

Research Reveals Plain Truth

by Don A. Sanford, historian

Editor's note: Seventh Day Baptist historian Don A. Sanford has, on several occasions, shared with me his concern that a number of Sabbathkeeping groups claim Seventh Day Baptist history as their own—without identifying SDBs as such. Last year, *The Plain Truth* ran a series of articles entitled "History of the Church of God," which prompted the following article in the December, 1991, issue of *The Sabbath Recorder*, the official Seventh Day Baptist periodical. Your editor sent this article, along with a request for comment to Dr. Herman L. Hoeh, editor of *The Plain Truth*. Dr. Hoeh's reply follows the article.

The Worldwide Church of God is running a series of articles in their *Plain Truth* magazine under the heading, "History of the Church of God." The Historical Society has received several letters questioning their use of Seventh Day Baptist history in establishing an unbroken claim to New Testament origins.

Seventh Day Baptists do not believe that the validity of the Sabbath is dependent upon any "apostolic succession" of an organized church. Attempts to prove such dependence on human institutions sometimes detract from the divine origin of the Sabbath.

Seventh Day Baptists believe that it is far more important to base the belief and practice of Sabbath observance upon the study of Scriptures rather than a succession of human authority or practice.

During the mid-17th century, the Bible became available to the common people. Those who were known as Separatists, separated from the Church of England, giving birth to such nonconformist movements as that of the Congregationalists and the Baptists.

Baptist historian William Brackney recognizes the beginning of Seventh Day Baptists by noting that "in the biblicalism of the age when the Scrip-

tures were being constantly reexamined as a standard of Free Church doctrine and practice, it is not surprising that a person or church should conclude that keeping the Sabbath was an inescapable requirement of biblical Christianity."¹

One of the first Baptists to write in support of the seventh day Sabbath was James Ockford, whose book was condemned by Parliament. He was followed by others such as William Saller and Dr. Peter Chamberlen, men associated with the Mill Yard Church which still exists as a Seventh Day Baptist church in London.

Francis Bamfield, Edward and Joseph Stennett were leaders in the Pinners' Hall Church which existed as an SDB church until about 1850.

John James was another leader who has long been associated with the movement leading to the Seventh Day Baptist cause in England. He was forcibly taken from his pulpit in Bull Stake Alley, arrested and martyred in 1661. Although the charge was largely political, he gave a strong testimony to the Sabbath and believers' baptism in his statement at the foot of the gallows.

James Ockford, Francis Bamfield, and John James are all mentioned in Part 9 of the series in *Plain Truth* (September 1991), but no mention is

made of their Seventh Day Baptist connection, leading people to assume from the heading that they were members of the Church of God.²

Part 10 continues the history under the title, "The Sabbath Comes to New England." The authors credit Stephen Mumford with bringing the Sabbath to Rhode Island. They write of the separation of the Sabbathkeepers from the First Baptist Church of Newport in 1671.

Although the source of most of their material is taken from the *Seventh Day Baptist Memorial*, published in 1852-54, they avoid identifying that church as the first Seventh Day Baptist church in America.³

Many of the existing records of that Newport Church are in the possession of the Seventh Day Baptist Historical Society, with the last book beginning with the words: "A continuation of the Records of the Seventh Day Baptist Church of Newport, RI."⁴

Part 11 of the series in *Plain Truth* magazine is entitled, "War and the New Frontier." Samuel Hubbard is erroneously listed as one of the founders of the Newport Baptist Church which was founded in 1644, whereas the records show he was baptized and joined in 1648. The authors identify Samuel's wife, Tracy, as "the first native-born American to convert to Sabbathkeeping," yet she was born in 1609 in England, 11 years before the Pilgrims came to America. According to Samuel Hubbard's journal, the first native-born Americans to accept the Sabbath would have to have been the Hubbard's three daughters, Ruth, Rachel, and Bethiah.

"My wife took up the Lord's holy 7th day Sabbath the 10 day March 1665. I took it up 1 day April 1665. Our daughter Ruth 25 October 1665, Rachel-Jan. 15 day 1666, Bethiah-Feb. 1666. Our son Joseph Clarke 23 Feb. 1666."⁵

Ruth later married Robert Burdick. Rachel married Andrew Langworthy and was one of the charter members March 1692

of the Newport Seventh Day Baptist church. Bethiah was the wife of Joseph Clarke. Many of today's seventh Day Baptists have documented direct lineage to these early Sabbathkeepers in Rhode Island.

Under a section headed, "The Name of the Church," the authors correctly recognize the Hopkinton congregation (the First Hopkinton Seventh Day Baptist Church in Ashaway, RI) as an outgrowth of the Newport Church, but refer to it as the "Church of God," based on a couple of passages which use the term "church of God" in a generic sense.

They correctly date the founding of the church at Piscataway, NJ, from the study of the Scriptures by Edmund Dunham in 1705. The authors call it "the Church of God," but a check of the record books clearly show that the early minutes all begin with the phrase, "The Church of Christ keeping the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus Christ...." Several early Seventh Day Baptist churches did use the name Church of Christ, possibly to clearly identify the church as Christian rather than Jewish because of their Sabbath observance.

The authors make use of several Seventh Day Baptist books including the *Seventh Day Baptist Memorial*, and Henry Clark's *A History of the Saboatarians or Seventh Day Baptists in America*, published in 1811. However, several passages are quoted as being from Clark's book, when in reality they are from vol. 2 of *Seventh Day Baptists in Europe and America*. Again there is a marked avoidance of identifying the people and events as being Seventh Day Baptist.

The final quotes in that article from the November/December 1991 *Plain Truth* were taken from a more recent book, *A Free People in Search of a Free Land*, written in 1976 by the author of this review, and published by the SDB Historical Society. Yet no identification is made of its Seventh Day Baptist author or origin.

Seventh Day Baptists are anxious for the claims of the Sabbath to be proclaimed throughout the world. The Sabbath is not limited to any one denomination. But in the interest of "the plain truth," falsehoods or misleading information do not advance the cause of truth in the world.

Footnotes

*William Henry Brackney, *The Baptists* (West Port, CN: Greenwood Press, 1988) 6-7.
*Ronald D. Kelly, "Free at Last" in *The Plain Truth*, vol. 56:8 (September 1991) 8-11.

†Ronald D. Kelley and Jimmy Franks, "The Sabbath Comes to New England," in *The Plain Truth*, vol. 56:9 (October 1991) 18-21.

**Records of the Seventh Day Baptist Church of Newport, RI* to June 5, 1892 (CRR 1922:1).

†Ronald Kelly and Charles Vorhes, "War and the New Frontier," in *The Plain Truth*, vol. 56:10 November/December 1991, pp. 18-21.

*Samuel Hubbard's Journal circa 1633-1686. Manuscript relating to Samuel Hubbard of Newport, RI, transcribed from copies known by Isaac Backus, p. 10.

The Plain Truth Responds

by Herman L. Hoeh

Your cover letter and the article by Don A. Sanford point up that certain editorial inaccuracies in the early history of Sabbatarians (in the U.S.) appeared in Part 11 of the series on the history of God's church in *The Plain Truth*. In particular, please thank Don Sanford for addressing them in *The Sabbath Recorder*.

As you know, God's people were commonly referred to as Sabbatarians in the 17th and 18th centuries and that is how we identified them—rather than by the now common denominational term Seventh Day Baptist. We did identify these first Sabbatarians in America as having reluctantly severed connection from the parent church, the First Baptist Church of Newport. As author Don A. Sanford says of the literature of God's people, the church of God was used as a generic term, not a denominational term. We used it thus throughout our series, and do not dispute the use of

other terms in the Sabbatarian churches, for the New Testament does the same.

The introductory paragraphs of Part 11, page 18, column 1 of the series in *The Plain Truth* mentioning Samuel Hubbard and Tacy Hubbard are properly corrected by Don A. Sanford. The errors arose from misreading of the text and will be correct in any future reference to the Newport church.

The quotation in reference to the 18th century Sabbatarian church in Pennsylvania was wrongly attributed to Clarke's *History*, p. 1208, due to a deletion in copy fitting. The quotations should have been attributed to *Seventh Day Baptists in Europe and America*, volume 2, page 1208.

We happily thank Don Sanford for drawing readers' attention to these particular oversights in Part 11 of our series.

My Sabbath Home

by Brian Jones

I wasn't a churchgoer. For years I had been a hermit in the woods, and had once, for some months, lived in a cave. As a hippie, whose passions were jazz and occult experience, church had not entered into my thinking, except to pity others whose imagination was too stunted to know what else to do with a Saturday or Sunday morning but listen to a preacher and sing some tired old hymns.

But now something had changed in my life, something I would never have suspected possible. I had found Christ, or rather was found by Him. He was now my Savior. The myths that held me in thrall now melted away like a thick cloud. The hot, pulsating music of the night club and dance floor died out to a distant echo of a disordered, hedonistic past. I was on my way to church, drawn not by conventional instincts, but by Christ, whose Spirit and word had taught me to desire the fellowship of other believers.

Some weeks before I had tried to go and had walked several miles to reach the steps of a church, but was held back from ascending them by fear—of the unknown, or rejection, or being questioned about my spirituality, such as it was, but about which I could make no comment, knowing that I was a sinner. I went home and prayed, to seek God's blessings in private. I was not disappointed, but was also stimulated with a sharper craving than before for fellowship with people who were not ashamed or afraid of assembling to worship God. "If we walk in the Light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another," and the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7).

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Beyond question I realized that the seventh day was God's Sabbath, a time for "holy convocation" (Exod. 20:8-11; Lev. 23:3), which was a blessing not to be missed. The idea of maintaining a wholly private religion that had no connection with corporate effort for the good of others was an escapism that had lost its appeal to me. The Apostles were not hermits but public spirited men whose whole lives were devoted to evangelizing the world. They reached all races, classes and cultures, excluding none from their regard and loving efforts. It was time for me too, as a new believer, to emerge from seclusion, and openly join the family of God to participate with them in the joys and responsibilities of Christian life.

My second effort to attend church was more successful. I chose to visit a small Sabbathkeeping congregation in the Mission district of San Francisco. Never had I come into the company of so many loving, kindly people, who seemed to genuinely enjoy life without the need for any artificial excitement. They asked me no embarrassing questions and subjected me to no humiliating treatment. I was delighted and thankful that they did not ask me to explain why I was there, because, with long, greasy hair and clad in dungarees, I did not look the standard part of a Christian.

But I was not totally comfortable yet. The experience of attending church was too new for that to be possible. I stayed for Sabbath school, but escaped, unnoted, before the sermon. This went on for several weeks, until I summoned the courage to stay for "part B", my private terminology for the main worship service ("part

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