From Rogers to Netherton:
A Heritage of Baptist Presidents
The Seventh:
Rev. Jesse Baker, D.D.

Soon the land was baptized in blood and tears and overshadowed by the smoke of battle. The college came out a wreck with a debt of $6,000, her only assets being three dilapidated brick buildings destitute of floors, windows and doors and an unfenced lot. In 1869 Dr. Baker was elected president and an attempt was made to revive the institution. I knew something of his feelings for it was then that I was called, a mere boy, to a place in the faculty.... We went to look over the grounds and talk over the work on August 7th, 1869, the day of the total eclipse of the sun. As we looked over the wrecked buildings and grounds it seemed fitting to have the light of the sun shut out. Dr. Baker was distressed because the property was in ruins and the people discouraged, the college about to be sold under debt and its history about to end in dishonor.... As we turned to leave the cheerless spot he said, “Let us undertake it.”

(From Prof. W. T. Russell’s address at the memorial service for Dr. Baker held by the Trustees and Alumni)

Although serving the second shortest tenure of the college’s presidents, Jesse Baker is one of its most famous. Elected June 9, 1869 by the Board of Trustees, he served during perhaps the most crucial period of Carson-Newman College’s existence until resigning December 10, 1870. His heroic efforts were vital to its salvation and gave him a lasting legacy in the annals of East Tennessee history.

Jesse Baker was born on March 20, 1836 near Sneedville, Hancock County, Tennessee to G. W. and Martha Baker. Like his great grandfather Andrew Baker of Virginia, he would heed the call to the ministry.

In 1842 he accepted Christ as his Savior at the age of six. He made a public profession of faith in 1853 at seventeen and was baptized by Elder John Gilbert, becoming a member of the Sneedville Church. Feeling the call to preach, he entered Mossy Creek Baptist College in March 1855.

In the summer of 1858, Baker was ordained in the Sneedville Church under the presbytery of Elders Asa Routh, Thomas Gilbert, and J. D. Berry. On June 9, he was one of six in the graduating class of 1859. That September he was called to his first pastorate in Tazewell, Claiborne County. He would serve there for the next ten years.

On October 3, 1860, Baker married Lucy A. Neil, daughter of William and Margaret Neil of Tazewell. They would have four sons and serve together for the next thirty-two years.

Dr. Jesse Baker
President, 1869-1870
On November 16, 1862 Baker enrolled for three years of service as a private in Company “F” of the 16th Tennessee Cavalry Battalion, C.S.A. under Captain Michael Staley at War Gap in Hancock County. On January 2, 1863 he deserted his battalion at Camp Jackson in Hancock County and surrendered to raiding Union troops under the command of Brigadier General Samuel P. Carter. After taking the Oath of Allegiance he was released and allowed to return to civilian life.

After his short war experience Baker returned to the ministry. In the fall of 1865 he preached three sixteen-day revivals during which one hundred and fifty professions of faith were made. He continued to serve in Tazewell until September 20, 1868 when he accepted the pastorate of Mossy Creek Baptist Church. That same year he joined R. R. Bryan as associate professor at the newly re-opened Mossy Creek Baptist College. The school had been closed since the spring of 1862.

On June 9, 1869 the Board of Trustees elected Baker president. Described as being of “medium size” at five feet ten inches, one hundred and fifty pounds with dark hair, blue eyes and a fair complexion, little did he know that his efforts during the upcoming year would make him a legend. The college was in a very precarious state. The campus had been ravaged by military occupation during the war and debts exceeded $6,000. A decree was entered in Chancery Court by creditors asking that the property be auctioned off if payment could not be made within a year. Baker then resolutely set off on a ten-month campaign by horseback. Professor W. T. Russell took charge of the school in his absence.

During this time he traveled 3,500 miles and raised $5,250, enough to save the school. In his Biographical Sketches of Tennessee Baptist Ministers, Joseph Borum notes: “On the 4th of May, 1865, by the blessing of God, the last dollar of debt was paid, and Mossy Creek [C]ollege was free from debt for the first time in its history.”

God continued to bless the school and church. In less than five months during 1870 Baker saw one hundred young men matriculate as students. In the fall of 1870 revival came to the area and one hundred conversions took place. Records show that he also received his M.A. during this year. On December 10, 1870 Baker resigned as president in order to give all his time to preaching and pastoral work. N. B. Goforth would succeed him as president.

He served Mossy Creek Baptist Church for a total of sixteen years and during that time baptized more than five hundred into its membership. During his lifetime he also served Dandridge Baptist Church for seventeen years, Cedar Grove (Alpha) Baptist Church for twenty years (serving four different times), and Mouth of Richland for ten years as well as Dumplin, Island Home, Smithwood, Newport, Rankin, Beaver Creek, Buffalo, Rob Camp, and Little Sycamore.

Professor W. T. Russell described Baker’s preaching as he later recalled one of his services: “I remember especially one great sermon at night. He spoke with such pathos and power and eloquence that it seemed the whole audience was moved as I have never seen an audience moved before or since. His voice was full of fervor and melody. His tongue was eloquent; his hands could speak. His fiery words burned into every soul present.”

Although he had resigned his presidency, Baker continued to work very closely with the college, serving on the Board of Trustees for almost thirty years and serving as its secretary. During this time he was instrumental in the development of Newman College for women. In
1882 the school honored him with an honorary Doctor of Divinity.

Rev. Jesse Baker, D.D. died on May 21, 1902. He and his wife were laid to rest in the old First Baptist Church cemetery behind Sarah Swann Residence Hall on the Carson-Newman College campus. His obituary in The Watchman noted that funeral services “were held in the Baptist church by Dr. Phillips and [were] attended by the largest concourse of people ever seen at a funeral in Jefferson City.” It ended with, “A good man has been called away from us, yet he lives.”

Carson-Newman Hosts Baptist History & Heritage Society
Carson-Newman College and First Baptist Church, Jefferson City hosted the 2002 annual meeting of the Baptist History and Heritage Society June 20-22. This year’s theme was “Baptist Diversity.” Among the eleven distinguished program personalities were Sherman R. Tribble who spoke on “Diverse Baptist Worship Styles Among African-American Baptists,” Catherine B. Allen addressed “Diverse Baptist Attitudes Toward Women in Missions,” and Jimmy Garcia III described “Diverse Baptist Worship Styles Among Hispanic Texas Baptists.”

Baptist Archives Annual Report
(July 1, 2001 – June 30, 2002)
Accessions: 4

Patrons: 45 (57 in 2000-02 / 50 in 1999-00)
Carson-Newman Staff: 3
Carson-Newman Students: 12
Others: 30

States Represented
California: 3
Georgia: 1
Indiana: 2
Massachusetts: 2
Missouri: 3
South Carolina: 1
Tennessee: 17
Virginia: 1

Walk-Ins: 31
Phone: 7
Letter: 3
Email: 4
I.L.L. (Inter Library Loan): 0

Visit our web site at:
http://library.cn.edu/CNAPs/Baptframe.html
Off campus
http://library.cn.edu:8686/CNAPs/Baptframe.html

Jesse and Lucy Baker’s Grave Marker
Old First Baptist Church Cemetery
Jefferson City

Baptist History Resources: R. Lofton Hudson Manuscript Collection
This spring the Baptist Archives completed processing of the R. Lofton Hudson collection. Included are notes, manuscripts and resource material of this eminent marriage / family counselor and former pastor whose achieve- ments included the founding of the Midwest Christian Counseling Center and Hudson Center. Dr. Hudson passed away this past year after many years of faithful service.
Carson-Newman is grateful for the materials that he donated before his death and for the opportunity to make them available to researchers.
BE A PART OF HISTORY – JOIN TODAY!

BAPTIST HISTORY AND HERITAGE SOCIETY
Formed in 1938 under the leadership of W.O. Carver at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, the Society functioned from 1951 to 1995 as an auxiliary of the Historical Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention. When the SBC decided in 1995 to eliminate the Commission, the Society became an independent organization. Today, the Society operates on its own, does not receive Cooperative funds, and is self-supporting. The Society is a voluntary, non-profit organization whose primary purpose is to provide leadership and direction for the study, preservation, and communication of Baptist history and heritage. Membership entitles members to receive the journal Baptist History and Heritage, the Baptist Heritage Update newsletter, a 10% discount on other Society publications and products, and reduced fees for participating in the annual meeting.
For more information, contact Charles W. Deweese, Executive Director & Treasurer. Mailing address: BHHS, P.O. Box 728, Brentwood, TN 37024-0728 Phone: (800) 966-2278 Membership: $30/1 yr. $55/2 yrs. $75/3 yrs. $20/1 yr. (student) $25/1 yr. (senior 60+)
Email: cdeweese@tnbaptist.org Website: <www.baptisthistory.org>

TENNESSEE BAPTIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY
The Tennessee Baptist Historical Society is composed of individuals, churches, associations, institutions, and other organizations that are willing to share their resources and interests for the cause of Baptist history in Tennessee. Membership ($15 per year) entitles members to receive publications of the Society and attend the annual meeting that is usually scheduled in conjunction with the Tennessee Baptist Convention.
For more information, contact Albert Wardin, Jr., Treasurer. Mailing address: 208 Old Williamsburg Court, Nashville, TN 37215

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