

Rev. William Blackstock
by Louise Pettus

Rev. William Blackstock (1761-1831) had a rich and varied life. He was born in Ireland, educated in Scotland and licensed to preach by the Associate Presbytery of County Down, Ireland.

When 31 years of age he boarded a ship, "The Volunteer," often referred to as "Irish Volunteer" because it transported so many volunteer Irishmen to fight American forces in the Revolutionary War.

Blackstock kept a journal of the voyage from North Ireland to Charleston, S. C. The ship left the port of Larne carrying 400 passengers on October 6, 1792. There were a good many passengers who were 60, 70 or 80 years old. No sooner than they were on the high seas, violent storms began. Blackstock said the old people were most vexed for having left their comfortable homes and exposing themselves to such dreadful conditions. There were 12 deaths during the voyage, a number somewhat counteracted by 5 births.

Blackstock kept an account of "wind and weather, of birds and fishes, and of ships that were seen or spoken to." Several sharks were captured.

Every passenger was issued 8 pounds of biscuits, 4 pounds of beef, 1 pound of molasses per week and 2 quarts of water daily. Because of the rough seas it took 80 days to cross the ocean. Several days before they landed at Charleston all provisions were cut in half. It was Christmas eve when Blackstock first set foot on American soil.

Finding a church was no problem for Blackstock. He was ordained by the Presbytery of the Carolinas and Georgia on June 8th, 1794 and became the pastor of two York County churches—Ebenezer and Neely's Creek—and of Steele Creek in Mecklenburg County. He was to leave the three churches in 1803 or 1804 when the congregations split over, as one wit said, whether to sing David's Psalms or to sing the Psalms of David. After several years he returned to this area.

Blackstock had gotten a lease from the Catawba Indians as indicated by a York County deed record in which he contracted with Alexander Faris, a blacksmith, to "build a mill dam, grist mill and cotton gin" on land on "Half Mile Creek, old Nation Ford, on west side of the Catawba River." The mill dam was to be 10 feet deep.

Not long after Blackstock arrived in this country, he met and married Sarah Hutchison whose family had come first to the Waxhaws of Lancaster county and then moved across the river settling near the Nation Ford between present-day Rock Hill and Fort Mill. They had no children. She died in 1810 and he never remarried. It is not known where Sarah was buried.

About 1811 Blackstock became pastor of Tirzah ARP in Mecklenburg, now Union County, N. C. He served Tirzah until 1827.

Synod records indicate that Blackstock was very active. He was a regular correspondent with the Synod and frequently traveled to their meetings. He was a vigorous preacher but, very unusual for his time, not a long-winded one. When most ministers were sermonizing for hours, Blackstock kept his sermons at about 35 minutes in length. Described as "very short and his complexion very dark," Blackstock also had great endurance on horseback.

In 1821 he made a trip to the west and was gone for 14 weeks. In 1827 he rode horseback to Obion County, Tennessee and preached the first sermon ever delivered there. The congregation at Troy A. R. P. was made up mostly of former York, Lancaster and Mecklenburg folks who, in 1824 had moved by wagon train to an area near present-day Memphis but was then only wilderness. Among those present to hear Rev. Blackstock at Troy were many who bore the names of Harper, Hutchison, Garrison, Hood, Stewart, Nisbet, Brice, Erwin and McCaw.

Reverend Blackstock preached his last sermon at Sardis Associate Reformed Church in Mecklenburg County. He died October 7, 1831 and is buried at Tirzah ARP in Union County, N. C.