev. John Gano, now in my eighty-third year, and the brother of Mrs. Margaret Ewing. I was raised from my fifth year to manhood by Mrs. Margaret Hubbell (nee Gano), I have heard her say that her father baptized (immersed) General Washington.

S. F. Gano, M.D.
Subscribed and sworn to in my presence this 16th day of August, 1889.
Stephen Gano Long
Notary Public
State of Kentucky.”

2. The third independent line of evidence is Margaret Ewing (Gano):

To whom it may concern: I, Margaret Ewing (nee Gano) aged 90 years last May, being of sound mind and memory, make this statement: I have often heard my aunt Margaret Hubbell (nee Gano), the eldest daughter of Rev. John Gano, say that **her father told her that he baptized General George Washington, at Valley Forge**, to the best of my recollection. She, Mrs. Hubbell, also said that General Washington, for prudent reasons did not desire that his baptism should be made public. **Rev, John Gano was a Chaplain in the Revolutionary War and an intimate personal friend of General Washington.**

Margaret Ewing
Subscribed and sworn to in my presence this 10th day of August, 1889.
Stephen G, Long Notary Public
State of Kentucky”

These testimonies were obtained for the present writer, in 1889, by the courteous aid of Rev. R. M. Dudley, D, D., President of Georgetown College, Kentucky. The fact that they have lain 37 years unpublished is but an illustration of how easily “perishable the remembrance” of such a fact might be, even in the hands of one who had taken a real interest in preserving it.

This two-fold testimony seems to make it certain that Chaplain John Gano told his eldest daughter that he baptized General George Washington. There is no known reason for doubting the competence or the veracity of any of the links in this evidence. In fact, there is only one link between the witnesses and the man who performed the service. Such evidence is not to be whiffed away. It is either to be accepted or disproved. If disproved, it must be by something more substantial than conjectural hypotheses.

But it does not stand alone. The testimony in the second independent line was originally printed in some paper, the name of which is not known. It was reprinted in the

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“Watchman” of Boston 1889. It contains two or three slight errors, or rather slips, to be noted in the reading, which have however no bearing on the point in question. The incidental facts of geography and of personal history introduced have been carefully and fully verified and found correct. The statement reads:

“Being requested by my brother, Joseph W. D. Creath of Texas, who is now at my house, I make the following statement of facts: In 1810 Daniel Benedict [It must have been as late as 1818, and was David instead of Daniel Benedict.] the author of the history of the American Baptists, staid at my father’s house in Mecklenburg County, Virginia, some ten days, during which time I distributed his history, to which my father obtained a number of subscribers; and while he was at my father’s house he gave my mother the life of Doctor John Gano, who, he told mother, was Chaplain to General Washington’s army during the revolutionary war and that he, Gano, immersed Washington during the war privately, and that Washington did not wish it known; and this statement he, Benedict, received from his father-in-law Stephen Gano of Rhode Island, and he received it from his father who moved from the Eastern states and settled in Town Fork, in Fayette County, Ky., near Lexington, and had the care of the Baptist church there; and my uncle, Jacob Creath, Sr., succeeded him in the pastorate of said church, as he told me and as I believe he did and as I heard others say, I saw and read the life of Gano which Benedict gave to my mother, and I heard her often relate what Benedict told her respecting the baptism of Washington by Doctor Gano, who died in Kentucky.

Jacob Creath
Palmyra, Mo. August 11, 1874.”

The only reason known for hesitation as to this statement is the wonder that David Benedict, the Baptist historian, should have told this in Virginia and not, so far as is recorded, elsewhere. That his common reticence on the subject should have been broken at this one point only, could not be effectually denied, however, unless one knew all the outward and psychological conditions of the case. Exceptional action is not unnatural. To Miss Maria Benedict, living in Providence, R. I., in 1889, the daughter of David Benedict, the account of her father’s statement seemed reasonable and trustworthy. That Stephen Gano, who had been a surgeon in Washington’s army and was like his General a devoted member of the Masonic Fraternity, and who believed in private baptism, should not have published the matter to the world is only what we should expect. The line of evidence, therefore, reaching back to Chaplain Gano, through David Benedict and Stephen Gano, is especially strong. Could anything but a fact have run that gauntlet and survived?

3. The third independent line of evidence is through General R. M. Gano of Texas. His affidavit reads as follows:

”Dallas, Texas
March 27, 1891

The tradition in our family of the immersion of George Washington by my great-

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grandfather near Valley Forge I have heard from my childhood, and never had any knowledge of any one doubting it until my attention was called to the fact, that was due to the fact, partly that General Washington demanded in a quiet way and wished no demonstration made over it, and partly to the fact that it was not according to Baptist usage to immerse any one who was not received into the Baptist church. But the Gano and Ewing and Beal and many other families with whom I have conversed both in Kentucky and in Virginia have the tradition in their Families.

But among all with whom I ever conversed, old uncle Daniel Gano, the oldest son of John Gano, the minister who immersed Washington, knew most.

Said Daniel Gano was a captain of artillery in the Revolutionary War, at which time his father was Chaplain. He died in Scott County, Kentucky, at about the age of 94 years, when I was a youth. I remember his appearance and conversational manner well. But being about a half a century since I cannot recollect exactly what he said about the immersion of General Washington by his father.

But I do remember the impression made upon my mind that he knew more about it than any one I had ever seen. But I cannot say at this remote date that he was an eye witness of the immersion, I have talked with some who were eye witnesses. I have the impression that there were about forty-two witnesses present.

R. M. Gano
State of Texas
County of Dallas

This day personally appeared R. M. Gano, who being duly sworn, said the foregoing was true to the best of his knowledge and belief.

Witness my hand and official seal of office, this 27th day of March, 1891.

S. B. Scott, County Clerk
Dallas, Texas by W. E. Keller
Dep'ty"

The most doubtful point in this testimony is as to the number of witnesses. Exactly that point Gen. Gano states in a doubtful way. His doubt on this point is therefore confirmatory of the reliability of his memory. A similar remark is true of Margaret Ewing's way of referring to Valley Forge as the locality. Gen. Gano however refers to Valley Forge without using any mark of less certain recollection in that particular. There is a natural presumption in favor of the vicinity of Morristown or Newberg. But there is no impossibility in its having been at Valley Forge. The place is a matter of no consequence.

If incidental features of the testimony were in much greater doubt than they are, the validity of the evidence as to the main fact would not be thereby shaken. There is no conflict in the testimonies. Three distinct lines of transmission assent that three children of Chaplain Gano, his eldest daughter, his eldest son, and his physician-minister son, the

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two sons having been fellow-officers with their father in General Washington's army – that these three children believed that their father baptized Washington.

With two of the children our sworn witnesses have personally talked. By one of these children two of our witnesses were reared from childhood. One of these two witnesses is a physician who may be supposed to know something of the value of evidence. With the daughter of Chaplain Gano he was reared to manhood.

How did time children of the chaplain who were adults at the time in discussion come to believe, so as to instill it into others without a question that their father baptized Washington? The evidence makes the interrogation insistent. How would this answer do, the baptism was a fact?

Circumstantial Evidence of Washington's Baptism by John Gano

This proves nothing although eminent jurists can be quoted insisting that circumstantial evidence may be more convincing than direct evidence, being less subject to impeachment. All that need be said in the present case is that a comprehensive view of pertinent circumstances removes completely one's first thought of utter improbability as to the alleged fact.

IS IT PROBABLE THAT WASHINGTON, SPRINKLED IN INFANCY, BRED IN THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND AND CONTINUED TO THE END IN THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH, COULD AT ANY TIME HAVE SEEN IT TO BE HIS DUTY TO BE BAPTIZED, I.E. IMMERSED?

It will be recognized at once (that the improbability would be far greater than it is, if he had been reared in almost any of the other Pedobaptist churches, e.g., the Presbyterian. But immersion continued to be the common practice of the Church of England till within less than one hundred years of the birth of Washington.

Washington's own prayer book taught him that baptism is preferable to any substitute for the act. Its rubric read and still reads, not only in the order for 'the baptism of children, but also in that for "such as of riper years; ---. And then shall dip him in water or pour water upon him." At another point it says, "After the immersion or pouring of water." Seven times over, and always as the first choice, is placed the New Testament act, the substitute being named only as an alternative. In one place the substitute is not even mentioned, the only thing spoken of being "dip-ping," In our own day has not a Dean of the Church of England shown so convincingly what the act of Apostolic baptism was, that his article has been published as a Baptist tract? It is within the range of individual observation that more than one thoughtful Episcopalian has been baptized as a result of reading that article.

Washington speaks in one of his letters of the fact that his stepson had begun the study of the Greek New Testament with a tutor at Mt. Vernon. Is it possible that, at meal time, or

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of an evening in that farmer's mansion, the actual meaning of the word strong>“baptize” may have been discussed. At any rate, Washington doubtless knew enough of his English Bible to know that it spoke of “one baptism” only, and did not contain the “or pour” of his prayer book. It may not have needed the instruction of a Dean or even of a Baptist minister, to convince his well-balanced, conscientious and fearless mind that he must himself obey the command, “Repent and be baptized,” and that it would not answer to change it into a command, “Repent and have been baptized (in infancy) or poured.” We have reasonably gathered that the Episcopalian atmosphere which Washington breathed may have been, if not favorable, at least not hostile to a correct view as to that was the primitive act of baptism.

But if we knew the actual opinion on the subject in the church circles in which he moved, should we be likely to find it as we have supposed. Happily we know what was his intimate church circle and what it had to say about the matter in question. During the various periods of Washington's residence in Philadelphia he had for rector in Christ Church, which he attended, Rev. William White, a man of almost angelic face, as portrayed in the engraving at the beginning of Volume V of Sprague's *Annals of the American Pulpit*. Mr. White was one of the exceedingly few ministers of the Church of England in America who stood true to the American cause. It is said that he was the only one in Pennsylvania. He offered the prayers for the King and Royal family, until the Sunday immediately preceding the Declaration of Independence, but he then ceased to do so and took the oath of allegiance to the United States.” The next year he was chosen Chaplain of Congress, to which service he was continually reelected till the removal of the seat of government to the District of Columbia.

Mr. White's only sister was the wife of Robert Morris, the financier of the patriot cause, Washington's adopted son, George Washington Park Curtis, in his “*Recollections and Private Memoirs of Washington*,” says, “if I am asked,— ‘Did not Washington unbend and admit to familiarity and social friendship some one person to whom age and long interesting association gave peculiar privilege, the privilege of the Heart? I answer, that favored individual was Robert Morris.’” William White, who had become the first regularly ordained Bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church in America, himself says, “The Father of our country, as well during the revolutionary war, as in his presidency, attended divine service in Christ Church.” “I was often in company with this great man, and had the honor of dining often at his table.”” He was pleased to express himself gratified by what he had heard from our pulpit.”

What had he heard from that pulpit? Among other things, very likely the following opinion, which Bishop White declared to the world in his “*Lectures on the Catechism of the Protestant Episcopal Church*” published in Philadelphia in 1813. Speaking concerning the question as to immersion or sprinkling, he says, “The result, in the estimation of him who now writes, is that the present general practice is a deviation from what it was originally which it is desirable to restore to the standard of the Rubrics as they were framed in the Church of England, and as they continue to this day in the liturgy of that and of the American Church, although fallen by universal custom into neglect.”

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In the particular now under consideration, therefore, the ascertained facts do more than to simply remove any improbability that Washington could have looked with favor on immersion. They show that in the circle of highest Episcopalian authority in the land, the very circle in which Washington was personally intimate, immersion was advocated as the original, the correct and the “desirable” act of baptism, Washington never broke connection with the church of his birth.

We can easily understand how he may have believed that change of ecclesiastical relation might impair confidence in his judgment and his influence as the leader of the people in those bitterly partisan and troublous times especially as the few Baptists were surely devoted to the Republic anyway and on principle while some of the Episcopalian leaders were not.

There would appear to be nothing in the least disingenuous in his being privately immersed and yet remaining an adherent of the Episcopal church, if, on the one hand Bishop White advocated immersion, and on the other, Chaplain Gano was ready and glad to baptize every one who wished the ordinance, of whatever Pedobaptist church he might be and continue to be a member.

Under the first question of probability, it must be concluded that it is not improbable that Washington, though sprinkled in infancy, bred in the Church of England, and continuing to the end in the Episcopal Church, may have seen it to be his duty to be baptized.

IS IT PROBABLE THAT A BAPTIST MINISTER WOULD HAVE BAPTIZED WASHINGTON WITHOUT THE VOTE OF A CHURCH AND WITHOUT HIS BECOMING A MEMBER OF A BAPTIST CHURCH?

Such certainly would not be the ordinary method of procedure. Exceptions however have always been sanctioned in emergencies. During the war of 1861- 65, hundreds of soldiers were baptized by Baptist chaplains, many of them during active campaigns, far from settled quarters and formalities, some of them in plain sight and range of the pickets on the opposite side. But apart from exceptional emergencies, there have been some Baptist ministers who have habitually baptized every one who applied and gave evidence of being a genuine Christian, whatever his former or subsequent church relations might be.

We have no direct evidence as to the views of John Gano on this subject. But it is, at least, interesting to note the views and practice of his son Rev. Stephen Gano, M. D., who was for thirty-six years pastor of the First Baptist church in Providence, R. I. In a pamphlet register of members of that ancient church, published in 1832, four years after his death, is a biographical sketch of Pastor Gano. It contains this paragraph,

“As to his denominational views and attachments, Dr. Gano was a Baptist of the old school, of the true, regular and orthodox cast, he was also a thorough-going adherent to all the peculiarities of his favorite sect, with the exception of the treatment of persons baptized by immersion in other communities. He had no scruples at administering the ordinance of baptism to all in whom he could recognize the characteristics of genuine

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discipleship to our blessed Lord, whether they were about to become church members with his own denomination or to unite in other communities. He was also fully settled in the belief that Baptist churches ought, in consistency with their principle, to admit to their communion table all real Christians who have been baptized by immersion on a profession of their faith, to whatever denomination they might belong. Many were the cases of his performing the baptismal rite to members of Pedobaptist churches.”

When we remember that all the theological training Dr. Stephen Gano had, was under the tuition of his father, Chaplain Gano, it is certainly no violation of probabilities to suppose that Chaplain Gano could have baptized General Washington without scruple, leaving him to remain without disturbance in the church wherein he was born. One might even go further, and wonder whether the unusual view which the genial Stephen Gano so tenaciously held in opposition to most of his brethren, is not best accounted for by supposing some such distinguished fact behind it as the baptism of Washington by his father. But the opinion and practice of the son is brought forward, not to establish a probability, but simply to remove any improbability, that Washington may have been privately baptized by the father, the fact being cherished as an entirely worthy family secret.

IS IT PROBABLE THAT WASHINGTON’S KNOWLEDGE OF BAPTISTS AND RELATIONS WITH BAPTISTS WERE SUCH AS TO FAVORABLY DISPOSE HIM TOWARD THE PRACTICAL ADOPTION OF ONE OF THEIR VIEWS? Baptists were at that time generally despised and spoken against.

One thing, however, was greatly in their favor. They were true to the American cause. In view of some of the circumstances in the case this was a remarkable fact, which must have impressed intelligent observers. They themselves felt called upon to explain, Isaac Backus said, “Since the Baptists have often been oppressed in this land, and would have suffered more than they did had it not been for restraints from Great Britain, how came they to join in the war against her? Many have wondered at it, and some have censured them severely therefore. But they had the following reasons for their conduct.

1. Where Episcopalians have had all the power of government, they have never allowed others so much liberty as we have enjoyed. In England all are taxed to their worship, while none are admitted into civil offices both communicants in their church. In Virginia they cruelly imprisoned Baptist ministers, only for preaching the gospel to perishing souls without license from their courts, until this war compelled them to desist therefrom. Of this we had incontestable evidence. Therefore we had no rational hopes of real advantage in joining with them.”

Mr. Backus proceeds with four other reasons of different kinds, laying hold of the deepest principles of both religious and civil liberty, “the immutable rules of truth and equity.” Long lists of Tories are in print containing many hundreds of names, one of them 926 names but so far as is known, there are no names of Baptists among them. There is no need of discussion on this subject, for Washington himself said in his address to the Baptist Churches of Virginia,

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“I recollect with satisfaction that the religious society of which you are members have been, throughout America, uniformly and almost unanimously the firm friends of civil liberty and the persevering promoters of our glorious revolution.”

Washington said “almost unanimously.” There was one well known Baptist minister who was a Tory. That one fly spoiled the pot of ointment and compelled the President to say “almost,” instead of saying altogether. Baptist and Episcopalian ministers were nearly alike in one respect. Both bodies were unanimous with scarcely more than a single exception each. But Washington must have been deeply impressed by the opposite sides on which their sympathies fell. One cannot help noticing one or two things suggested by this address of Washington to the Baptists. In the first year of his presidency he responded to esteem sent him by representative bodies of at least ten denominations of Christians and individual congregations of one or two other sects, including Hebrews.

It may be purely predisposition on the part of the reader which makes the address to the Baptists seem to have in it more of the element of personal fraternity than the other. There was certainly a successful effort to be highly impartial in the treatment of all. The very point, however, on which he, congratulates the Episcopalians contains, by implication a severe reaction on their conduct towards Baptists and others just before the war. He says,

“On this occasion, it would ill become me to conceal the joy I have felt in perceiving the fraternal affection, which appears to increase every day among the friends of genuine religion. It affords edifying prospects, indeed, to see Christians of different denominations dwell together in more charity, and conduct themselves with respect to each other with a more Christian-like spirit than ever they have done in former age, or in any other nation.”

As will appear further on, Washington knew perfectly well the significance of these words. Without even going back fifteen or twenty years to the days of persecution in Virginia, the address which he had receive but three months previously from the Baptists of that State, expressing the necessity felt by them for stronger guarantees of religious liberties in the Constitution of the United States, which as we know, their earnestness soon secured in the first amendment to that document. His letter ought to be quoted in full in a study like the present.

“To the General Committee, representing the United Baptist churches in Virginia, May 1789,

Gentlemen, I request that you will accept my best acknowledgments for your congratulation on my appointment to the first office in the nation. The kind manner in which you mention my past conduct equally claims the expression of my gratitude. After we had, by the smiles of Heaven on our exertions, obtained the object for which we contended, I retired, at the conclusion of the war, with an idea that my country could have no further occasion for my services, and with the intention of never entering again into

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public life; but when the exigencies of my country seemed to require me once more to engage, in public affairs, an honest conviction of duty superseded my former resolution, and became my apology for deviating from the happy plan which I had adopted. If I could have entertained the slightest apprehension, that the constitution adopted at the Convention, where I had the honor to preside, might possibly endanger the religious rights of any ecclesiastical society, certainly I would never have placed my signature to it; and, if I could now conceive that the general government could be so administered as to render the liberty of conscience insecure. I beg you will be persuaded, that no one would be more zealous than myself to establish effectual barriers against the horrors of spiritual tyranny, and every species of religious persecution. For you doubtless remember, that I have often expressed my sentiments, that every man conducting himself as a good citizen, and being accountable to God alone for his religious opinions, ought to be protected in worshipping the Deity according to the dictates of his own conscience.

“While I recollect with satisfaction, that the religious society of which you are members, have been, throughout America, uniformly and almost unanimously the firm friends to civil liberty, and the persevering promoters of our glorious revolution, I can not hesitate to believe, that they will be faithful supporters of a free, yet efficient general government. Under this pleasing expectation I rejoice to assure them, that they may rely on my best wishes and endeavors to advance their prosperity. In the mean time be assured, Gentlemen, that I entertain a proper sense of your fervent supplications to God for my temporal and eternal happiness.”

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These sentiments as to religious freedom were not expressed to Baptists only. To his friend Lafayette, who was at the time devoting himself to the political interests of France, Washington wrote,

”I am not less ardent in my wish that you may succeed in your plan of toleration in religious matters. Being no bigot myself, I am disposed to indulge the professors of Christianity in the church with that road to heaven, which to them shall seem the most direct, plainest, easiest, and least liable to exception.”

This is first rate Baptist doctrine, which had not yet been heartily and wholly adopted by many other Christians.

If Washington had a good opinion of Baptists, they also had a good opinion of him. Mr. Backus said of him,

”God raised up a man in Virginia, the oldest of our colonies. who, by the congress, was unanimously appointed the chief commander of our armies, and as such, arrived at the camp in Cambridge, July 2. And through eight perilous campaigns he was preserved in safety and health, was enabled to unite reason and resolution, authority and mildness, until his country was delivered from the most imminent dangers, and peace restored to the nations, and then he as readily resigned his command as he received it, and joyfully

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retired into a private station, followed with the universal esteem and blessings of his country; while a demonstration is hereby held up to all the world, that prudence, uprightness, and benevolence, will procure and preserve that honor, authority and happiness, which in vain sought for in any other way.”

The sympathy between the Baptists and Washington was not simply that of fellow patriots. It was rooted in some of the distinctive principles of the denomination, which Backus, in this connection, traced to the beginning of its history in America. The demonstration of this is found in the fact that the Baptists in England itself espoused the American cause. Dr. Rippon, successor of Dr. Gill, and predecessor during sixty-three years in the pastorate of the church. Mr. C.H. Spurgeon so long served, sought a correspondence with President Manning of Providence, in the opening letter of which he says,

“I believe that all our Baptist ministers in town (Landon), except two, and most of our brethren in the country, were on the side of the Americans in the late dispute. We wept when the thirsty plains drank the blood of your departed heroes, and the shout of a king was amongst us when your well-fought battles were crowned with victory.”

Robert Hall tells how, when he was a boy in his father's house, overheard a group of Baptist ministers talking about the war in America. His hair stood on end when he heard the famous Dr. John Ryland say,

“If I were General Washington, I would summon all the American officers; they should form a circle around me, and I would address them, and would offer a libation in our own blood, and I would order one of them to bring a lancet and a punchbowl; and he should bleed us all, one by one, into this punch-bowl, and I would be the first to bare my arm; and when the punch bowl was full, and we had all been bled, I would call upon every man to consecrate himself to the work by dipping his sword into the bowl, and entering into a solemn covenant engagement by oath, one to another, and we would swear by him that sits upon the throne, and liveth forever and ever, that we would never sheath our swords while there was an English soldier in arms remaining in America.”

Washington knew that Baptists were his strongest supporters, not simply because they were Americans but also because they were Baptists, and it was in the fiber to fight for liberty.

The revolutionary period was a period of rapid multiplication of Baptists in America. In 1770 there were but ninety-seven churches. The thirty-four churches in the Philadelphia Association averaged sixty-nine and two-thirds members each. If the same average held throughout the ninety-seven churches there were less than 6,800 members in the land. In 1784 there were 471 churches with 35,101 members. In that fourteen years of general distress and distraction during which some churches, like that of John Gano of New York, were utterly scattered, “the meeting houses” in some cases being “forsaken and occupied for civil and martial purposes.” The membership multiplied by more than five.

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The Baptist cause was crescent in those days. Washington need not have hesitated before the liberty-loving tribunal of his own heart to have even his ascendant star silently linked with that cause. All this is plain enough now. But how was it then? Had Washington been thrown into such personal relations with Baptists as to come by natural processes to understand their kindred temper and the mottle of their motives, so as naturally to give heed, when they insisted on the duty of plain obedience to a plain command of Christ.

The first Baptist church in Virginia, north of the James River, was not organized until Washington was eleven years old, when it was seventy-five or one hundred miles away, on the frontiers of the inhabited portion of the State. Baptists from Maryland and Pennsylvania settled along the lower Shenandoah valley, and founded several Churches there. Strangely enough, the first man's work Washington did in the world was exactly there. The young man left the ruts of an old Virginia plantation, and flung himself into the wilderness as a surveyor of land among the new settlements. His first extant writings are journals of that work.

He describes vividly how he roughed it, living with the settlers as they lived. We simply know three things. First, Washington surveyed these woods. Secondly, those woods were full of Baptists. Thirdly, Baptists in those days did not hide their light under a bushel. Let imagination realize the scenes and discussions around the cabin fire and camp fire. Five, six and seven years later on his three expeditions to the Ohio River, the first the daring one alone, the last the disastrous one with Braddock, he renewed his acquaintance, both going and coming, with the people of this region.

Then for more than three years he was stationed here, as the Colonel of the Virginia regiment and the sympathetic defender of the settlers against the Indians, marching from point to point, along the frontier and sometimes having whole neighborhoods Rock to his camp to remain under his protection. It is simply a marvel, is some of the best men Washington ever knew in the days of his young manhood and shaping character, were not hardy Baptists of the Shenandoah Valley. Such, at any rate, are the probabilities of his life from his seventeenth to his twenty-seventh years of age.

The next fifteen years of his life were spent at Mt. Vernon managing various farms near and far, and being sent from time to time to Williamsburg, the capital of the Province, as a member of its house of Burgesses. What chance did he have to become favorably acquainted with Baptists during this period? In his early boyhood he had lived eight years in his father's house on a farm opposite Fredericksburg, the county seat of Spotsylvania county, in plain sight of that town. Washington's mother continued to live on the farm, and later in the town until her death. At the time of which we are now speaking, he had the personal oversight of this farm, visiting it to keep watch of the processes of agriculture as they went on. He thus kept fresh his intimate boyhood acquaintances with an interest in Fredericksburg and the region round about. It was only part of a day's ride from Mt. Vernon.

Now it came to pass that in exactly this region were enacted some, of the stirring events in early Virginia Baptist history; and the most remarkable of them occurred with in this

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period. Virginia had been an Episcopalian colony for a hundred and sixty years and continued to be so exclusively such, that Lawrence Washington, the brother of George, wrote that dissenters would probably never be tolerated. The mere organization of a Baptist church was therefore a marked event in local affairs. There must have been slow preparation in some quarters, but all at once there was an outburst of missionary zeal which caused the multiplying of converts in many sections. It was almost a moral cyclone which struck Spotsylvania County in 1766-7.

In the latter year the Upper Spotsylvania Baptist Church was organized, the first in a vast region of country and the mother of many others. The chief missionaries of this movement were Rev. James Read of North Carolina and Colonel Samuel Harris of southern Virginia, the latter not an ordained minister but a man of distinguished position, wealth and talents. The historian says,

“Read and Harris continued to visit these parts for about three years with wonderful effect. In one of their visits they baptized seventy-five at one time and in the course of their journeys, which generally lasted several weeks they baptized upward of two hundred. It was not uncommon, at their great meetings, for many hundred of men to camp on the ground, in order to be present next, day. There were instances of persons travelling more than one hundred miles to one of these meetings; to go forty or fifty was not uncommon.”

This sudden and great blaze of religious earnestness, in marked contrast to the cold uniformity of the established church was seen by every inhabitant of the region. It proved also to be not a flash of popular emotion, but a genuine moral heat, regenerating hundreds of lives. For example, there was a notorious character in the county, so notorious that he was some times called “the Devil’s adjutant.” “He once had three warrants served on him at the same time on account of one uproar.” His name was John Waller, but he was popularly known as “Swearing Jack Waller.”

It was common remark that “there would be no deviltry among the people, unless Swearing Jack was at the head of it.” He was furious against the Baptists. But in that, he followed the lead of many respectable people, clergymen and others. They were willing, however, to use him as an instrument for suppressing the offensive Dissenters. “He was one of the grand jury who presented (a Baptist) I. Craig, for preaching.” But Mr. Craig took the spoiling of his goods so joyfully, and bore himself toward the jury in such a meek and at the same time manly way, showing the utmost kindliness of feeling toward them, that Jack Waller could not resist the force of Craig’s Christ likeness. Jack Waller became a new man, and a preacher of Christ himself. The whole countryside witnessed the reformation.

But even such miracles as this did not stay the hand of bigotry. This tide of dissent was rising and must be turned back. The first instance of actual imprisonment of Baptists in Virginia took place in Spotsylvania county in Fredericksburg jail, “On the 4th of June, 1768, John Waller, Lewis Craig, James Childs, and others, were seized by the sheriff, and haled before three magistrates, who stood in the meeting house yard, and who bound

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them in the penalty of one thousand pounds, to appear at court two days after. At court they were arraigned as disturbers of the peace; on their trial, they were vehemently accused, by a certain lawyer, who said to the court, May it please your worship these men are great disturbers of the peace, they cannot meet a man upon the road, but they must ram a text of Scripture down his throat.' Mr. Waller made his own brethren's defense so ingenuously, that they were somewhat puzzled to know how to dispose of them. They offered to release them, if they would promise to preach no more in the country, for a year and a day. This they refused, and therefore were sent into close jail. As they were moving on from the courthouse to the prison thru the streets of Fredericksburg, they sung the hymn,

"Broad is the road that leads to death."

Lewis Craig was released at the end of four weeks. John Waller and the rest were kept thirteen days longer, forty-three days in all.

"While in prison they constantly preached through the open grated windows. The mob without, used every exertion to prevent the people from hearing, but to little purpose. Many heard indeed, upon whom the word was in power and demonstration. Did all this take place in Fredericksburg without being perfectly well known to Washington? It seems almost like a chapter of a romance, when we turn from the pages of Dr. Semple, the historian of the Baptist to the recently published private diaries of Washington, which he kept in interleaved Virginia Almanacs, and find that in the course of this very forty-three days, he made one of his visits to Fredericksburg, 1768, June 28th. Set out for and reached Fredericksburg. Began to cut the upper part of my Timothy Meadow, 29th. Rid round and examined the wheat fields there, which were fine. 30. Went to Mr. Bouchers, dined there and left Jackey Custis, returned to Fredericksburg in the afternoon."

Did Washington on any of these days hear "Swearing Jack Waller" as he stood reverently and earnestly preaching through the barred window of Fredericksburg jail? We know not, but we do know that four days later one of the prisoners was released to go with a plea for his brethren to the Governor of Williamsburg. Did the visit of the great landed proprietor, the already famous and influential Col. Washington have anything to do with that release? It is of course possible. One or two facts make it quite likely. One of the most influential personal factors in the formation of Washington's character, was his older brother Lawrence with whom he lived for sometime.

Lawrence Washington wrote long before this, (in the same letter in which he said that there were no dissenters, and that there was no prospect that there ever would be in Virginia,) expressing vigorously his own opinion that there ought not to be civil disabilities on account of religious opinions. There is abundant reason to believe that George Washington at this time, as well as later in life, heavily disapproved of religious persecution.

The first imprisonment for conscience in Virginia was now being endured and that in his own neighborhood. It is more than conjecture, it is matter of record, that, just at this time,

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he had a long interview with the man whose word secured the release of the Baptist prisoners. Three days after their arrest Washington's diary reads.

Went up to Alexandria to meet the Attorney-General and returned with him, his Lady and Daughter, Miss Corbin and Major Jenifer.

"8, At home with the above Company."

"The Attorney and Co. went away."

Now turn back to Dr. Semple's record of what took place nearly a month later.

"Lewis Craig was released from prison, and immediately went down to Williamsburg to get a release for his companions. He waited on the Deputy-governor, the Hon. John Blair, stated the case before him, and received the following letter, directed to the King's Attorney, in Spotsylvania. "Sir – I lately received a letter, signed by a good number of worthy gentlemen who are not here, complaining of the Baptists: the particulars of their misbehaviors are not told, any further than their running into private houses, and making dissensions. Mr. Craig and Mr. Benjamin Waller are now with me and deny the charge, they tell me they are willing to take the oaths, as others have: I told them I had consulted the attorney-general, who is of the opinion, that the general court only have right to grant licenses, and therefore I referred them to the court; but, on their application to the attorney-general, they brought me his letter. advising me to write to you, that their petition was a matter of right, and that you may not molest these conscientious people, so long as they behave themselves in a manner becoming pious Christians, and in obedience to the laws, till the court, when they intend to apply for license, and when the gentlemen, who complain, may make their objections and be heard. The act of toleration (it being found by experience that persecuting dissenters increase their numbers,) has given them a right to apply in a proper manner for licensed houses for the worship of God according to their consciences, and I persuade myself, the gentlemen will quietly overlook their meetings till the Court, I am told they administer the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, near the manner we do, and differ in nothing from our church, but in that of Baptism, and their renewing the ancient discipline; by which they have reformed some sinners, and brought them to be truly penitent: Nay, if a man of theirs is idle and neglects to labour and provide for his family as he ought, he incurs their censures, which have had good effects. If this be their behavior, it were to be wished we had some among us. But, at least, I hope will remain quiet till the Court.

I am, with great respects to the gentlemen, Sir,

Your humble servant,

John Blair

Williamsburg, July 16, 1768."

This vigorous endorsement of the Spotsylvania Baptists by the Attorney-general is incredible if he had received other than a favorable account of them from Col. Washington. Three days after the letter was signed by the Deputy-governor in Williamsburg, the prisoners were released in Fredericksburg.

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The facts here unearthed in their correlations, are at least a substantial pou sto on which the historical novelist of the denomination can do something stirring, and at the same time strictly adherent to reality.

The picture of affairs must be completed by another paragraph from Semple.

”After their discharge, which was a kind of triumph, Waller, Craig and their compeers in the ministry, resumed their labors with redoubled vigor, gathering fortitude from their late sufferings, thanking God that they were counted worthy to suffer for Christ and His gospel. Day and night, and indeed almost every day and night, they held meetings in their own and adjacent neighborhoods. The spread of the gospel and of Baptist principles, was equal to all their exertions; in so much that, in very few sections of Virginia, did the Baptist cause appear more formidable to its enemies, and mare consoling to its friends, than in Spotsylvania.”

All that is based on these facts in the present study, is the unavoidable conclusion that Washington, before he left Mount Vernon for the national arena, was thoroughly well acquainted with the opinions, practices and sterling worth of Baptists.

During the last years of the period, they made systematic, organized, thorough, persistent and successful effort in the Virginia House of Burgesses to secure Freedom from the State Church, Madison, Jefferson and Henry espoused their cause. Washington was perfectly conversant with that struggle and triumph.

In 1774 the First Continental Congress convened at Philadelphia, with Washington as one of its members, Congress organized by electing Peyton Randolph of Virginia, President, and Charles Thompson of Pennsylvania, Secretary. Mr. Thompson served as secretary during the whole fifteen years of the existence of the Continental Congress without compensation. John Adams wrote,

“Charles Thompson is the Sam Adams of Philadelphia, the life of the cause of liberty. Statesmen from other countries watching the deliberations of Congress, called him “the soul of that political body!”

When a homeless, wandering boy, a lady, who had kindly taken him up to ride in her carriage, asked him, “What would you like to be?” ”A scholar,” was his instant reply. She sent him to school. He fitted for a teacher. One day he stumbled on a part of a copy of the Septuagint. He discovered in it a treasure. In two years he was able to save enough pennies to complete his copy. After the Revolution he made the first translation of the Septuagint ever made into English, also a translation of the New Testament, which Dr. Francis Bowen of Harvard happening upon a hundred years afterward, with many words of enthusiasm spoke of as “challenging comparison with the best results” of modern scholarship. No one else, however, had taken out the copy from the Harvard Library when the present writer found it there. Mr. Thomason gave twenty years, after the war, to his work of translating the whole Greek Bible into English, making four transcriptions of

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the entire work. During all this time he was a constant attendant at the Lower Merion Baptist Church where he resided in a suburb of Philadelphia. He was not a member of the Church. But it is easy to understand how a man who devoted himself to a study of the Greek Bible should have cast in his lot with the Baptists.

John Jay wrote to him urging him to give at least one hour of the twenty four to preparing a history of the Revolution, saying "You are the most competent man for the task." But Thomason, who had written the thirty-nine foolscap volumes of the Journals of Congress, preferred to devote the rest of his life exclusively to the Bible. He was an intimate friend of Washington. When the latter was first chosen President of the United States, Congress sent Charles Thomason to escort him from Mount Vernon to New York. When Thomason had delivered his message, Washington said, "I shall be in readiness to set out the day after tomorrow, and shall be happy in the pleasure of your company; for you will permit me to say that it is a peculiar gratification to have received this communication from you."

This bit of forgotten history does nothing more than to show that Washington was acquainted with a patriot of the highest distinction, who was at the same time one of the most scholarly men of his age, and who belonged to the Baptist persuasion.

The First Continental Congress had not been in session days when Isaac Backus presented himself as the authorized representative of New England Baptists to plead for religious liberty on their behalf. His memorable mission, so well known, is passed with this mere allusion.

President Manning was introduced to General Washington at West Point in 1779, Later on, elaborate courtesies were extended to President Washington, by Dr. Manning and the corporation of the college at Providence.

Our chief interest, however, in the present investigation centers about Washington's relations with Baptist Chaplains. Washington insisted on having good Chaplains, on having them adequately paid, and on having them diligently attend to their religious work.

His "Orderly Book" shows the following order as issued July 9, 1776.

"The honourable Continental Congress having been pleased to allow a chaplain to each regiment, with the pay of thirty-three dollars and one-third per month, the colonels or commanding officer's of each are directed to procure chaplains accordingly, persons of good character and exemplary lives and to see that all inferior officers and soldiers pay them a suitable respect. The blessing and protection of Heaven are at all times necessary, but especially so in times of public distress and danger. The General hopes and trusts, that every officer and man will endeavor so to live and act as becomes a Christian soldier, defending the dearest liberties and rights of his country."

After a time it was determined to have only one Chaplain for each brigade instead of

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having one for every regiment or two, thus reducing the number, but exalting the rank and requirements of the office. The resolution of Congress May 27, 1777, reads,

“Resolved, that for the future, there be only one Chaplain allowed each brigade of the army and that such Chaplain be appointed by Congress: That each brigade Chaplain be allowed the same pay, rations and forage allowed to a Colonel in said corps: That each brigadier-general be requested to nominate and recommend to Congress a proper person for Chaplain to his brigade; and that they recommend none but such as are clergymen of experience, and established public character for piety, virtue and learning.”

In that day of established churches in many of the States, we shall expect to see most of the Chaplains drawn from the ranks of these churches. If any Baptist is chosen it must be because of such preeminent fitness to minister in the patriot army as to outweigh every ordinary and lower consideration. In a list of twenty-one Brigadier-Chaplains, which had been chosen within a year after the order calling for them, more are Baptists than are known to be of any other one denomination. The denominational relations of five, however are unknown. Five were Congregationalist. Three were Presbyterians. Two were Episcopalians. Six were Baptists. We are indebted to Dr. Gould's “Chaplain Smith” for this classification. The six Baptists were Hezekiah Smith, William Vanhorn, Charles Thompson, John Gano, David Jones, and William Rogers. Sketches of all these except Vanhorn can be found in Sprague's “Annals.” We must confine our attention to three of them.

Hezekiah Smith was a graduate of Princeton College, the founder and forty years the pastor of the church in Haverhill, Massachusetts, and one of the founders of Brown University. He was Chaplain in the army over five years. There is no doubt that Washington had a personal acquaintance with him, if not so intimate friendship. It is said that the General corresponded with him freely, and that, after Mr. Smith's death, his son had a package of some twenty or thirty letters from Washington, which he gave as mementoes to relatives and friends. It is further said, that when the President was in Haverhill in 1799, he called on Mr. Smith, and on Mr. White one of Mr. Smith's parishioners,

“Whose daughter-in-law, Mrs. Leonard White, had been a frequent visitor, sometimes for weeks together, of Mrs. Washington.”

Chaplain Smith's diary has two very interesting entries. We should be glad if he had gone a little more into detail in the record of those two days. One was in August 1778, and reads simply:

“Sab.: 2, I preached a sermon to our brigade, from Mal. 2:5. His Excellency General Washington attended. I dined with him the same day.”

That is all. The only other fact of which we are sure is the reading of the text, but on which part of it the Chaplain mainly enlarged before “his Excellency” we know not.

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“My covenant was with him of life and peace and I gave them to him for the fear wherewith he feared me, and was afraid before me,”

All things considered, it would be a good text for a Fourth of July sermon in any of our Baptist pulpits. Possibly it is the only one of the thousand texts on which Washington heard sermons now ascertainable.

The next year another entry in Chaplain Smith's diary reads: “Monday, November 1. I went to West Point, received my pay to the last of October, dined with Washington.”

The first student in Brown University, and for a few days the only one, was William Rogers. He was graduated in the first class, 1769. He became pastor of the First Church, Philadelphia, continuing in that service until the month before the Declaration of Independence. Nearly thirty years later he was the stated supply of that church again for two years. In March 1776 the General Assembly of Pennsylvania raised three battalions of troops for the defense of the Colony and appointed William Rogers sole Chaplain of their forces.”

”In 1778 he was promoted to a Brigade Chaplaincy in the Continental Army.”

In all he served five years as Chaplain. Later for over twenty years he was Professor of Oratory and Belles-lettres in the University of Pennsylvania. After that he was elected by the County of Philadelphia and served two years in the General Assembly of the State. He enjoyed a familiar acquaintance with Washington. An English gentleman traveling through this country wrote home as follows:

"After traveling through an extreme pleasant country, we arrived at Philadelphia, and waited on Dr. Rogers. Dr. Rogers is a most entertaining and agreeable man, and received your letter with pleasure. We were with him a great part of the time we remained in the city, and were introduced by him to General Washington. The General was not at home when we called, but while we were talking with his private secretary in the hall; he came in and spoke to Dr. Rogers with the greatest ease and familiarity. He immediately asked us up into the drawing-room, where was Lady Washington and his two nieces. When we were seated the General called for wine and cake, of which we partook, he drinking our health and wishing us success in all our undertaking. The General asked us a number of questions respecting the situation of things in Europe, to all which we answered, you may be sure, in our best manner. It is his general custom to say little; but on this occasion we understood he was more than usually talkative."

A few years before this, soon after resigning his Chaplaincy, in fact, about the time of Washington's supposed baptism, an event in Mr. Rogers' life occurred, showing fraternal relations between Episcopalians and Baptists at that time, which the Episcopal Church would not now sanction. The following record is found in Updike's "History of the Naraganset Church." It is taken from the records of the St. John Protestant Episcopal Church, Providence, R. I. for June, 1782.

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”At a request of the wardens, the Rev. Mr. Wm. Rogers, a Baptist Clergy- man, preached in the church this and the following Sunday, and, on the 30th of the same month he again preached, and the wardens were requested to wait upon and thank him for this day’s service, and present him with the contribution, and ask him to officiate in church next Sunday, in his way, provided he can not conform to our liturgy, but if he will conform, the congregation invite him further to serve them.”

It seems that Dr. Rogers could not “conform.” So, after serving the Episcopal Church four Sundays ”in his way,” he declined their call.

IS IT PROBABLE THAT THIS PARTICULAR MAN, JOHN GANO, MIGHT BE CALLED UPON TO PERFORM SUCH A SERVICE FOR THE FATHER OF HIS COUNTRY?

Washington was intimately acquainted with Gano. There is no evidence that the two men had met before the war. But, it is suggestive to find by careful comparison of accounts, that, in that exceedingly interesting period of Washington’s life which was spent in the Shenandoah Valley, Gano was sent by the Philadelphia Association as a missionary to that very spot. Exact dates are painfully infrequent in Gano’s ”Memoirs”.

But persistent examination, with occasional help from the minutes of the Association, show that he made not less than six missionary journeys to Virginia and North Carolina. Backus said of him, in a general way;

“He has been the most extensive traveler to preach the gospel of any man now living in America. Going and coming, between 1754 and 1758, Gano must have crossed Washington’s fresh tracks in the Shenandoah region, not less than seven times. If they avoided meeting in those four years they must have almost taken pains to do so. Neither of them went through on Pullman express trains. Both of them had serious public business which kept them occupied there for weeks, and months at a time. It was a sparsely settled region, and a brilliant young preacher from the North was doubtless the county talk. Washington may at least have heard of him, if he did not hear him. The young Colonel was at that time in repeated letters pleading with the government of Virginia to send him a Chaplain, promising that, if need be, the officers would personally provide the support. Gano could not have failed to hear of Washington there although he has left no direct mention of it in his “memoirs”. The following paragraph, however, concerning this time and region, is significant in several particulars, illustrating, withal, the missionary’s ready wit: “I returned way of Ketockton or Blue-ridge, where the inhabitants are scattered.

On my return I observed a thunder storm arising, and rode speedily for the first horse. When I arrived, the man came running into the house, and seeing me, appeared much alarmed: there being at that time great demands for men and horses for Brad- dock’s army. He said to me; ‘Sir are you a press-master?’ I told him I was. ‘But’, said he, ‘you do not take married men.’ I told him, surely I did; and that the master I wished him to serve was good, his character unimpeachable, the wages great, and that it would be for

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the benefit of his wife and children, if he enlisted. He made many excuses, but I endeavored to answer them and begged him to turn out a volunteer in the service of Christ. This calmed his fears; and I left him, and proceeded on my journey to Ketockton, where I spent some time, and baptized Mr. Hall.”

Mr. Gano’s introduction to the knowledge of General Washington near the beginning of the revolutionary war was a most favorable one. The pastor of the First Baptist Church in New York, and the Commander of the army, may have become acquainted before they were together driven out of the city by the British in 1776. The Americans were forced northward from point to point after they left the town. Finally the chief stand was made near White Plains, and a sharp battle was fought, the thickest being on a bluff, called Chatterton’s Hill. J. T. Headley, the historian of Generals and battles, thus describes this conflict and Chaplain Gano’s part in it:

“As soon as (the British General) got his twelve or fifteen pieces of artillery within range he opened on the American lines. The heavy thunder rolling over the heights carried consternation into the ranks of the militia, and as a round of shot struck one of their number, mangling him frightfully, the whole turned and fled. Colonel Hazlet tried in vain to induce them to drag forward the field pieces so as to sweep the ascending columns, but he was able to man only one and that so poorly that he was compelled to seize the drag ropes himself. But he was denied the gratification of using even his one gun, for as it was being slowly trundled to the front a ball from the enemy’s batteries struck the carriage, scattering the shot in every direction, and setting fire to a wad of tow. In an instant the piece was abandoned in terror. Only one man had the courage to remain and tread out the fire and collect the shot. - After a little time McDougall found only six hundred of the fifteen hundred with which he commenced the fight left to sustain the shock of the whole British army. - It was on such as this the fearless chaplain gazed with bursting heart. As he saw more than half the army fleeing from the sound of cannon – others abandoned their pieces without firing a shot, and a brave band of only six hundred manfully sustaining the whole conflict, he forgot himself, and distressed at the cowardice of his countrymen and filled with chivalrous and patriotic sympathy for the little band that scorned to fly, he could not resist the strong desire to share their perils, and eagerly yet involuntarily pushed forward to the front.”

Gano himself describes the event very modestly, almost deprecatingly,

“My station, in time of action, I knew to be among the surgeons; but in this battle, I somehow, got in the front of the regiment; yet I durst not quit my place, for fear of dampening the spirits of the soldiers, or of bringing on me an imputation of cowardice. Rather than do either, I choose to risk my fate. This circumstance, gave an opportunity to the young officers of talking; and I believe it had a good effect upon some of them.”

We can easily understand that not only “the young officers”, but the older ones as well, gloried in the bravery of the Chaplain. It is a matter of history that Washington witnessed that battle from his stand on a neighboring hill. Gano followed Washington’s army in its memorable retreat across the Delaware. The next year we find him at Fort Clinton on the

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Hudson standing on the breast works with the bullets whistling about him. He was in the Western campaign of 1779 against the Indians.

In 1781, he was at Yorktown to rejoice in the decisive victory there. Three winters Washington's headquarters were at Morristown, N. J. where Mr. Gano had once been a pastor of the Baptist Church and where his father-in-law, John Stiles, Esq. was a well-to-do and well known patriot, being for several years mayor of Elizabethtown not far away. The last two winters of the war, Commander's headquarters were at Newburg on the Hudson and at Windsor nearby. In that vicinity was Gano also, even when not on duty, for his family during the Revolution lived at Warwick, half way between Morristown and Newburg, only twenty-five miles from each.

Finally the glad hour came for the proclamation of the cessation of hostilities. On the 18th day of April, 1783, Washington issued his orders for a grand celebration of the event the next day. It was the completion of the long struggle, the crowning act of the war. It is said that the morning dawned with the booming of cannon all along the shore from West Point to Newburg. There was all the noise and parade of military jubilation. But the point of the day concerning which Washington issued particular orders, as the high light of the whole day and the consummation of years that had gone before, was the service at twelve o'clock on the steps of a new public hall in New Windsor. Here is the description of an eye-witness, from the journal of James Thacher, one of the surgeons of the army.

"On the completion [April 19th] of eight years from the memorable battle of Lexington, the proclamation of the Congress for a cessation of hostilities was published at the door of the public building, followed by three huzzas after which a prayer was offered by the Reverend Mr. Gano and an anthem was performed by voices and instruments."

At the supreme moment, when the long deferred, hopes of Washington were at least realized, and announced, the man chosen to carry the cause of America to the God of nations in thanksgiving was John Gano.

Is it incredible that, during some of these preceding months of comparative military inactivity along the banks of the Hudson, that same Chaplain had pointed out to his beloved General the duty of obeying exactly the orders of the supreme Commander of men? It would be almost incredible if he had not. Baptists in those days not only held their views, but also taught them aggressively, and believed that they were guilty if they did not. The Chaplain of Chatterton's Hill was not the man to hold back before the face of any mortal cause which he deemed God's cause. He had, too, the zeal of convictions which had been strong enough to bring himself from the Presbyterian to the Baptist ranks. He was not only bold and earnest, but also daft and happy in imparting pointed instruction. An officer uttered profane sentence in his presence and then said, "Good morning, Doctor." "Good morning, Sir", replied the Chaplain, "you pray early this morning?" – "I beg your pardon, Sir," said the officer. The Chaplain's next rapier thrust went deeper. "Oh, I cannot pardon you, carry your case to God." He was not only bold, earnest and keen, he was also a man of remarkable persuasive power with truth. One of his neighbors in New York, Rev. Mr. Bowen, an Episcopalian rector, said of him that

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”Mr. Gano possessed the best pulpit talents of any man that he ever heard,”

Is it incredible that the man chosen to be the Chaplain of the proclamation of peace for the Nation may have been chosen by Washington also to be the minister of his personal adjustment to a plain teaching of God’s Word countersigned by his own prayer book and Bishop?

An inductive study of circumstantial facts seems to obliterate a priori assumptions against the baptism of General Washington by Chaplain Gano. That leaves the testimony of Gano’s children to stand at full face value. R. M. Gano in a letter to the First Baptist Church, New York, of which John Gano was pastor during its first quarter of a century printed in its souvenir volume, names it puts beyond question one thing and that is the only important of two other Revolutionary War families besides his own as having handed down knowledge of the event.

The estimate of the evidence available may depend largely on the predilections of the people who consider it. But whatever else the evidence proves or fails to prove, it puts beyond question one thing. Contemporaries of George Washington, who were close enough to him to see the real man, believed, him to be such an intense Christian that he might perform an unpopular religious act out of sheer personal loyalty to Jesus Christ, and John Gano was a revered minister of Washington’s highest ideals.

This college chapel, dedicated in the sesquicentennial year of our country to the memory of John Gano, is a visible monument to the fact that intense personal religion is at the basis of all character-building both national and personal.

John Gano was one of those elemental characters who belongs to all times. Back in the 18th century, without the lingo which we use in describing our particularly modern conception, we think, (Christianity as the divine force for redeeming all social relationships as well as individual souls,) he was so keen a Christian in its eternal realities that he said it in a way which might well be inscribed on the walls of this twentieth century chapel and drilled into the life- purpose of every student who enters these halls of learning during the 20th and all succeeding centuries. In the first sentence of his brief autobiography, written in compliance with the request of his family that he leave some memorials of his life, he modestly says:

”I should much more cheerfully undertake the task had I spent my life to better purposes and more faithfully in the services of my God and society, both civil and social, to which I have long since considered myself inviolably to owe every part of it.”

SOURCE: [Evidences Proving that John Gano, Baptized George Washington during the Revolutionary War](#)