

Annals of the Ashpole Community

1750-1814

This work prepared by Judge Zachary Taylor Fulmore, then of Austin, Texas, began in AAFA ACTION #78, Fall 2007. It continued through the next two issues. This segment concludes his work. It should be noted that the Alford's mentioned in this work, right down to the concluding paragraphs, were forebears of many of the Alford's found in South Carolina, especially Dillon County.

The first step taken so far as available records show towards the establishment of Ashpole Presbyterian Church is evidenced by the following document recorded in the registry of deeds, in Lumberton.

State of North Carolina,
Robeson County)

This indenture witnesseth that Athneill Trawick, of the State and County above mentioned, doth by these presents lease to the Congregation of Mitchell's Creek a certain tract of land, lying and being in the County of Robeson on the west side of said Mitchell's Creek, containing one acre and a half, beginning at a stake near the road, running east by north, 15 poles, from thence to a black jack, the corner 15 poles, from thence to a marked pine, and from thence to the beginning.

The land hereby leased and given up by the said Athneill Trawick to the said congregation for the use of a preaching house, and the use and benefit thereof as long as the said Congregation shall or may think it proper to keep said meeting there, and the said Congregation doth by the acknowledge (sic) that whenever they see cause to remove said preaching place or drop that by any means, that the said instrument of writing shall be void and none effect (sic). But as long as meeting house or preaching place continues there to be in full force and virtue.

Sealed, signed and delivered in the presence of (William Blue, Gilbert Curry, John Blue), this second day of January, 1796.

Athneill Trawick (seal)

The real name of the grantor was Othniel Trawick. The instrument was not registered until nearly nineteen years later, as appears by the following endorsement:

November Term 1814- The above instrument was proved in open Court by the oath of William Blue, and ordered to be registered.

J. McQueen

It may be worthwhile to note that on the day preceding the date of this instrument, the first post office in Robeson County was established at Lumberton, and the Lumberton and Harlleesville road, which skirted the east side of this site, was

established as a post road.

This site was about twenty miles west of Lumberton, forty-seven miles south of Fayetteville, about two miles from the South Carolina line, and

was well within the drainage basin of Little Pee Dee River, Mitchell's Creek, a branch, being one of the minor tributaries of the river.

It was at the junction of the Old Cheraw and Fair Bluff road, which skirted on the north side, and the Lumberton and Harlleesville road, which skirted on the east side and about three miles from the main or Big Ashpole Swamp, and about seven miles east of Shoe Heel Creek, etc.

The residence of Othneil Trawick was just across the road on the north, Gilbert Currie's about one mile south on the Lumberton and Harlleesville road, and the residence of William and John Blue, several miles further south in South Carolina.

On the east side of the stream, was what a few years before had been the residence of Robert McTyer, and at some distance in front of it an old burial ground, that had been dedicated or given as

such by Robert McTyer, years before that, as a common burial ground for the old families of John Cade, Jacob Alford, Britton Drake and probably others who lived on Ashpole Swamp and were related by blood or marriage, and in this way had become known as Ashpole Burial Ground. This had been used as a burial ground as much as 140 years and is still used as such by the descendants of the old pioneers of Ashpole.

Now that the country had been settled with Scotch families, this location was more central to all concerned.

The next memorandum on the subject is found in the Minutes of old Orange Presbytery.

Dr. Craig, the custodian of the minutes of Orange Presbytery, has furnished me the following, showing all that refers to Ashpole, from its beginning down to 1813.

September 28, 1796

"Ordered that Messrs. Paisley and Gillispie, supply one Sabbath each at Raft Swamp, Shoe Heel, Laurel (Hill) and Ashpole" (First mention made.)

March 3, 1797

"Ordered that Messrs. Stanford and McDiarmid, each supply one Sabbath each at Laurel Hill, Ashpole, Raft Swamp and Lumber Bridge, before next stated meeting".

March 3, 1797

"A petition from Raft Swamp, Laurel Hill, Ashpole and Lumber Bridge, for Mr. John Gillispie's labors for one year. Ordered that he supply those churches."

The next memorandum on the subject is found in the Minutes of old Orange Presbytery.

Dr. Craig, the custodian of the Minutes of Orange Presbytery, has furnished me the following, showing all that refers to Ashpole from its beginning down to 1815.

Dr. Craig then adds, "Ashpole does not appear again in the Minutes until 1808, when Malcolm McNair was pastor of the church and seems to have continued until 1813". Dr. Craig's statement would seem to be incorrect as to the time when McNair took charge as other evidence establishes that it was in 1803.

"From 1800 to 1808, the Minutes of Orange Presbytery were wholly wanting".

Dr. Craig further states, "In November 1799, the first statistical report, (as far as I know) was made by the Synod of the Carolinas to the Assembly. That report

gives the ministers and the charges of the Presbyteries."

In that report John Gillispie has charge of Center,

Laurel Hill and Raft Swamp. Ashpole is not mentioned.

In 1800 Mr. Gillispie has charge of Center and Laurel Hill, and Raft Swamp seems to be dropped and is not mentioned.

For the next five years there is no report from Orange.

In October, 1806, Malcolm McNair has charge of Laurel Hill and Center, and John Gillispie is marked "W. C.," without a charge.

In October 1808, McNair's charges are Center, Laurel Hill and Ashpole. This is the first mention of Ashpole since 1799.

In October, 1809, McNair's charge is Center, Ashpole and Gum Swamp.

And in 1810, it is the same.

In 1811, it is Center, Ashpole and Laurel Hill. This year Gillispie, W C, was dismissed from Orange.

In 1812 the Synod was dissolved and there was no report from Orange and Fayetteville was set off, etc.

I have taken pains to try to make intelligible some of these statements.

The location of Shoe Heel, at the home of Angus Brown, about seven miles west of Ashpole Presbyterian Church has already been noted. Gum Swamp was the same, or substantially the same, as Laurel Hill. Hopewell was a small congregation organized with its place of worship about ten miles south of modern Maxton, between what is now called Raemont and Little Pee Dee River. It was too far away from Ashpole for the convenience and necessities of those people, and Smyrna in Richmond and Carolina in Marion, S.C. and probably its derivatives.

The real kernel of the minutes of Orange, so far as Ashpole is concerned, is entirely omitted. This is supplied by "Foote's Notes," where it is seen that Malcolm McNair was ordained pastor of Ashpole in June, 1803. Dr. Foote doubtless had the use of all old records then available, and in this instance he failed to return the minutes of Orange to their proper custody, and in that way, they were lost and were probably supplied from memory and other sources. They are evidently but a transcript from the original minutes.

At this period in the history of the Church, there was a great demand for ministers. In such a case it is not probable that Duncan Brown and Malcolm McNair were idle from their licensure in 1801 up to 1803. In fact their statements to Bishop Asbury, in Lumberton, concerning their work among the Scotch Presbyterians, is almost conclusive that they had been at work. Duncan Brown was reared among the members of Ashpole, while McNair's home was in the vicinity of Center, where he was reared.

It has occurred to me that services at Ashpole, by regularly ordained ministers during the first seven years of its history, were irregular, to say the least of it, and that those many aids so essential to the support of the Church were wanting.

Among the ministers assigned, not one lived in Robeson. The home of Paisley was in Guilford, of Stanford in Dublin, McDiarmid in upper Cumberland, and Gillespie in Orange. The visits of each was only once a year.

The coming of McNair in 1803, seems to mark the real beginning of Ashpole as a full-fledged Church.

It would seem doubtful whether either Stanford or McDiarmid ever held services at Ashpole, for at the same meeting of Presbytery they were assigned there, a petition was presented for the labors of Gillespie and favorably acted upon.

From other sources we learn that Stanford had a charge of an old church in Dublin, and it was about this time that evidence began to accumulate which resulted in deposing McDiarmid from the ministry, on account of drunkenness. Paisley and Gillespie seem to have been ministers who supplied the Church at odd times, until the ordination of McNair as pastor in 1803.

McNair seems to have been the real Moses who led the Presbyterians from out of their disorganized condition and brought that order and system that made Ashpole, Laurel Hill and Center the permanent churches which they came to be. The task set before him was difficult one. Services had to be apportioned among them and he seems to have been peculiarly qualified for such a work. He was not only a man of extraordinary force as a preacher, but he had a genius for organization. He could converse in Gaelic, and was a favorite among those Scotch who used that dialect exclusively. He had great powers of endurance and extraordinary energy, was a good judge of human nature and could present the

claims of the gospel in the home of people of all grades of intelligence, was sympathetic and easy in his manners, and put himself in close touch with the people there, together with his magnetism in the pulpit, brought to the services virtually all the people without reference to their church relations.

Although a native of Scotland, he was reared not more than fifteen miles from Ashpole, and was practically one of those people. He was born in Scotland in 1777, and came to America with his parents about the year 1785.

His father, John McNair, acquired a large body of land between Drowning Creek and the head waters of Back Swamp. Its western line was a mile or more southeast of the site of the modern town of Maxton, and extended down the creek to a line, a mile or such matter, below the site of the modern Alma. John McNair established his home on the upper end of the tract. A post office was established there April 1, 1815, and named Cowpers Hill, and was continued there until December 1866, when the rising town of Shoe Heel, (later Maxton) superseded it. He became one of the promoters and founders of Center Church, about 1800, and was a member of the first Board of Elders at that church. He was a man of exemplary Christian character and of superior intelligence, and his wife also had those qualities.

Among such environments young Malcolm grew up. After completing the course of common school education, Malcolm's father employed Prof. Jacob Nelson to instruct him in the classics, mathematics and the sciences and later he attended the school of Dr. McCorkle, in Rowan (County), and later the school of Dr. Caldwell in Guilford.

After completing a course of theology at that school, he was licensed to preach at Barbecue Church in Cumberland County, at the spring meeting of Orange Presbytery in 1801, and in June 1803, was ordained to the pastorate of Ashpole Church. He served that church Laurel Hill and Center, with other temporary charges, until his death in 1822.

The federal census of 1790, shows that there was seventeen heads of McNair families in Robeson and Richmond Counties, and among them, another John McNair, designated in the census as a school teacher. He came to Robeson at an early date, it seems, from Richmond, and established his home on the head waters of Old Field Swamp, ten or twelve miles from Ashpole

Church.

For aught I know he may have been one of the original Members of Ashpole. He reared four children, among them Duncan McNair, who married a daughter of Archibald McCallum, moved on up Ashpole Swamp, and located on the old Ashpole Bridge Muster Ground place, and was for many years an Elder of Ashpole Church.

The name of Duncan McNair also appears on the census roll of 1790. I have no positive evidence that he was a brother of John McNair, and uncle of Malcolm McNair, but the families were so closely identified by intermarriage and otherwise, and so intimately connected with the later history of Ashpole, I insert a genealogy which I was fortunate enough to obtain in Denver, Colorado, supplemented by Battle's History of the University, and such facts are within my own knowledge.

Duncan McNair came to Robeson in the winter of 1786-87, and was located near the present site of the town of St. Pauls, and within striking distance of old Raft Swamp Church, which seems to have been the oldest church in the County.

He and his family identified themselves with the church and remained members until about the year 1802, when the church at St. Pauls was established and Raft Swamp Church ceased to exist.

Here in this vicinity he reared his family. John, the oldest son, had ten children, four of whom were sons, viz: Duncan, who married a great granddaughter of Jacob Alford.

Nathaniel, who was twice married, first to a great granddaughter of Angus Brown and Daniel McCallum, and then to a great granddaughter of Jacob Alford. Nathaniel settled in the Ashpole Community, and was an exemplary Christian gentleman, and I think an Elder in the Church.

Malcolm was a graduate of the State University in the class of 1849, became a minister and school teacher, and was known as "Lame Malcolm".

John was killed in the Battle of Sharpsburg in 1862.

Malcolm, the third son of Duncan McNair, had two sons, Dr. A.D. McNair, who died in 1853, and John Calvin McNair, a graduate of the State University in the

class of 1849. He became a minister and was taking a post graduate course at Edinburgh University in Scotland, when he died in 1858. He left a will by which he gave all his property consisting of slaves, securities and land, to the State University, to endow a course of lectures on the harmony of Science and Religion, but the Civil War followed, and nothing was saved from the wreck except the land which was sold after the Civil War for \$13,500.

The next son of Duncan McNair was Robert. Five sons survived him, viz: Dugald Patterson McNair, who graduated at the State university in the class of 1856, engaged in teaching school at Ashland Academy, married a great granddaughter of Jacob Alford and settled on a place, now in the suburbs of Rowland, owned by W. H. McCallum, moved to Alabama in 1859, and in 1873, to Texas. His life was devoted to teaching school. Evander, who became a minister, moved to Arkansas, and later to Missouri, where his life was spent in the ministry and as Professor in one of the leading colleges of that state. The degree of D.D. and Ph. D. were conferred upon him. His son, Lindsay, is now pastor of the Moore Memorial Church, in Nashville, Tennessee.

Robert became a farmer and died near St. Pauls, after the close of the Civil War.

Duncan McNair, the fourth son of the original Duncan, was the father of four sons, Malcolm, a member of Ashpole Church, a Captain in the service of the Southern Confederacy, and died in 1862.

Rory, a graduate of the State University in the class of 1855, a lawyer and school teacher.

Duncan E. McNair, a graduate of the State University, a civil engineer and a captain in the Confederate Army and was killed in battle during the Civil War.

Robert, a farmer, who died after the Civil War.

It should have been noted in the proper place, that Malcolm McNair McKay, a grandson of Malcolm McNair, was pastor of the First Presbyterian Church at Fort Smith, Arkansas, for many years, and that Roderick McNair, brother of Malcolm, was the father of

John McNair, long a leading member of Ashpole, and Dr. Neill McNair, who died in 1862, and Evander, one of the sons of Roderick, entered the ministry, and after filling the pastorate of Old Bluff Church in Cumberland, and other churches, was called to the pastorate of the First Presbyterian Church in Galveston, Texas, where he spent the most useful part of his life. Returning to North Carolina, he retired from the active labors of the church and died about the year 1885, at his brother's home, a few miles north of Ashpole Church.

A mere recital of these facts touching the McNairs tell its own eloquent story.

From these desultory notes much may be gathered of the early, as well as the more recent history of Ashpole.

If we go back to the year 1797, when the organization of the Church may be said to have been completed, it will be found that at that time it was the only Presbyterian Church between Drowning Creek and Little Pee Dee, and probably Big Pee Dee River, in that large scope of country beginning at the line of Richmond County, and extending indefinitely to the east.

If we will take the pains to trace the history of the churches, now within this territory, it will find its way back to Ashpole. I do not know the number or the names of the churches now within that area. Lebanon, Iona, Rowland, Kentyre, Pee Dee, Hamer, Dillon, Little Rock, Reedy Creek, Carolina, Smyrna and Midway are the fruits of the work of the fathers. Few of the old churches in the Carolinas, can make such a showing, in fact, I very much doubt, whether there is a country church in the State, that can make such a showing -all this too, without reference to the Presbyterian Churches established in other states.

If we had some tangible basis for estimating the value of the contributions made to civilization by such men as Angus Brown, Jacob Alford, Daniel McCallum, John and Duncan McNair, and others whose names might be mentioned, a picture might be presented that would astonish the gaze of the average man, but this is one of the pictures we shall never see until our vision catches a glimpse of the "Lambs Book of Life".