

2011

Elijah Baker and the Churches He Planted on the Eastern Shore of Virginia: 1776-1798

Laverne Young Smith

Wilmington School of the Bible, lsmith4@liberty.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/will_articles

Recommended Citation

Smith, Laverne Young, "Elijah Baker and the Churches He Planted on the Eastern Shore of Virginia: 1776-1798" (2011). *Articles*. Paper 34.

http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/will_articles/34

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Wilmington School of the Bible at DigitalCommons@Liberty University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Articles by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Liberty University. For more information, please contact scholarlycommunication@liberty.edu.

LIBERTY BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

ELIJAH BAKER AND THE CHURCHES HE PLANTED ON THE
EASTERN SHORE OF VIRGINIA: 1776-1798

A RESEARCH PROJECT

SUBMITTED TO

DR. HOMER MASSEY

IN FULFILLMENT OF

THE REQUIREMENTS FOR

CHHI 695 – DIRECTED RESEARCH IN CHURCH HISTORY

BY

LAVERNE SMITH

AUGUST 1, 2011

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
Early Virginia Baptists	1
Elijah Baker	3
Early Eastern Shore Baptist Churches	6
LOWER NORTHAMPTON BAPTIST CHURCH (1778)	7
Founding and History	7
Current Ministry	10
RED BANK BAPTIST CHURCH (1783)	11
Founding and History	11
Current Ministry	14
CHINCOTEAGUE BAPTIST CHURCH (1786)	15
Founding and History	16
HOLLIES BAPTIST CHURCH (1790)	17
Founding and History	17
Current Ministry	23
CONCLUSION	25
Eastern Shore Churches Founded by the First Four	26
Baker Remembered on the Eastern Shore	30
BIBLIOGRAPHY	33
APPENDIX: PHOTOGRAPHY RECORD OF ELIJAH BAKER'S CHURCH PLANTS, 8-9 JULY 2011	35

INTRODUCTION

Early Virginia Baptists

The story and impact of early Baptists in Virginia has been very well documented.¹ Most every student in a Baptist history class has heard of the contribution of Baptist pastor John Leland. His influence upon the deliberations of the Founding Fathers led to the inclusion of the religious freedom in the first amendment to the United States Constitution. The Constitution touched on religion only in article six, which proscribes any religious test for the office of President of the United States and is “virtually a declaration in favor of the most absolute religious liberty”² It was not, however, enough to satisfy Virginia Baptists. “They had been great sufferers in the past, and, having just emerged from a long and arduous struggle for their rights, they were apprehensive that, if they entered into this new and stronger union with

¹ David Benedict, *A General History of the Baptist Denomination in America and Other Parts of the World*, Volume 2 (Boston, MA: Manning & Loring, 1813), accessed at <http://books.google.com>; Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia: 1704-1790*, Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Lewis Peyton Little, *Imprisoned Preachers and Religious Liberty in Virginia: A Narrative Drawn Largely from the Official Records of Virginia Counties, Unpublished Manuscripts, Letters and Other Original Sources*. Lynchburg, VA: J. P. Bell, 1938; Robert Baylor Semple, *History of the Baptists in Virginia*, rev. and ext. ed. by G. W. Beale with an Introduction by Joe M. King (Lafayette, TN: Church History Research and Archives, 1976).

² Charles James, *Documentary History of the Struggle for Religious Liberty in Virginia, Civil Liberties in American History*, Leonard W. Levy, gen. ed. (New York: Da Capo, 1971), 152.

States that still had religious establishments, there might be a reaction disastrous to their liberties.”³

John Leland was nominated as a delegate to the Constitutional convention to oppose the ratification of the Constitution without such guarantees.⁴ Once the first government was formed, however, James Madison moved adoption of the first amendment to the Constitution. His reasoning put it, in his own words, “It will be a desirable thing to extinguish from the bosom of every member of the community any apprehensions that there are those among their countrymen who wish to deprive them of the liberty for which they valiantly fought and honorably bled.”⁵

Baptists in Virginia had struggled against varying degrees of persecution from the Established (Anglican) Church in Virginia. Often church leaders would seek out the sheriff’s aid to imprison Baptist preachers for unauthorized preaching.⁶ Elijah Baker was among them, imprisoned for fifty-six days in 1778 in Accomac County, charged with vagrancy.⁷ His story, and the story of four of the six Baptist churches that he planted on Virginia’s Eastern Shore and which survive today, are the focus of this project.⁸

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Annals of Congress, Vol. 1, pages 431-2, quoted in James, 166.

⁶ Little, 470; 516-20. This is an interesting list of Baptist preachers in Virginia during the Colonial era who suffered varying degrees of persecution from having their preaching interrupted to being pelted with apples to poisoning to imprisonment for preaching. These men definitely experienced the afflictions described in 2 Cor. 4:7-9: “afflicted in every way but not crushed; perplexed but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed” (New American Standard Version). Unless otherwise noted, all scripture references in this paper will be from *The Holy Bible*, Updated New American Standard Version (Anaheim, CA: Foundation Publications, 2002).

⁷ Little, 470.

⁸ Elijah Baker ministered on the Eastern Shore of Virginia and Maryland from 1776-1798, dying November 6, 1798, in Salisbury MD shortly after addressing the Salisbury Association (Blanche Syndor White, *History of the Baptists on the Eastern Shore of Virginia*,

*Elijah Baker (1742-1798)*⁹

Elijah Baker entered life in Orange County, Virginia.¹⁰ He was baptized in 1769 and began at once preaching in the Orange and Lunenburg County area.¹¹ “Quite likely the fact that his forebears stemmed from York County influenced Elijah Baker to include York and vicinity in his long, arduous and fruitful preaching tours that culminated on the Eastern Shore.”¹² He energetically sought to preach, baptize, and form congregations along a path that took him from Orange to Charles City, James City, Henrico, and York Counties. He then crossed the York River into Gloucester where he planted a church in the Guineas community, and encountered Thomas Elliott, a native of Northampton County.¹³ Elliott had recently moved from the Eastern Shore to Gloucester. He wanted his friends and family on the Eastern Shore to hear the gospel. So he and Baker “sailed over to the Eastern Shore on Easter Sunday 1776 and went to church ‘where an established clergyman was that day to preach and administer the sacrament’.”¹⁴

1776-1959: Prepared for the Sesqui-Centennial of the Accomack Baptist Association, vol. one of *History of the Accomack Baptist Association – 1809-1984* (Baltimore, MD: J. H. Furst, 1959), 9. The churches he planted on Virginia’s Eastern Shore are: Lower Northampton (1778), Messongo Baptist (1779-1835), Red Bank Baptist “Hungars Baptist” (1783), Metompkim Baptist (1785-1834), Chincoteague Baptist (1786); and Hollies Baptist “Pungoteague” (1790). See Kirk Mariner, *Revival’s Children: A Religious History of Virginia’s Eastern Shore* (Salisbury, MD: Peninsula Press, 1979).

⁹ “Geneological Notes: Elijah Baker (1742-1798),” *Virginia Baptist Register*, 6 (1967): 286-288.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 287.

¹¹ White, 4.

¹² “Geneological Notes, 287.

¹³ White, 4. Robert Williamson, *A Brief History of the Origin and Progress of the Baptists on the Eastern Shore of Virginia, embracing an account of the Accomack Association and Sketches of the Churches* (Baltimore, MD: J. F. Weishampel, Jr., Printer and Bookseller, 1878), 6.

¹⁴ Williamson, 6, quoting from Robert Semple’s history.

The clergyman that Easter Sunday did not make an appearance, so Baker and Elliott invited the assembled group to move down the road just a bit to hear a gospel message. “Mr. Baker had no pulpit than the end of a horsing tree [saw horse], which having mounted, he began one of the most successful ministerial labors that has fallen to the lot of any man in Virginia.” They visited in several homes for a few days and promised to return by Whitsuntide [Pentecost].¹⁵ Upon his return, he never went back over the bay; settling in Northampton County and proceeding up the Delmarva Peninsula, planting churches as he progressed northward toward Maryland.

In the spring of 1778, Elijah Baker baptized five believers, forming the Lower Northampton Baptist Church, the first Baptist church planted on the Eastern Shore.¹⁶ It was after this event, that the church warden of the Accomac Anglican parish took notice (27th day of May 1778).¹⁷ Charged with vagrancy, Baker was jailed, pending trial for fifty-six days. Rev. Baker was imprisoned from July 1 until August 25, 1778.¹⁸ As a prisoner, Baker “preached to the people who gathered outside the window of his cell.”¹⁹ Elijah Baker’s imprisonment was illegal since a Bill of Rights had been adopted by the Virginia Convention in 1776. Anglican Church officials in Accomac “were either unaware of this legislation or they flagrantly violated Baker’s rights because they resented his preaching in their parish.”²⁰

¹⁵ Ibid., 6-7.

¹⁶ Williamson, 10; White, 4.

¹⁷ Little, 470ff.

¹⁸ Williamson, 8-9.

¹⁹ White, 5.

²⁰ John S. Moore, “Elijah Baker (1742-1798): A One-Talent Man Who Succeeded,” *Virginia Baptist Register* 30 (1991): 1514.

Other attempts to silence him included pelting him with apples and stones, as well as a thwarted attempt to deport him to Europe. Apparently, upon his release from prison, several of Virginia's stoutest citizens met him at the Accomac jail and forced him aboard a ship bound for Europe. They charged the captain that this man was a trouble-maker and should be made to work to pay his passage and be left somewhere in Europe. The ship was still in port on Easter Sunday and Rev. Baker asked the captain for permission to lead the crew in prayer and singing. The captain, observing, determined that Rev. Baker was a good man and returned him to shore.²¹

Having settled in Northampton, Baker married Sarah Copeland (d. 1787) and later married Ann Widgeon. In 1785, the Accomac court qualified him to perform marriages in Northampton. "The court called him an 'Anabaptist,' a term used of contempt often used of Baptists."²² Baker was also a slave owner. The tax list in 1785 shows him in ownership of 2 slaves; after his marriage to Ann Widgeon (a wealthy widow with one son), he is recorded as the owner of 8 slaves.²³ In a remarkable note, Baker is known to have granted manumission to a slave named Jacob Bishop in 1791. This same Bishop is listed "as a licentiate for the ministry from the Lower Northampton Baptist Church in 1791."²⁴

Baker last addressed the assembled Baptist churches of the Salisbury Association (Maryland); he spoke in a manner that seemed to bring heaven down to earth. He was stricken

²¹ Little, 474, quoting Semple's *History* (1810 edition), 385.

²² Moore, 1514-15. Moore refers to the Northampton County Order Book, No. 30 p. 241, January 12, 1785.

²³ *Ibid.*, 1515, referring to the Northampton County personal property lists for 1785 and 1788; White, 8.

²⁴ Moore, 1515, referring to John Asplund, *Annual Register, 1791*, p. 30. John Asplund, *The Annual Register of the Baptist Denomination in North America to the First of November 1790, Containing an Account of the Churches and Their Constitutions, Ministers, Members, Associations, their Plan and Sentiments, Rule and Order, Proceedings and Correspondence, also*

with an illness at his host's home and was never able to return home.²⁵ When he died on November 6, 1798, it was apparent that Mr. Baker, in addition to preaching, maintained an extensive farming operation. "His household articles show that his farm was equipped for comfortable living at that time."²⁶ This is not to slight his remarkable preaching career; that story will be told through the histories of the churches he planted.

Early Eastern Shore Baptist Churches

"In 1774, there was, in all probability, not a Baptist in the counties of Northampton and Accomack."²⁷ With the possible exception of a Presbyterian effort, "the religious system of the Established Church was the only one known to [denizens of the Eastern Shore] one hundred years ago."²⁸ After the founding of Lower Northampton Baptist Church, Baker proceeded northward, founding Messongo Baptist Church in 1779.²⁹ This was followed by Red Bank (or Hungars Baptist) in 1783. A fourth church, Metompkin was founded in 1785, but dissolved in 1835, after their building was destroyed by a tornado, which the congregation saw as a judgment from God.³⁰ The next church planted by Elijah Baker was Chincoteague Baptist (1786), interestingly not located on Chincoteague Island but on the mainland.³¹ His final plant on

Remarks upon Practical Religion (NP, 1791). Accessed at <http://books.google.com/books>, 30 July 2011.

²⁵ White, 9.

²⁶ Moore, 1519.

²⁷ Williamson, 5.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 11; Mariner, 483.

³¹ Williamson, 11; visit to Chincoteague Baptist Church, 8 July 2011, author's notes.

Virginia's Eastern Shore was Pungoteague Baptist Church (1790), now Hollies Baptist Church.³² Of these six churches, four still have a current active membership. Both the Messongo and Metompkin churches did not survive much past 40-50 years of ministry due to doctrinal strife.³³ The story of the history and ministry of the surviving churches follows.

LOWER NORTHAMPTON BAPTIST CHURCH (1778)

Founding and History

On an Easter Sunday morning 1776, Thomas Elliott, a layman and Elijah Baker, sailed over the Chesapeake Bay from Gloucester County, landing at Hunt's Point. Going to the grounds of Magothy Church, they noted that as usual the women were inside and the men were outside waiting for the clergyman, the Rev. McCoskry, to arrive and announce the beginning of divine service.³⁴ Mr. Elliott introduced Rev. Baker to the assembled men and no doubt they asked him about his sect. When it became obvious that Rev. McCoskry was not going to keep his appointment to preach, "the stranger issued an invitation, 'If you will go with me down the road a little way,' he said, 'I will preach the gospel according to the light which the Lord has given to me.'"³⁵ Thus did Elijah Baker preach his first sermon on the Eastern Shore. He and Elliott stayed on the Eastern Shore for several days, visiting homes to share the gospel. There

³² Williamson, 12.

³³ Ibid., 13-15. There was in the early 1800s a major debate among Baptists related to the extent of the atonement. Most Eastern Shore Baptist churches adhered to general atonement, but a some accepted limited atonement and began to oppose the promotion of mission work. Messongo eventually left the association in 1834 and became a Primitive Baptist Congregation, surviving as such until 1935 (Mariner, 479-80). Metompkin was similarly torn over the "missions question." A tornado tore through the building in 1834 and there was not sufficient interest to rebuild it (Mariner, 483).

³⁴ White, 1; Mariner, 463.

³⁵ White, 2.

was such a positive response that Baker promised to return by Pentecost Sunday.³⁶ “After two years of informal preaching, Baker constituted the first Baptist church on the Eastern Shore, and this became the present Lower Northampton Baptist Church.”³⁷ Founded in 1778, the first congregation consisted of five baptized believers.³⁸

Kirk Mariner notes that “Lower Northampton Baptist Church is, by the date of organization (1778), the fourth oldest existing congregation on the Eastern Shore. . . . It is not only the oldest Baptist church on the Shore, but the oldest continuous congregation of any denomination whose existence can be authenticated by the written record.”³⁹ Anglican churches have been on the Shore since the 1600s but have more sporadic records of activity. In 1785 Nathaniel Griffigon “deeded 800 square yards ‘for the use of the Baptist church’ . . . Quite often the early churches were erected with the verbal consent of the landowner, many years before the site was actually deeded to trustees.”⁴⁰ In 1798, the year Elijah Baker died, Mr. Griffigon exchanged that parcel of land for another piece and a second building was erected at the present site of the church.⁴¹ The church is known to have occupied a third building by 1869 and from thence birthed a number of daughter congregations.⁴² The current facility, a clerestory Gothic

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ralph T. Whitelaw, *Virginia’s Eastern Shore: A History of Northampton and Accomac County*, vol. 2 (Camden, ME: Picton Press, 1989) 123.

³⁸ Mariner, 456; White, 4.

³⁹ Mariner, 456.

⁴⁰ Whitelaw, 123.

⁴¹ Ibid., 124; Mariner, 456;

⁴² Mariner, 456-57. The daughter congregations consist of Eastville (1877), Cheriton (1889), Cedar Grove (1898) and Oyster (1908) [Mariner, 457]. Cedar Grove was to have a significant impact on the life of Lower Northampton in the mid-twentieth century.

style edifice, was built in 1913. This building has been in continuous use since with an education building erected behind the church in 1976.⁴³

By 1810, the church had 219 members; it was the largest Baptist church on the Shore.⁴⁴ From its beginning, it was a missions-minded congregation. In 1846, they established a Sunday School. In 1857, the congregation voted to not release members to other churches who were not up to date on their missions pledges. A Women's Missionary Society was formed by the congregation in 1888.⁴⁵ The church minutes reflected a resolution offered by a W. M. Scott that "we are willing and desire that sister V. F. Nottingham, Vice President of the Accomac Association of the Woman's Missionary Society (C.C.) in Virginia organize a missionary society in our church." In 1893, the church adopted a motion by Scott that "Bro. T. H. Downes be requested to ask the executive board of the Accomac Baptist Association to appropriate \$50 to the chapel at Sunnyside, a mission station of this church and that the pastor [H. Petty] be instructed to do the same to the State Mission Board."⁴⁶ In 1901, the church had a membership of 187 and reported attendance at their missions schools at Pine Grove (83) and Cedar Grove (116). Cedar Grove was established as a daughter congregation when 19 members of Lower Northampton were released to form the church in 1902.⁴⁷

In February 1956, its membership having dwindled to twenty-nine, Lower Northampton asked Cedar Grove to merge with their congregation, keeping the latter's name and, thereby

⁴³ Ibid., 457.

⁴⁴ W. Reaves, "History of Lower Northampton Baptist Church," an address given at the Ninety-fifth Annual Session of the Accomack Baptist Association, held at Red Bank Baptist Church, August 12-14, 1903, Association Minutes, 10.

⁴⁵ Clarence Moore, *Bicentennial Celebration of Lower Northampton Baptist Church: April 25, 1976*. Pamphlet prepared for the bicentennial celebration, 19.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 22.

⁴⁷ White, 95; Mariner, 457.

reviving the oldest congregation among Baptists on the Eastern Shore. The merger was official on Easter Sunday, April 1, 1956, with the pastor of Cedar Grove, N. D. Blackman, becoming the pastor of the combined congregations, thus lifting the membership of Lower Northampton to 176 members.⁴⁸

Current Ministry

Lower Northampton Baptist Church is a distinctive red brick church on Lankford Highway (Highway 13) near Cape Charles, Virginia. The church has a more modern Sunday School building behind it, built during the celebration of its bicentennial. In addition to its continued strong support of missions, the church's children's missions groups support the maintenance of Jacobia Lane, which is not far from the church.⁴⁹ They have also been active in migrant worker ministry (there is a significant migrant worker population on the Eastern Shore due to large tomato farms in the area). In 1969, the woman's missionary association thanked the church for its generosity to a family of migrant workers who suffered the loss of a daughter.⁵⁰ The congregation also participates as an emergency food pantry in cooperation with the Southeastern Virginia Food Bank.⁵¹ They also support the Accomac-Northampton Pregnancy Center.⁵²

⁴⁸ Mariner, 457; White, 96; Moore, *Bicentennial*, 49.

⁴⁹ Author's notes, 9 July 2011. This is noted on a roadside sign posted by the Virginia Department of Transportation.

⁵⁰ Clarence Moore, *Ebb and Flood Tide of the Baptists of the Eastern Shore of Virginia: 1960-1984*, vol. two, *History of the Accomack Baptist Association – 1809-1984* (Baltimore, MD: J. H. Furst, 1984), 10.

⁵¹ <http://www.foodbankonline.org/EasternShore/ProgramsAndServices/PartnerAgencies.aspx>; accessed 26 July 2011.

⁵² http://www.lowernorthamptonbaptistchurch.com/index.php?p=1_7_Suggested-Links; accessed 26 July 2011.

The church currently has a pastor, Rev. Jeff Conrow, and on a recent Sunday in May baptized five people.⁵³ The church's website reveals that while the church is aware of its history; it is a living congregation, reaching out to its community. The church has added audio-visual technologies to its worship equipment, enabling it to put the pastor's sermons online. Young adults are attending the church; some playing in its praise band.⁵⁴ Easter Sunday has always been special to this congregation; this past one no less. The church sanctuary was nearly full; with a mixture of age groups worshipping together. A children's choir and adult choir led the worship.⁵⁵ The church reported to the Baptist General Association of Virginia that it has a membership of 203; having experienced 10 baptisms in 2009. 65 members regularly attend and 35 participate in Sunday School.⁵⁶ Lower Northampton is, by God's grace, alive and well and reaching its community.

RED BANK BAPTIST CHURCH (1783)

Founding and History

Red Bank Baptist Church (formerly Hungars Baptist),⁵⁷ located in Marionville, Virginia, is 18 miles north of Lower Northampton Baptist Church. This is the third location of the church. Founded in 1783 near Bridgetown, the church's worship site was near Hungars Creek, thus the name was originally Hungars Baptist. Whitelaw's *History* relates that, in 1794, "Joab Bell left

⁵³http://www.lowernorthamptonbaptistchurch.com/index.php?p=1_8&a=Baptism_Service_5_22_11; accessed 26 July 2011.

⁵⁴http://www.lowernorthamptonbaptistchurch.com/index.php?p=1_11_Music-Team; accessed 26 July 2011.

⁵⁵http://www.lowernorthamptonbaptistchurch.com/index.php?p=1_8&a=Easter_2011; accessed 26 July 2011.

⁵⁶http://www.vbmb.org/Resources/Publications/media/docs/09_Annual.pdf, 316; accessed 27 July 2011.

⁵⁷ Mariner, 552.

his home plantation to his son. An item in his will reads: ‘I give one-half acre of land where the meeting house stands and is marked out to the use of Baptist preachers for their use to preach there forever and for no other use whatsoever’. This site is still used by the Red Bank Baptist Church of today. . . . At first it was called Hungos or Hungers but later took its present name. When the earlier edifice mentioned in the will was erected or when it was replaced by the present church is unknown.”⁵⁸ Elijah Baker was pastor at Hungars from 1783 until 1789; while also pastoring Lower Northampton. John Elliott succeeded him. “For more than half a century, Red Bank’s pastors were most often shared with Lower Northampton.”⁵⁹

In 1809, the church (Hungars) had 125 members.⁶⁰ Semple’s *History* indicates that the early 1800s was a time of particular struggle for the congregation; “[Hungars] has been for some time a declining church, having sustained great losses by the death of many of her most valuable private members.”⁶¹ Sometime between 1810 and 1831, however, a revival may have occurred related to the church’s strong stance as a missionary-minded congregation in the midst of a schism over missions that took place during this time.⁶² In 1831, “the place of worship was moved to a site near its present location, and the name Red Bank was assumed because of the proximity to Red Bank Creek.”⁶³ God blessed this move; in 1832 the church grew, having fifty-one additions by baptism.⁶⁴ In 1843, Red Bank began a Sunday School and established a

⁵⁸ Whitelaw, vol. 1, 450.

⁵⁹ Mariner, 552.

⁶⁰ “History of Red Bank Baptist Church,” unpublished manuscript, church files, Red Bank Baptist Church, Marionville, VA, Dr. John M. Robertson, pastor, 1.

⁶¹ Sample, 370.

⁶² “History of Red Bank Baptist Church,” 1; Mariner, 552.

⁶³ “History of Red Bank Baptist Church,” 1.

⁶⁴ “History of Red Bank Baptist Church,” 1; Mariner, 552.

“Ladies Benevolent Sewing Society.” Through the efforts of this society, in 1874, Red Bank Baptist Church was the only church on the Eastern Shore to answer the call to support a mission school run in Tengchow China, by “two Virginia Baptist women.”⁶⁵

In 1857, “the land upon which the present building and annex stand was acquired from George Bell and John H. Powell,” and in 1858, a new building (the church’s third) was erected on the site.⁶⁶ Another revival is said to have occurred in 1872. The pastor, Rev. William Thomas, died later that year and was buried near the church. So close was he buried, in fact, that when the church expanded its present building in 1899, they were careful to make sure that the pulpit of the new building was “constructed directly above his grave.”⁶⁷

In the twentieth century, the church continued its strong missionary emphasis. The Appendix in White’s book notes that one missionary, “Miss Frances Carter Jones, who died in Nigeria, West Africa,” in 1937 was sent out from Red Bank.⁶⁸ In 1958, as part of the church’s 175th anniversary, it was noted that the church was raising monies to build a new auxiliary building to support the Sunday School and other ministries. By 1961, this building was

⁶⁵ “History of Red Bank Baptist Church,” 2; these two sisters were Edmonia and Lottie Moon; see brief history of Lottie Moon at <http://www.imb.org/main/give/page.asp?StoryID=5526&LanguageID=1709>, accessed 26 July 2011.

⁶⁶ The old roof of this building, when the church was enlarged in 1899, can still be seen in its belfry. Interview with Linda Floyd, member of Red Bank Baptist Church, Saturday, July 9, 2011, Marionville, Virginia, author’s notes. Mrs. Floyd joined Red Bank Baptist Church when she was 14 years old. Her great-grandparents were members there.

⁶⁷ Mariner, 552.

⁶⁸ White, 103; Mariner, 553.

completed and “dedicated on December 3.”⁶⁹ The church membership has stayed consistently between 230 and 270 members.⁷⁰

Current Ministry

Today, Red Bank Baptist Church continues to worship in the building erected in 1899. It is a white, vinyl-siding church structure with gothic stained glass windows. There are two front entrances with a stained glass center window facing the street. There is a steeple on the left tower containing a belfry; the right tower has a flat roof. A large cemetery surrounds the church on three sides with additional plots across the road. An interesting architectural feature is an apse with windows on three sides on the back of the church. There is a sidewalk running between the church and the Sunday School building (which also houses the church office, library, and fellowship hall). There is modern playground equipment in a fenced area behind the Sunday School building. The interior of the church consists of a white slat-board ceiling and curved pews. The current pastor, Dr. John M. Robertson,⁷¹ could not say how old the pulpit or the furniture was. The congregation is using New King James Version Bibles and the current *Baptist Hymnal* in its worship, accompanied by organ. They provide hearing aid assistance and use power point for sermons. The interior of the apse was recently painted and the pastor noted that they ring the bell every Sunday. Interestingly, the baptistry is in the floor of the pulpit area.

The church currently has seventy members who attend regularly and is healthy financially. Dr. Robertson definitely sees the Eastern Shore as a mission field. The church was

⁶⁹ “History of Red Bank Baptist Church,” 2.

⁷⁰ White, 103; Mariner, 553.

⁷¹ Author’s description upon visiting the church, 9 July 2011. Dr. John Robertson is recently retired as Director of Missions (DOM) for the Portsmouth Baptist Association. He also currently serving as interim Director of Missions of the Accomack-Northampton Baptist Association, as the former DOM, Donald Roberts, recently passed away.

promoting and planning Vacation Bible School, scheduled in late July and has supported Operation Christmas Child. Red Bank also is supporting a Hispanic church plant, which uses facilities in its annex. He is planning a new member's class and a study aimed at helping the church members see themselves as part of God's plan for reaching the Eastern Shore, "Operation Inasmuch." He says that Red Bank is a pretty laid back church.⁷² A history, possibly written for the 200th anniversary of the congregation, notes that "Red Bank Baptist Church exists today as the result of members who throughout the years have been loyal and devoted to its mission and service and who have also been contributors to the social, political, and economic life of the entire Eastern Shore."⁷³ The church's 2009 annual report to the Baptist General Association of Virginia indicates that the church has a membership of 102; with fifty in regular attendance and forty-two participating in Sunday School.⁷⁴

CHINCOTEAGUE BAPTIST CHURCH (1786)

The Chincoteague area was made famous by the Misty of Chincoteague childrens' book series.⁷⁵ The name is derived from the name of an Indian tribe that dwelt in the area.⁷⁶ Today, it is a quiet island community with two Baptist churches in their midst. Surprisingly, Chincoteague

⁷² Interview with Dr. John M. Robertson, Pastor, Red Bank Baptist Church, Marionville, Virginia, 9 July 2011, author's notes. The author is greatly appreciative of the hospitality of the pastor and the members of the church who were so very helpful to open the church's doors and share her history and current life.

⁷³ "History of Red Bank Baptist Church," 2.

⁷⁴ http://www.vbmb.org/Resources/Publications/media/docs/09_Annual.pdf, 316; accessed 27 July 2011.

⁷⁵ http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=nb_sb_ss_i_0_21?url=search-alias%3Daps&field-keywords=misty+of+chincoteague&prefix=misty+of+chincoteague, accessed 27 July 2011.

⁷⁶ H. Chandlee Forman, *The Virginia Eastern Shore and Its British Origins: History, Gardens and Antiquities* (Easton, MD: Eastern Shore Publishers' Association, 1975), 195. The Indians called the area "Gingo Teague" which was anglicized to Chincoteague.

Baptist Church is not among them. On a recent excursion to explore the history and current ministry of Elijah Baker's church plants, a visit with the kind assistants at Union Baptist Church redirected the author back past Wallops Island and north on Highway 13 toward the Maryland state line. The only firm direction given was that the church was in the countryside behind the Royal Farms convenience station on Highway 13. Thanks to the kindness of a stranger who indicated a church was down a particular road, the explorers found Chincoteague Baptist Church, located in New Church, Virginia.

Founding and History

Elijah Baker founded Chincoteague Baptist Church in 1786 and it is the third oldest of the Baptist churches still in existence. Sample's *History* indicates that "the Gospel was first carried to these parts by the indefatigable Elijah Baker. His labors were not at first extensively blessed immediately in the neighborhood of Chincoteague."⁷⁷ This was attributed to the fact that the area was a strong "Pedo-Baptist community."⁷⁸ "It was named Chincoteague, according to local tradition, because Chincoteague Islanders are said to have had to travel this far to come to church." Mariner indicates that "a more likely explanation is that the name Chincoteague in the late 1700s referred to a wider area of the Shore than it does today."⁷⁹ The church prospered and in 1806, "William Benson deeded one-half acre to trustees 'for the purpose of building a meeting house for the Baptist church known by the name Chincoteague Church'."⁸⁰ By 1810, the church's membership was 132.⁸¹ The church was very much affected by the anti-mission cause

⁷⁷ Sample, 369.

⁷⁸ White, 86.

⁷⁹ Mariner, 321.

⁸⁰ Whitelaw, vol. 2, 1309.

⁸¹ Mariner, 321.

on the Shore. Pastor Thomas Roberts (1809-1832) was an active advocate against mission funding and his “ultra-Calvinism put the church to sleep and caused the do-nothing party to prevail.” The membership of the church during period “dwindled away to almost nothing.”⁸² After Roberts’s departure, the church was without a pastor until 1843 when William Wilkerson became pastor. The church reported that year to the Accomac Association that God was at work at Chincoteague.⁸³ The church’s greatest period was in the 1890s during which “the building was repaired and enlarged and stained glass windows installed.” During the pastorate of Walter Rhodes (1897-1903), there were fifty baptisms.⁸⁴ Chincoteague, true to her founding DNA, gave up twenty-four members in 1897 to found Horntown Baptist Church, following a “great meeting,” led by Chincoteague’s pastor, Judson Reamy.⁸⁵ In 1858 the church erected its present building, a modest white clapboard structure, and “the congregation is still carrying on services at the old site.”⁸⁶

In 1909, the church explored moving closer to the railroad in New Church but decided to send forty-nine members to found a new congregation there instead.⁸⁷ These two releases of members drained a great deal of strength from the church; the daughter churches quickly outpaced the mother church. “In 1921 Beulah Nock Allen of this church became a missionary to India.”⁸⁸ Since 1966, Chincoteague and Horntown have shared their pastors. Regretfully, the churches’ most recent pastor, Rev. Harold Derrickson, Jr., a native of Chincoteague, passed

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Mariner, 322.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 322; White, 87.

⁸⁵ Mariner, 430.

⁸⁶ Whitelaw, 1309.

⁸⁷ Mariner, 379.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 322.

away on March 28, 2011.⁸⁹ A sign on the church's door indicated that worship would not take place at the church on July 10, 2011. The church's 2010 annual church profile reported to the Baptist General Association of Virginia indicates that the church has a current membership of thirty four individuals with eight attending worship regularly, and two active in Woman's Missionary Union.⁹⁰

HOLLIES BAPTIST CHURCH (1790)

Founding and History

In 1790, Elijah Baker partnered with George Layfield to found a Baptist church in the Pungoteague community.⁹¹ By 1791, the church had sixty members. By 1792, the membership had tripled to 178 members.⁹² "Undoubtedly the first meetings were held in private homes, according to Elder Baker's custom. Even after it was organized, the church still had to meet from house to house for about two years."⁹³ George Layfield served as pastor of the church from

⁸⁹ http://www.salyerfh.com/fh/obituaries/obituary.cfm?o_id=1118910&fh_id=11836; accessed 27 July 2011. Rev. Derrickson served Chincoteague Baptist Church for 23 year and Horntown Baptist Church for 31 years.

⁹⁰ http://www.vbmb.org/Resources/Publications/media/docs/09_Annual.pdf, 316; accessed 27 July 2011.

⁹¹ Mariner, 423; Arleen Tyndall and Willi Behnken, "175 Years of God's Grace: Hollies Baptist Church (1790-1965), a pamphlet prepared for the celebration of the church's 175th anniversary, 7.

⁹² Tyndall and Behnken, 9. The historians refer to Asplund's history of Salisbury (MD) Association for these figures. John Asplund, *The Annual Register of the Baptist Denomination in North America to the First of November 1790, Containing an Account of the Churches and Their Constitutions, Ministers, Members, Associations, their Plan and Sentiments, Rule and Order, Proceedings and Correspondence, also Remarks upon Practical Religion* (NP, 1791), 24, accessed at <http://books.google.com/books>, 30 July 2011. Regretfully the pages where the Accomac county churches in Asplund's *Register* published in 1794 would be recorded are blank in the Google digitized version of this text and thus the history from 1965 is relied upon for the 1792 membership figure.

⁹³ Tyndale and Behnken, 7.

shortly after its founding by Baker from 1790 to 1814.⁹⁴ On May 16, 1792, the land on which the church meets to this day was deeded to the church by Mary Fox for the price of 20 shillings.⁹⁵ They built a simple meeting house. “In those years, the folks probably built with undressed lumber, cut in a nearby woods and the ‘log cabin’ description handed down to us, may indicate that it was slab-sided. The roof was peaked and, glass panes being expensive, they may have had as few windows as possible.” Meetings were frequently suspended due to inclement weather; so it must have been a very uncomfortable building.⁹⁶ In 1890, Judge Gunter, in an address to the Accomac Association, as a member of Hollies described attending services at “old Holly’s [sic] meeting house, with its high boxed pulpit, more like a prisoner’s box than a place for God’s servants to deliver HIS [sic] message to the people, with its unceiled walls, the rays of sunlight beaming through the cracks and knot-holes in the weather-boarding; with its seats not more than eight inches wide and no support to the back; hearted by an old ten-plate stove, with the light of the wood-fire shining through its badly connected joints.”⁹⁷ Under Layfield’s

⁹⁴ Ibid., 42.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 7, quoting from the Accomack County Deed Book 1788-1793, page 655, “Indenture 2d day of April 1792 between Mary Fox of the County of Accomack and the parish of St. George . . . and the trustees or members of the Baptist Church of the same place . . . for and in consideration of an earnest desire to promote and encourage any religious institution and particularly the building of a babtist [sic] meeting House and also the sum of 20 shillings in hand . . . one-half acre of land lying and begin at the West corner of Mary Fox’s land and adjoining the land of Jonathan Groten, Charles Bayly Taylor . . . for them and the succeeding Baptists forever and for no other use, intent or purpose whatsoever . . . and the intent of this deed is that if the said one-half acre of land is made use of for any other end then for the benefit or advantage of the said Church that the same be forfeit to the said Mary Fox.”

⁹⁶ “Tyndale and Behnken,” 7.

⁹⁷ Ibid. Benjamin T. Gunter, Address Made August 14, 1890 at the Accomack Baptist Association, Virginia, held at Pungoteague Baptist Church: The Centennial Year of that Church (Baltimore, MD: J. F. Weishampel, 1890), Association Minutes.

ministry, Pungoteague took on its first form but was “molded more completely during the 1830s by William Laws and the laymen of the Church.”⁹⁸

Originally part of the Salisbury Association, which met primarily in Maryland, the church joined with the other Baptist churches located in the Virginia section of the Eastern Shore to form the Accomac Association in 1809, at Pungoteague Church.⁹⁹ At the time of the formation of the Accomac Association, Pungoteague had a membership of 135.¹⁰⁰ The church was quite prosperous during the middle part of the nineteenth century. Though mostly pastored by laymen or unlicensed preachers during this period, the congregation never failed to look for opportunities to spread the gospel. It sponsored preaching points in Daugherty, Onley, and Sluitkill Neck. “It organized its first local missionary society in 1834.”¹⁰¹ They passed a resolution on April 12, 1834, “Resolved, that we form a Missionary Society within the bounds of this Church, to aid the funds of the General Association and that the object be presented tomorrow morning and subscriptions be opened immediately for that purpose.”¹⁰²

In 1841, the church licensed a gentleman named George Bradford to preach. Bradford was baptized in 1835 at the “Warehouse down on Pungoteague Creek,” at age 24, Pungoteague was asked to license him by Rehobeth Baptist Church. He returned to Pungoteague two years later and supplied their pulpit periodically for forty-three years. During this time, following Baker’s example, he planted three churches (one in Talbot County, Maryland and two in North Carolina). Bradford was called to pastor other churches but never moved his membership from

⁹⁸ Tyndale and Behnken, 19.

⁹⁹ Tyndale and Behnken, 9; Mariner, 424.

¹⁰⁰ Tyndale and Behnken, 9.

¹⁰¹ Mariner, 424.

¹⁰² Tyndale and Behnken, 36. “This was done at a Saturday business meeting . . . At this point, the Missionary Society covered all the church members.”

Pungoteague.¹⁰³ Interestingly, he liked to use the name “Holly’s Church” for the congregation. It is supposed that this “nickname” was derived from the family who farmed the property adjoining the church. Mary Fox’s stepfather was Abel Hawley and he perhaps farmed the land that Miss Fox deeded to the church. The nickname became the church’s official name in 1918.¹⁰⁴ Other changes to the property include purchasing a parcel near the church in 1837 from George Bradford and then a major expansion of the building in 1849.¹⁰⁵ Judge Gunter described the expansion. “The old meeting-house was turned around, improved and made comfortable.” This was necessary because of a change in the route of the road that ran in front of the church. The building affected was the one built in 1792, “measuring about 25 by 33 feet, which extended from the double-doors now in front, to the first step of the present platform of the pulpit.”¹⁰⁶

The church started a Sunday School ministry in 1851 and this has gone uninterrupted except for a couple of years during the civil war.¹⁰⁷ The first class consisted of “fifty pupils and twelve teachers.”¹⁰⁸ In 1856, the church dismissed members to form Onancock Baptist Church.¹⁰⁹ Pastored by William Fisher, there were sixteen baptisms that year.¹¹⁰ The church’s membership roll reached a high of 216 just after the civil war. In 1867, the members who were

¹⁰³ Tyndale and Behnken, 20.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 26. Authors cite the minutes of the Accomac Baptist Association, March 1918 as their source.

¹⁰⁵ Mariner, 424; Tyndale and Behnken, 21. Interestingly, Mariner indicates that in 1849, more than half of the church’s membership were slaves.

¹⁰⁶ Tyndale and Behnken, 21.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 22; Mariner, 424.

¹⁰⁸ Tyndale and Behnken, 33.

¹⁰⁹ Mariner, 424.

¹¹⁰ Tyndale and Behnken, 23.

former slaves withdrew their membership to form their own church, leaving 105 members.¹¹¹

The 1870s were a difficult period for the church with a low of thirty members in 1874.¹¹² In

1884, John Hundley became pastor and the congregation decided to expand their meeting house.

“The building was lengthened and a large platform for the pulpit was added.” A wing was built

on each side and a chandelier was purchased. The newly remodeled church was dedicated on

September 2, 1888, with George Bradford preaching the sermon.¹¹³ Hundley resigned the church

in 1889 because he felt that he could not keep up with such a large church field that included not

only Pungoteague, but Drummondtown, Onancock, and Broadway churches. He felt each

church was large enough to have its own pastor and that his continued presence on the field

discouraged the churches from seeking out their own pastors.¹¹⁴

Pungoteague was always open for opportunities to spread the gospel. In March 1890 the

church minutes reflect that they discussed establishing a preaching point at Wachapreague. In

1894, they supported the planting of preaching point in Harbortown, which quickly grew into a

congregation. She dismissed members to support this new church. In 1904, God sent a revival

to the church and forty professions of faith were made public; “with twenty-six baptized and one

reclaimed.”¹¹⁵ This required more expansion of the building, which was completed by 1906.¹¹⁶

The church’s lengthiest pastorate began in 1933 with the arrival of H. M. Nichols. At

the beginning of his pastorate the membership was ninety-one, and before his retirement in 1957,

had increased to 163. This increase created a pressing need for more Sunday School space, so

¹¹¹ Tyndale and Behnken, 23; Mariner, 424.

¹¹² Mariner, 424.

¹¹³ Tyndale and Behnken, 23.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 23-24.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 25.

the church voted in 1945 to raise money to build a two-room building that could be converted into one open space if needed.¹¹⁷ During his tenure, the church also drew up a new constitution, as there were no extant records of any earlier ones.¹¹⁸

The Sunday School building which the church aspired to build was made reality in October 23, 1960 when the “ground-breaking took place.” The building was designed and built of cinderblock, thirty by seventy feet in dimension, and designed to hold six classrooms, a kitchen and a fellowship hall.¹¹⁹ The membership in the twentieth century peaked at 199 in 1964. “Hollies has worshipped continuously in its building on its plot of ground longer than any other Baptist Church on the Eastern Shore of Virginia.”¹²⁰

Current Ministry

After the quiet silence at Chincoteague, it was refreshing to meet Pastor Joe McKnight at Hollies Baptist Church. Rev. McKnight and his assistant, Sherry Adams, graciously allowed the end of their Friday routine to be interrupted by passing strangers with an interest in seeing the interior of the church and hearing about its current ministries.¹²¹ Hollies Baptist is a white vinyl-sided building with gingerbread styled trim that is so prevalent among churches on the Eastern Shore. It has a large buttress pressing into the building’s exterior to strengthen it, as renovations that removed the balcony also destabilized the building. The church offices are located in a

¹¹⁶ Mariner, 424.

¹¹⁷ Tyndale and Behnken, 27.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 28.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 29.

¹²⁰ Mariner, 424.

¹²¹ Interview of Rev. Joe McKnight, Pastor, Hollies Baptist Church, Keller, Virginia, 8 July 2011, author’s notes. Rev. McKnight is a native of the Eastern Shore and is a 1990 graduate with a Bachelor of Science in Religion from Liberty University.

temporary building behind the church. Central heat and air were added to the buildings in 2000. The glass in the windows is original. The pews and pulpit date back to 1812 and the pulpit chairs date back to the founding. Lighting fixtures are shaped like pineapples, a symbol of hospitality frequently used in Virginia. In updating the interior of the building, they have installed sound equipment donated by a retired musician. The church has also installed a power point projection system, and a sound board so that recorded accompaniment can be used. The church members are having a work day on Saturday, July 9, to cover the wiring involved with crown molding. The church also has a new website.¹²²

Pastor McKnight seeks to encourage the members, as they perform renovations and other ministries at the church, to look for ways to do similar kinds of ministry in the community. Benevolence is now part of the standard budget, and giving to missions has increased. The church has recently revised its mission statement to say, "Impacting the World with the Truth and Love of Jesus Christ."¹²³ As a result of a year-long strategic planning survey, the church is now actively involved in evangelistic outreach, with nearly thirty persons involved in a recent G.R.O.W. night.¹²⁴ The church is planning a prayer walk and open house during the month of July 2011.¹²⁵

¹²² <http://www.holliesbaptistchurch.com>. This website has several helpful features, including audio of some of the Rev. McKnight's sermons and of the choir singing, and highlights of various ministry activities.

¹²³ <http://www.holliesbaptistchurch.com/>.

¹²⁴ Joe McKnight, "Impact, Impart, Inspire," *Hollies Baptist Church Impact Newsletter*, Summer 2011. GROW is a outreach program provided by Lifeway Christian Resources. "GROW" is an acronym for "God Rewards Our Work." GROW works to cultivate commitment among those who are willing to be involved in outreach once a month. <http://www.lifeway.com/ArticleView?storeId=10054&catalogId=10001&langId=-1&article=GROW-Outreach-Teams-That-Win>, accessed 31 July 2011.

¹²⁵ http://www.holliesbaptistchurch.com/index.php?p=1_4_Events-Calendar, accessed 30 July 2011.

Hollies Baptist Church now supports a ministry called Impact Hope, which ministers to those with cancer. They also have a ministry called Impact Hunger, which works on several initiatives, including providing a food pantry for the working poor, maintaining a vegetable garden to provide fresh vegetables, and providing “Bobcat Sacks” for children during the school year to take home on weekends and during breaks. In the schools, Hollies volunteers encourage teachers by providing a staff breakfast and helping with the literacy outreach of the school. McKnight hopes to expand the community outreach by someday providing respite care for adult care providers to have a safe place for their elder family member while they shop or run errands. The parsonage owned by the church, which is in Keller,¹²⁶ is used as a home for missionaries and has been the base for a Hispanic church planter for seven or eight years. The Leland Center in Richmond sends an instructor over to provide seminary courses to area Hispanic pastors in the church’s fellowship hall. In 2009, the church reported to the General Association a membership of 237 with two baptisms recorded that year. Hollies Baptist Church averages attendance of 150 with sixty-six attending Sunday School.¹²⁷ On a recent Sunday, in early July 2011, 139 attended worship and sixty participated in Sunday School.¹²⁸

CONCLUSION

On the work of Virginia Baptists, G. M. Byrdon once commented, “the fact that ‘unlearned and ignorant men’ filled with the zeal of the Christian gospel preaching to the uneducated men and women is the most outstanding and notable feature of the Baptist

¹²⁶ Purchased in 1914 (Mariner, 424).

¹²⁷ http://www.vbmb.org/Resources/Publications/media/docs/09_Annual.pdf, 316; accessed 27 July 2011.

¹²⁸ Weekly Statistics for 3 July 2011, Hollies Baptist Church Sunday Bulletin, 10 July 2011.

movement. They did a work in Virginia between 1750 and 1800 which neither the Anglicans or Presbyterians were prepared or equipped to do. . . . The very things that repelled the educated classes attracted the uneducated all the more strongly and, as they yielded to new teaching, they found themselves expressing their faith in their own words and producing their own preachers and leaders.”¹²⁹ Elijah Baker was one of these preachers and the fruit of his work with his co-laborers, among whom are Thomas Elliott, George Layfield, and emancipated slave Jacob Bishop, impacted the lives of those who heard them gladly. The churches he founded, with the exception of the two that foundered on the shoals of Calvinism, gave birth to eight daughter congregations. Two overseas missionaries went out from among their membership in the early 1900s.¹³⁰ The following is a sketch of the development of Baptist life on the Eastern Shore and how the churches of the Eastern Shore have chosen to remember their founding church planter even as they honor him by serving Christ today.

Eastern Shore Churches Founded by the First Four

Elijah Baker’s zeal for souls was not lost in the generation that inherited his work when he passed away in 1798. Lower Northampton, the first Baptist church on the Eastern Shore, provided support for the founding of the Eastville Baptist Church, sending eight members (along with eight members from Red Bank) to give the congregation a start in 1877 with sixteen members.¹³¹ When the church celebrated its centennial year, it had a membership of 141, and

¹²⁹ G. M. Byrdon, “Virginia’s Mother Church,” *Philadelphia Church Historical Society*, 11 (1952), p. 190, quoted in John S. Moore, “Elijah Baker (1742-1798): A One-Talent Man Who Succeeded,” *Virginia Baptist Register* 30 (1991): 1510.

¹³⁰ Mariner, 322, 424, 457, 553. Frances Carter Jones (Nigeria) was a member of Red Bank; Beulah Nock Allen (India) was a member of Chincoteague.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 457; White, 89.

extensively remodeled and expanded its facilities in 1904 and again in 1952.¹³² Pastored by Keith Horner, its current membership, as reported in 2009 is forty-six souls.¹³³ Lower Northampton and Red Bank worked together again to support a Sunday School and then the plant of Cheriton Baptist Church in 1889.¹³⁴ “Rev. J. W. Reams organized the church in 1890 with twenty-seven constituent members.”¹³⁵ In the 1920s the church grew to a point that it needed a new building and a site was chosen in Eastville across from the Methodist Church and was built at a cost of \$65,000, “perhaps the most expensive church building on the Eastern Shore at the time.”¹³⁶ The current pastor is Charles Peterson.¹³⁷ In 2009, the church reported a membership of 178, having baptized two souls.¹³⁸ In 1898, Lower Northampton wanted to start a church further down on the tip of the Eastern Shore. They began a Sunday School in Cedar Grove which quickly developed into a church. Nineteen members of Lower Northampton withdrew to form the new congregation. By 1902 it had a building, though services were often in the afternoon since the church shared its pastor with Lower Northampton until 1918.¹³⁹ In 1930, “the building was extensively enlarged and improved The membership was 143 in that year.”¹⁴⁰ Cedar Grove’s success was almost Lower Northampton’s demise. In January

¹³² Mariner, 359.

¹³³ http://www.vbmb.org/Resources/Publications/media/docs/09_Annual.pdf, 316; accessed 27 July 2011.

¹³⁴ Mariner, 312.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*; White, 85.

¹³⁶ Mariner, 312.

¹³⁷ <http://www.vbmb.org/apps/Churches/Associations-details.cfm?ID=1>, accessed 30 July 2011.

¹³⁸ http://www.vbmb.org/Resources/Publications/media/docs/09_Annual.pdf, 316; accessed 27 July 2011.

¹³⁹ Mariner, 306.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

1956, Lower Northampton asked the Cedar Grove congregation to merge with it, keeping the former's name and building. Cedar Grove accepted the offer and her pastor became the pastor of Lower Northampton in January 1956. The building in Cedar Grove was reported in 1978 to be in use as a storage building for a farm.¹⁴¹

Red Bank Baptist Church assisted with the founding of Eastville and Cheriton, and was the driving force behind the founding of Exmore Baptist Church in 1907.¹⁴² A group of Baptist women from Red Bank established the Sunday School in the summer of 1906. By the fall of 1906 meetings were held to talk about the possibility of planting a Baptist church in town. "Rev. Charles Clement, of Chincoteague Baptist Church was summoned to conduct a revival."¹⁴³ On April 11, 1907, "the new church was organized with twenty-nine members."¹⁴⁴ It grew rapidly into one of the largest Baptist churches on the Eastern Shore.¹⁴⁵ Today, it is pastored by Jonathan Carpenter and is affiliated with the Southern Baptist Conservatives of Virginia.¹⁴⁶ It hosts a Christian academy and has an active Children's and Youth Ministry.

Harborton was a short-lived church founded by Hollies Baptist Church in 1894 in this new community. "The new church seated 300 persons, cost \$3500, and was said to be the finest frame church building on the Eastern Shore of Virginia at that time."¹⁴⁷ Hollies sent twenty-eight members to found the new congregation. Though it had its own pastor briefly, it regularly

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Mariner, 372; White, 90.

¹⁴³ Mariner, 372.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 373.

¹⁴⁶ <http://www.exmorebaptistchurch.com/>; <http://www.sbcv.org/churches>; accessed 30 July 2011.

¹⁴⁷ Mariner, 417.

shared pastors with Hollies Baptist Church. In 1930, the church ceased holding services, and the land on which the church was built reverted back to its original owner and the building was sold and dismantled in 1944.¹⁴⁸

Chincoteague is the mother church of Horntown Baptist and First Baptist, New Church. Horntown was founded out of a revival meeting lead by Judson Reamy, pastor of Chincoteague, and on December 31, 1896, “twenty-four persons [were] dismissed from Chincoteague for the purpose of constituting the new congregation.”¹⁴⁹ Its building was completed in 1897.¹⁵⁰ Until the recent death of their most recent and longtime pastor in 2011, Horntown and Chincoteague shared their pastor. In 2009, Horntown reported a membership of nineteen with twenty-five average attendance for morning worship.¹⁵¹ First Baptist Church, New Church, Virginia was begun when forty-seven members of Chincoteague were dismissed with the church’s blessing in 1909 to start a congregation nearer to the new railroad tracks.¹⁵² This congregation quickly eclipsed its mother church. The building constructed in 1909 is still in use. They added rooms in the 1960s and a fellowship hall in the 1970s. Its Facebook page points to its website.¹⁵³ The website indicates that it relates to both the Baptist General Association of Virginia and the Southern Baptist Conservatives of Virginia.¹⁵⁴ The current pastor is Bobby Parks, and the

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 418.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 430.

¹⁵⁰ White, 94.

¹⁵¹ http://www.vbmb.org/Resources/Publications/media/docs/09_Annual.pdf, 316; accessed 27 July 2011

¹⁵² Mariner, 379.

¹⁵³ https://www.facebook.com/pages/First-Baptist-of-New-Church-VA/193653323982896#!/pages/First-Baptist-of-New-Church-VA/193653323982896?v=info#info_edit_sections, accessed 30 July 2011.

¹⁵⁴ <http://firstbaptistnewchurchva.org/About.html>, accessed 30 July 2011.

church reports in its 2009 annual church profile that it has 205 members with an average attendance in worship of forty five.¹⁵⁵

Baker Remembered on the Eastern Shore

Upon arrival on the Eastern Shore via the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel, a traveler will drive about eight miles north and come upon an usual-looking red-brick church on the left. This is Lower Northampton Baptist Church. The church has a plaque upon its façade that offers a tribute to Elijah Baker. “Elijah Baker, pioneer Baptist of the Eastern Shore of Virginia, who landed at Hunt’s Point, Old Plantation Creek, on Easter Sunday 1776 and the same day preached the first Baptist sermon, ‘at the end of a horsing tree.’ Opposition of the established church caused him to be deported; but kind providence brought him back. He was later imprisoned 56 days in the old debtors’ jail at Accomac for the crime of preaching the gospel. (Act IV: 19, 20) [sic] In gratitude for the rich heritage that is ours because of his suffering and imprisonment, this memorial is erected by the churches of the Accomac Baptist Association, April 4, 1926.”¹⁵⁶ This is apparently a copy of a similar one on display on a monument in the yard a Drummondtown Baptist Church. White’s history of the Accomac Baptist Association records the presence of a different memorial plaque, dedicated on May 31, 1931, which read “Memorial Elijah Baker, 1742-1798, First Baptist preacher on the Eastern Shore of Virginia. Landing at Hunt’s Point on Easter Sunday, 1776, he preached near where this church stands. He organized Lower Northampton Baptist Church, 1778, and was its pastor until his death, 1798. This ‘Hero of the Cross’ was imprisoned for preaching the fundamental doctrines of Baptists. (Acts 5:29). Erected

¹⁵⁵ http://www.vbmb.org/Resources/Publications/media/docs/09_Annual.pdf, 316; accessed 27 July 2011.

¹⁵⁶ See picture of this plaque in the appendix below.

by Accomac Baptist Association, May 31, 1931.”¹⁵⁷ The sesquicentennial and bicentennial celebration documents for Hollies Baptist Church and Lower Northampton give focus to the pioneer church planting work of Rev. Baker.

Mariner notes that Elijah Baker’s sermon was the first non-Anglican sermon ever heard on the Eastern Shore.¹⁵⁸ “Baker’s arrival was timely, for the Shore was ripe for spiritual change. Years of uncontested supremacy had made the Church of England lax and indifferent to the spiritual needs of the great mass of people on the Shore, and 1776 was the beginning of its end.”¹⁵⁹ A great revival was swirling around the Eastern Shore but the denizens citizens of the shore remained ignorant of it. “Safe and secure on its isolated peninsula, Eastern Shore society knew little or nothing of Jonathan Edwards, or John Wesley.”¹⁶⁰ It was Elijah Baker who brought the Great Awakening to the Eastern Shore. He was a “thoroughgoing son of the Great Awakening.”¹⁶¹ Mariner notes that Elijah Baker almost single-handedly “achieved a revolution” on the Shore.¹⁶² Charles James in his *Documentary History of the Struggle for Religious Freedom in Virginia* provides an appendix written by George W. Beale, “Baptist Beginnings in Virginia.” Beale mentions Baker in a hagon of persecuted preachers, “who heard the iron bolts turned against them.”¹⁶³ Little’s book, *Imprisoned Preachers and Religious Liberty*, helpfully provides verbatim documentation of the legal documents charging Elijah Baker with

¹⁵⁷ White, 76.

¹⁵⁸ Mariner, 1.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 2.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 12.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Mariner, 15.

¹⁶³ James, 215.

“vagrancy.”¹⁶⁴ Besides being jailed for preaching and an attempted deportation, Baker was sometime pelted with rocks and stones.¹⁶⁵

Without doubt, Elijah Baker, a son of the Great Awakening, was remarkably used by God to get His word to a group of very isolated people, snugly tucked away in Satan’s back pocket. He suffered the worst man could get away with legally or illegally to block the gospel and yet, his perseverance made all the difference. “Wherever he could find an audience, whether in homes, groves, or by the wayside, he, like the Apostle Paul, preached the words of life.”¹⁶⁶ Gunter notes in his address that the colony of Virginia and the state of Virginia was the location upon which the battle for religious liberty was fought, and “our Baptist fathers were the leaders in the struggle.”¹⁶⁷ Elijah Baker was a foot soldier in that struggle. The churches that he planted on the Eastern Shore continue his efforts to share the gospel with their communities and beyond.

¹⁶⁴ Little, 469-480.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 473.

¹⁶⁶ Tyndale and Behnken, 5.

¹⁶⁷ Gunter, “Address,” 4.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

“Geneological Notes: Elijah Baker (1742-1798).” *Virginia Baptist Register*, 6 (1967): 286-288.

Hollies Baptist Church Sunday Bulletin, 10 July 2011.

Asplund, John. *The Annual Register of the Baptist Denomination in North America to the First of November 1790, Containing an Account of the Churches and Their Constitutions, Ministers, Members, Associations, their Plan and Sentiments, Rule and Order, Proceedings and Correspondence, also Remarks upon Practical Religion*. NP, 1791. Accessed at <http://books.google.com/books>, 30 July 2011.

_____. *The Universal Register of the Baptist Denomination in North America for the Years 1790, 1791, 1792, 1793, and part of 1794*. Boston, MA: John Folsom, 1794. Accessed at <http://books.google.com/books>, 30 July 2011.

Benedict, David. *A General History of the Baptist Denomination in America and Other Parts of the World*. Volume 2. Boston, MA: Manning & Loring, 1813. Accessed at <http://books.google.com>.

Birkett, James N., compiler. *Carving Out a Kingdom: Carmel Baptist Church 1773-1965*. Richmond, VA: Christian Enterprises, 1965.

“History of Lower Northampton Baptist Church,” in *Church Directory of Lower Northampton Church 1940s era*.

The Holy Bible. Updated New American Standard Version. Anaheim, CA: Foundation Publications, 2002.

Forman, H. Chandlee. *The Virginia Eastern Shore and Its British Origins: History, Gardens and Antiquities*. Easton, MD: Eastern Shore Publishers’ Association, 1975.

Gunter, Benjamin T. *Address Made August 14, 1890 at the Accomack Baptist Association, Virginia*. Held at Pungoteague Baptist Church: The Centennial Yeal of that Church. Baltimore, MD: J. F. Weishampel, 1890.

Isaac, Rhys. *The Transformation of Virginia: 1704-1790*. Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999.

- James, Charles. *Documentary History of the Struggle for Religious Liberty in Virginia*. Civil Liberties in American History. Leonard W. Levy, General Editor. New York: Da Capo, 1971.
- Little, Lewis Peyton. *Imprisoned Preachers and Religious Liberty in Virginia: A Narrative Drawn Largely from the Official Records of Virginia Counties, Unpublished Manuscripts, Letters and Other Original Sources*. Lynchburg, VA: J. P. Bell, 1938.
- Mason, George Carrington. "The Colonial Churches of the Eastern Shore of Virginia." *William and Mary College Quarterly Historical Magazine*. Vol. 20 (October 1940): 449-464. Assessed in JSTOR
- Mariner, Kirk. *Revival's Children: A Religious History of Virginia's Eastern Shore*. Salisbury, MD: Peninsula Press, 1979.
- McKnight, Joe. "Impact, Impart, Inspire." Hollies Baptist Church Impact Newsletter, Summer 2011.
- Moore, Clarence. *Bicentennial Celebration of Lower Northampton Baptist Church: April 25, 1976*. Pamphlet prepared for the bicentennial celebration.
- _____. *Ebb and Flood Tide of the Baptists of the Eastern Shore of Virginia: 1960-1984*. Volume Two of *History of the Accomack Baptist Association – 1809-1984*. Baltimore, MD: J. H. Furst, 1984.
- Moore, John S. "Elijah Baker (1742-1798): A One-Talent Man Who Succeeded." *Virginia Baptist Register* 30 (1991): 1510-23.
- Reaves, W. "History of Lower Northampton Baptist Church." An address given at the Ninety-fifth Annual Session of the Accomack Baptist Association, held at Red Bank Baptist Church, August 12-14, 1903. Association Minutes.
- Rhoades, Walter. "History of Chincoteague Baptist Church." An address given at the Ninety-fifth Annual Session of the Accomack Baptist Association, held at Red Bank Baptist Church, August 12-14, 1903. Association Minutes.
- Sample, Robert Baylor. *History of the Baptists in Virginia*. Revised and extended edition by G. W. Beale. Introduction by Joe M. King. Lafayette, TN: Church History Research and Archives, 1976.
- Tyndall, Arleen and Willi Behnken. *175 Years of God's Grace: Hollies Baptist Church (1790-1965)* Pamphlet prepared for the celebration of the church's 175th anniversary.
- White, Blanche Sydnor. *History of the Baptists on the Eastern Shore of Virginia, 1776-1959: Prepared for the Sesqui-Centennial of the Accomack Baptist Association*. Volume One of *History of the Accomack Baptist Association – 1809-1984*. Baltimore, MD: J. H. Furst, 1959.
- Whitelaw, Ralph T. *Virginia's Eastern Shore: A History of Northampton and Accomack County*. Volume 2. Camden, ME: Picton Press, 1989.

Williamson, Robert. *A Brief History of the Origin and Progress of the Baptists on the Eastern Shore of Virginia, embracing an account of the Accomack Association and Sketches of the Churches*. Baltimore, MD: J. F. Weishampel, Jr., Printer and Bookseller, 1878.

Interviews

Interview with Dr. John M. Robertson, Pastor, Red Bank Baptist Church, Marionville, Virginia. 9 July 2011. Author's Notes.

Interview with Rev. Joe McKnight, Pastor, Hollies Baptist Church, Keller, Virginia. 8 July 2011. Author's Notes.

Interview with Linda Floyd, member of Red Bank Baptist Church, Marionville, Virginia. 9 July 2011. Author's notes.

Websites

<http://www.exmorebaptistchurch.com>; accessed 30 July 2011.

https://www.facebook.com/pages/First-Baptist-of-New-Church-VA/193653323982896#!/pages/First-Baptist-of-New-Church-VA/193653323982896?v=info#info_edit_sections. Accessed 30 July 2011.

<http://www.foodbankonline.org/EasternShore/ProgramsAndServices/PartnerAgencies.aspx>. Accessed 26 July 2011.

<http://www.imb.org/main/give/page.asp?StoryID=5526&LanguageID=1709>. Accessed 26 July 2011.

<http://www.lifeway.com/ArticleView?storeId=10054&catalogId=10001&langId=-1&article=GROW-Outreach-Teams-That-Win>. Accessed 31 July 2011.

<http://www.lowernorthamptonbaptistchurch.com>. Accessed 26 July 2011.

<http://www.sbcv.org/churches>. Accessed 30 July 2011.

http://www.vbmb.org/Resources/Publications/media/docs/09_Annual.pdf. Accessed 27 July 2011.

APPENDIX

*Photographic Record of Elijah Baker's Church Plants, 8-9 July 2011*¹⁶⁸

Lower Northampton Baptist Church, Cape Charles, Virginia

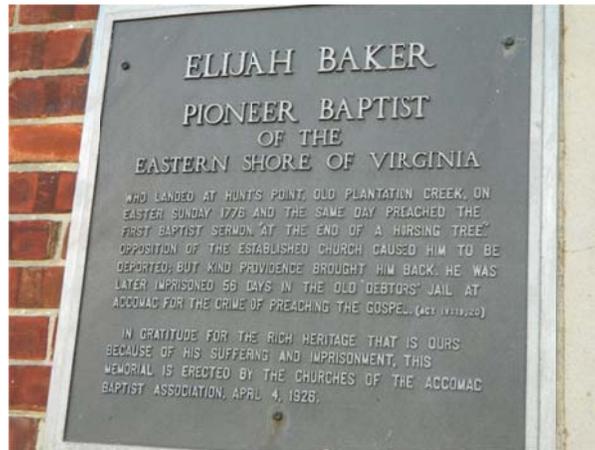


Figure 1 - Plaque on facade of Lower Northampton Baptist Church



Figure 2 Front of Lower Northampton Baptist Church

¹⁶⁸ Photo Credit: Fred Smith, taken with a Nikon Coolpix L120 camera, 8-9 July 2011.

Red Bank Baptist Church, Marionville, Virginia



Figure 3 - Red Bank Baptist Church with Sign



Figure 5 – Exterior Red Bank Baptist Church



nk

Chincoteague Baptist Church, New Church, Virginia



Figure 6 - Exterior of Chincoteague Baptist Church



Figure 7 - Church's Identification Above Door

Hollies Baptist Church, Keller, Virginia



Figure 10 - Church Sign

