

In 1802, religious fervor gripped area

Rev. Richard Furman, a Baptist minister who founded what was to become Furman University, was in the Waxhaw settlement of Lancaster County in May 1802.

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NEARBY HISTORY

In August, he wrote a letter to a Dr. Rippon in London describing the "extraordinary" events that he had witnessed. Furman noted there had been earlier revivals along the frontiers of Kentucky and North Carolina in which backcountrymen came to scoff and stayed to be converted. The same behavior occurred at Waxhaw.

Furman said the converts had experienced "bodily affections" and described their behavior in this way: "Some of them fell instantaneously, as though struck by lightning, and continued insensible for a length of time; others were more mildly affected, and soon recovered their bodily

strength."

John McGready, who was also at the Waxhaw revival, reported that 20 persons "fell" the first day, nearly all men. More than 100 were "exercised" in the five-day periods, said McGready. He estimated there were 3,500 people and 20 ministers of different denominations present. His estimate was based upon a count of 120 wagons, 20 carts and eight carriages.

Furman thought there were 3,000 to 4,000 people there but heard other estimates of 7,000 or 8,000. Of the ministers present, he was more certain: there were 11 Presbyterians, four Baptists and three Methodists.

He described the encampment as stretching from the top of a hill to a stream below, about 300 yards in length and 150 yards in breadth. This space was reserved for the preaching. A speaker's stand was erected under a large tree at one end and a wagon was used as a second stand at the other end. Lining the sides of the encampment were the participant's tents, and behind the tents were their wagons and

carriages.

The lead speaker on May 21, a Friday, was the Rev. Samuel McCorkle, a Presbyterian minister. McCorkle had once been skeptical that these "exercises" were genuine but after his son was "struck down" in an N.C. revival, McCorkle changed his mind.

The pattern set by McCorkle was to give a sermon and then inform the audience that they would that evening be visited in their tents and "exhorted" by the ministers present. Meantime, they should improve themselves through "religious conversation, earnest prayer and singing the praises of God."

Furman noted that the Presbyterians were in charge of arranging the schedules for each day. He witnessed a communion service in which the Presbyterian and Methodist ministers sat down together but noted the Baptists (including himself) abstained on principle.

Furman thought that there were fewer instances of being struck down in the Waxhaw revival than he had witnessed in other places. Indeed, he said

that the most agitated of the participants were from an area some 70 or 89 miles to the south.

These, he continued, were apparently genuine conversions, for they returned to their home areas and held some remarkable revivals of their own.

After leaving, Furman had heard that a majority of the Waxhaw church congregation had forced out their minister, the Rev. John Brown. The reason given was that he taken communion with Methodists.

Another way, not noted by Furman, that Brown offended his congregation was in attempting to introduce "Dr. Watts Psalms and Hymns" to replace "Rouse's Version." The dissidents founded what is known now as the Shiloh Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, about 3 miles north of Lancaster and one-half mile east of U.S. 521.

Disappointed in the Waxhaw outcome, Brown left the church to teach in several academies and the South Carolina College (now USC). In 1811, he became president of Franklin College, the forerunner of the University of Georgia.