

## SABBATARIANS COME TO HARRISON COUNTY IN 1792

by Dorothy Davis

Stephen Mumford came to Newport, Rhode Island, from London in 1664 and affiliated with the Baptists. Seven members of the Newport Baptist Church, persuaded by Mumford that the ten commandments were immutable, joined Mumford to form a Seventh Day Baptist Church in 1671. The idea spread to the nearby Westerly, Rhode Island, Baptists whose minister had been imprisoned for heresy in Boston in 1651. The entire church changed to Seventh Day Baptists.<sup>1</sup> For over 250 years Rhode Island was not without one or more Seventh Day Baptists in its colonial assembly or state legislature.<sup>2</sup> Members of the Westerly church, most of them sons of William Davis, moved to Monmouth County, New Jersey, to work in the vicinity of the Manasquan and Shark rivers and in 1745 organized a Seventh Day Baptist church in the town of Shrewsbury.<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile Abel Noble had come from London to locate near Philadelphia in William Penn's colony. While at Oxford University, Noble had fallen under the persuasion of Fox and had become a Quaker. Noble broke with the Quakers and was instrumental in the establishment of several Seventh Day Baptist churches. One of these was at Nottingham near the Maryland line and had as members the Bond family who lived in Cecil County, Maryland.<sup>4</sup>

Near the Shrewsbury colony of Sabbatarians in New Jersey was the Piscataway Seventh Day Baptist Church organized in 1707, when its pastor Edmund Dunham turned Sabbatarian after a search of biblical scripture and a nudge by Abel Noble.<sup>5</sup> Among the members of this church before 1722 were six members of the Randolph family.<sup>6</sup>

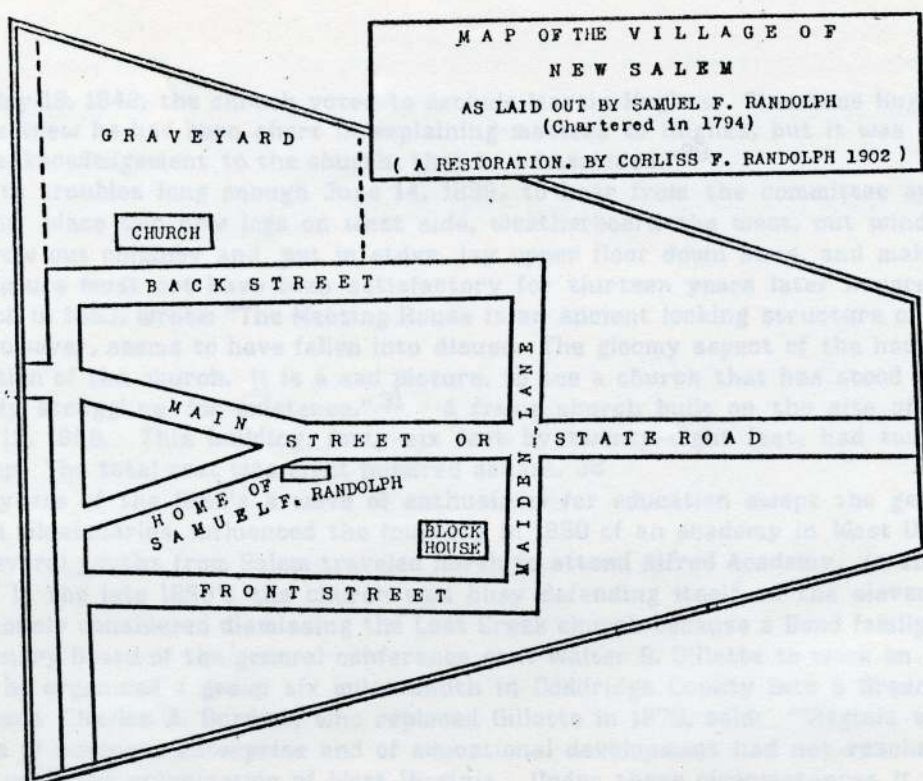
The years of The American Revolution were difficult for both New Jersey churches: "The British Army took possession of Piscataway. Their [the church members] meetings were broken up and means of grace neglected . . . Most of the patriots removed their families to the back settlements, while the Tories fled to British possessions."<sup>7</sup> The industries of the Shrewsbury church members were burned by the British; their minister Jacob Davis enlisted as chaplain and went off with the patriot army. The father of the minister rode off to observe the Battle of Monmouth. His horse brought him home a corpse after a stray bullet had pierced this body.<sup>8</sup>

During the war Samuel Fitz Randolph, born in 1738, met up with Major Benjamin Sites of the Redstone country in Southwestern Pennsylvania.<sup>9</sup> After the war Sites became a land speculator and it may have been under his influence that Randolph bought on November 21, 1785, eight hundred acres, chiefly virgin forest in Fayette County, Pennsylvania, on which was a house and farm buildings and traveled to make his home on the land sometime between November 1785 and November 1790.<sup>10</sup>

Even though the Shrewsbury group of Sabbatarians had finished erecting a church building on the eve of The American Revolution, they decided after the war that the entire church would emigrate. They sold the church building and seventy-two souls and ten wagons left on September 6, 1789, no doubt headed for the Redstone country where Randolph lived.<sup>10</sup> A Seventh Day Baptist Church was formed at Woodbridgetown in Fayette County, Pennsylvania, November 8, 1789, with the pastor of the Shrewsbury church in attendance at the organization.<sup>11</sup> This was the church of Samuel Fitz Randolph and his wife Margaret and it is uncertain if any of the Shrewsbury group belonged, for they settled on White Day Creek in Monongalia County in Virginia, where they lived for two years. Dissatisfied with their land, they talked with Samuel Fitz Randolph who suggested they move on to land he had bought from a widow by the name of Swearingen, land he had not seen on the headwaters of Tenmile Creek in Harrison County, Virginia.<sup>12</sup> No minutes of the Shrewsbury church exist after August 1789, except for the register of the death of William Davis on White Day Creek July 15, 1791, until: "May 13, 1792: The Church met in conference at New Salem, where the Church or part of them, is now embodied; this being the first opportunity of coming under regular discipline in church order since we left New Jersey."<sup>13</sup>

Part of the church which did not reach Salem had stopped at the mouth of Lamber's Run across the West Fork River from the 1990 town of Spelter. Thomas Maxson, a prosperous farmer from Shrewsbury, settled here. He built a brick dwelling house, and brick outbuildings. He, William VanHorn and others formed the West Fork River Seventh Day Baptist Church.<sup>14</sup> Those who moved on to Samuel Fitz Randolph's land may have built first a blockhouse, then log cabins for residences around it. In 1791 few people who knew the frontier would have dared live west of Clarksburg, where Nutter's Fort protected people from Indians. William Haymond wrote that Colonel William Lowther, who was in command of the Virginia militia, ordered him in 1792 to locate at Williams' Station opposite Marietta, Ohio. Haymond left Clarksburg on June 22, 1792, and spent the first night a Salem, where he said eight or ten men were stationed.<sup>15</sup> So the Virginia militia provided some protection, but William "Greenbrier Billy" Davis said that after the Indian menace ended in 1795, "an Indian chief said to the people at the fort (blockhouse) at New Salem that they were so careless that they (the Indians) could have killed them all if they had wanted to do so. But as they wore shoes and coats, the Indians knew they were from Pennsylvania or New Jersey and were friends. Had they worn moccasins and hunting shirts, they would not have left one alive in the fort."<sup>16</sup>

The Virginia General Assembly passed an act December 19, 1794: "Be it enacted . . . that the lots and streets as already laid off on the lands of Samuel Fitz Randolph in the County of Harrison are hereby established a town by the name of "New Salem" and John Patterson, John Davis, Samuel Lippincott, James Davis, Zebelon Maxson, Benjamin Thorp, Thomas Clayton, William Davis, Jacob Davis, George Jackson, and John Haymond . . . appointed trustees thereof."<sup>17</sup> Church meetings in the new town did the work of civil courts as shown by the second church meeting called "to settle some business between Brother William Maxson and Mosher Maxson; and it was agreed that William Maxson return the slait (sic) to Mosher Maxson and pay twenty-eight shillings and Mosher to return the ax and beetle rings to William Maxson."<sup>18</sup> March 8, 1795, church members chose John Patterson to replace their minister Jacob Davis who had died July 17, 1793, while visiting in Woodbridgetown, PA. June 13, 1795, the church voted to build a church which for some reason or other was delayed and not completed until 1803. The meeting house was built of hewed logs. In the middle was a chimney with a double fireplace. The crevices between the logs were filled with clay mortar.<sup>19</sup>



After 1795, when people in the town no longer needed protection from Indians, settlers bought farms and moved to acres which in twenty years formed a crescent extending across Doddridge County to the southern part of Ritchie County. Meanwhile the Bonds had moved from Cecil County, Maryland, via Woodbridgetown, to Quiet Dell and Lost Creek, where they formed a Seventh Day Baptist Church October 27, 1805. In 1807 the three Harrison County churches applied for membership in the General Conference of the Seventh Day Baptist Church and jointly sent in 1808 the Reverend John Davis, pastor of the New Salem Church, to the general conference meeting in Hopkinton, Rhode Island. The conference admitted the Lost Creek and Salem churches but denied membership to the West Fork River Church because it had held open communion with First Day Baptists.<sup>20</sup> John Davis may have influenced the decision, for May 9, 1803, the Salem church debarred their minister John Patterson and his wife Sarah from communion "for joining fellowship with the First Day Baptist Church" and took the following action: "We do renounce communion with all Seventh Day [Baptist] Churches that do give toleration and full fellowship with First Day Churches, and we appoint James Davis and Samuel Davis as messengers to the West Fork [River] Church."<sup>21</sup> The West Fork River Church disappeared after 1808 with its members perhaps joining the Hepzibah Baptist Church.

The general conference of the church meeting in Berlin, New York, in 1818 received a report of the destitute condition of the Lost Creek and New Salem churches and the plea: "Send forth to our relief a teacher whose superior ability, external deportment, and innate virtues are such as will insure confidence . . . Let him be furnished with such recommendation as will remove any doubt of his being an imposter, as we have been much imposed on by men of that description."<sup>22</sup> Between the fall of 1818 and the spring of 1822 five different ministers from churches in the East visited the Salem and Lost Creek churches, and during this time both John Davis and Peter Davis served as ministers of the New Salem Church. Here began a period of prosperity for the New Salem Church culminating in 1829-1830, when seventy-two souls were added to the roll of the church in three months.<sup>23</sup> Because its flock scattered widely to farms to the west, the New Salem church had built in the early 1820's a log structure and established a cemetery on land it purchased in Lewisport (West Union) so that parishioners could worship in an extension of the New Salem church. This group organized the Middle Island Seventh Day Baptist Church in 1831 with 29 members drawn from the New Salem church. Others soon followed.

Beginning in 1831 the New Salem church was rocked with dissension which continued for twenty years. The problems may have risen because of the transition of business differences from church to civil courts. In favor of the new order of things were men like Nathan Davis and Jonathan Randolph both of whom were justices of the peace in Harrison County. But to the average parishioner the technicalities and formalities of civil courts were confusing and wholly new and strange and several decades must pass before they could give up the power of the church to excommunicate for civil offences. May 20, 1831, Joshua G. Davis<sup>24</sup> charged William F. Randolph in church meeting. The two had appeared before Nathan Davis, justice of the peace. The church referred the matter to a committee of which the minister Peter Davis was chairman. The committee dismissed all charges but one which they said called for an apology from William Randolph, who declined an apology and was excommunicated from the church May 13, 1832.<sup>25</sup> William Randolph, who by 1845 would be a justice in Doddridge County, did not go quietly into the night. He said the records of the church were vague and demanded completeness of the record concerning his dismissal. The church called in Abel Bond from Lost Creek and Stillman Coon, a missionary to the church. They found Randolph charged of something indefinable by the records. The Lost Creek church received William Randolph as a member March 8, 1840, an act which brought protests from the New Salem church. Finally August 9, 1841, the churches appointed a committee of six from Lost Creek, Middle Island, New Salem and South Branch of the Hughes River churches. They settled the matter amicably<sup>25</sup> they thought; but finally the South Western Association of the church ordered "that papers that may be in the hands of individuals relating to the case be burned. . . and that we mutually forgive each other anything that has caused hard feelings."<sup>26</sup>

Another target in the dissension of the 1830's and the 1840's was Martin Hughes, son of Jonathan Hughes.<sup>27</sup> April 19, 1834, the church voted to send to sister churches for help in settling difficulties "between us and John Davis, Joshua Davis, and Martin Hughes." The sister churches decided Elder John Davis and those who followed him did "lop off from the church and the other party is the standing church."<sup>28</sup> February 21, 1835, the church charged Martin Hughes with circulating a subscription to divide the church. The matter was referred to the general conference which sent to New Salem two ministers to mediate the dispute. The church agreed to forgive all injuries, to unite, and to rescind the votes to excommunicate Martin Hughes, Elionia Davis, John Davis, and Joshua Davis. November 15, 1839, Martin Hughes was on the carpet for intoxication. Hughes said he had drunk strong drink so that he felt it, but he had not been intoxicated for two years. After being admonished, Hughes said he was sorry if he injured feelings and promised not to drink in the future. But he was in trouble again in 1841 for carrying a gun on Sabbath, for packing on Sabbath and for driving a cow home on Sabbath. He confessed that he carried a gun and packed a bag of flour home on Sabbath. Hughes said he was sorry and would be more careful in

the future. Finally May 19, 1842, the church voted to exclude Martin Hughes. This time Hughes accused Ezekial Bee of lying. Bee said he knew he had been short in explaining matters to Hughes, but it was "voted that Hughes not making satisfactory acknowledgement to the church, that he be excluded."<sup>29</sup>

The church left its troubles long enough June 14, 1839, to hear from the committee appointed to list repairs needed to the church: place two new logs on west side, weatherboard the west, cut window in south and west, make a stariway, throw out chimney and put in stove, lay upper floor down snug, and make seats.<sup>30</sup> Patch-up work on the old structure must not have been satisfactory for thirteen years later Reverend Thomas B. Babcock, who visited the church in 1853, wrote: "The Meeting House is an ancient looking structure of hewed logs. There is a gallery in it, which, however, seems to have fallen into disuse. The gloomy aspect of the house is, perhaps, too true an index to the condition of the church. It is a sad picture, to see a church that has stood the vicissitudes of more than a century, feebly struggling for existence."<sup>31</sup> A frame church built on the site of the old structure was dedicated on August 19, 1859. This building, forty-six feet by twenty-eight feet, had twelve-foot ceilings and a vestibule ten feet deep. The total cost was eight hundred dollars.<sup>32</sup>

During the early years of the 1850's a wave of enthusiasm for education swept the general conference of the church which through missionaries, influenced the founding in 1850 of an academy in West Union. The school closed in 1854, whereupon several youths from Salem traveled north to attend Alfred Academy, in 1890 Alfred University, in Alfred, New York.<sup>33</sup> In the late 1850's the church was busy defending itself on the slavery issue in the general conference which seriously considered dismissing the Lost Creek church because a Bond family owned slaves.

In 1866 the Missionary Board of the general conference sent Walter B. Gillette to work on the area served by the Salem church, where he organized a group six miles south in Doddridge County into a Greenbrier extension of the Salem church. Reverend Charles A. Burdick, who replaced Gillette in 1870, said: "Virginia was a slave state until the war, and the tide of business enterprise and of educational development had not reached them. They had no public school system until the organization of West Virginia. Under these circumstances it was very natural that the management of church business, keeping of church records, support of the gospel were not fully developed . . . I traveled exclusively on horseback, carrying a few books and changes of linen in a pair of capacious saddle bags. I wore heavy corduroy overall to protect me from mud and cold in winter, and carried a rubber blanket made to slip on over my head to shield me from rain."<sup>34</sup> Burdick, paid \$500 a year as salary, bought a lot in Salem on which stood a poor dwelling house. He applied to two men in the church in Plainfield, NJ, for \$150 to make repairs. Instead of repairing the old house, he built a new one.<sup>35</sup> In 1875 Burdick opened a "Salem Academy and Teacher's Institute" in the Salem church building. Desks were improvised by hinging leaves to the back of seats; the entry of the church became a recitation room; and he, his wife, and Adelle Whitford, a volunteer from Wisconsin, set about to train teachers. The school lasted two terms closing largely because it needed a building.<sup>36</sup>

In 1876 the Salem church for the first time offered a salary to a minister (\$400 a year) and hired Samuel D. Davis as a pastor. He served for three years while the church ran steadily behind with its finances.<sup>37</sup> August 15, 1879, the ministerial committee reported they did not secure enough in subscriptions to pay a pastor. So the four members of the committee personally guaranteed the salary. They wrote U. M. Babcock that "L. H. Davis will furnish from a specified portion of the membership one hundred dollars mostly in produce; and each of the other three (Richard Ford, Jesse F. Randolph, Preston Randolph) in like manner, provide one-fourth of the means for a good living . . . Our people are many of them farmers and they express a ready willingness to supply a minister with a sufficiency of such as they have. We would expect that soon on arrival you would go to housekeeping and live as becomes an economical minister of a liberal people in our condition."<sup>38</sup> The four agreed to pay the cost of shipping Babcock's goods from Oneida, NY, to Salem. Babcock accepted the call and served the church for one and one-half years before resigning with "I wish to give no reason."<sup>39</sup> In 1882 and again in 1888 the church thanked S. D. Davis for services since the church is without a pastor. One of the causes of the years of struggle was the attrition of membership transferring to churches started by the Salem church in rural areas as shown in minutes in March 1, 1880, when the land on which the Greenbrier church stood was transferred to the new church.<sup>40</sup>

The idea of starting an academy, which had resulted in two short-lived schools, never died. By the late 1880's the town of Salem was becoming economically viable. The Methodist Episcopal Church Conference voted in 1886 to establish an academy and the committee on a site chose either Salem or Buckhannon. On hearing the news, Jesse F. Randolph subscribed \$500 toward erecting a building for the Methodist school, but the Methodist conference decided by one vote to establish in Buckhannon because the delegates feared noise from the trains in Salem would disturb future students. The Seventh Day Baptist churches at an association meeting in 1887 decided the time had come for them to establish an academy. Led by Jesse F. Randolph and Reverend J. L. Huffman, the church received a charter for a school in Salem on December 28, 1888. Reverend Huffman, hired in February 1888 at \$100 a year to give one-fourth of his time to the Salem church, opened school in the Salem church building while the academy building was being built a mile to the west and Reverend Sanford L. Maxson, principal of Albion Academy in Albion, Wisconsin, was hired to head the new school. The church hired Maxson to serve as minister, in addition to his school duties, in August 1889 at a salary of \$400 a year. He served one year and resigned as pastor in August 1890 to give full time to Salem College.<sup>41</sup>

November 2, 1890, the Salem church called Theodore L. Gardiner in New Jersey to be its minister at an annual salary of \$500. He accepted and in the spring of 1891 after the church had bought a lot and three acres of land at 8 Woodhill Avenue, set about erecting a parsonage estimated to cost \$832. Gardiner contributed fifty days of labor on the structure. He attended general conference of the church in Westerly, R.I., in August and on the way home stopped at Philadelphia to buy wallpaper for the parsonage at John Wanamaker's so that he could move into the house in September 1891.<sup>42</sup> Gardiner wrote early in 1892: "Am now starting in the third week of my third revival since January 1. Began at Lost Creek . . . then at Buckeye, where I preached twice a day for ten days. And now we are in the midst of a wonderful revival in Salem, union meetings of all the churches; but it has fallen my lot to preach twice a day every day but two since they began."<sup>43</sup> Reverend Gardiner resigned as pastor in the spring of 1892 to take over the presidency of Salem College but agreed to fill the pulpit of the church. His career in Salem, which lasted until 1906,<sup>44</sup> coincided with the boom years of the petroleum industry when the population of the town swelled from 310 to 2,169.<sup>45</sup> Many parishioners had oil wells on their land. Money was adequate for the church to make plans to demolish the frame church and build a brick church.

May 20-22, 1892, the Salem church celebrated the one hundredth anniversary of the church in Western Virginia (WV) "Over the pulpit were the following data: 'Shrewsbury ----1745' at the top center; 'New Salem, VA. ---- 1792' at the left below; 'Salem, W. Va. ---- 1892' at the right below. The old tin candle-holders used in the first log church hung on either side, six in all. These also were lighted as of old. Several ancient relics that came with the first settlers were also on exhibition."<sup>46</sup>

## Footnotes

1. Henry Clarke, A History of the Sabbatarians or Seventh Day Baptists in America . . . to the Year 1811, pp. 8-9.
2. Richard Ward and his son Samuel both served as governors of the state of Rhode Island. "In his position of chairman of the Committee of the Whole in the Second Continental Congress, Samuel Ward was instrumental in the selection of George Washington as Commander-in-Chief of the Army. His name would most certainly have been included among the signers of the Declaration of Independence had he not been stricken with smallpox March 15, 1775, while on the floor of Congress. He died eleven days later. Don A. Sanford, A Free People in Search of a Free Land, p. 23.
3. James Bailey, History of the Seventh-Day Baptist General Conference from Its Origin September 1802, to Its Fifty-third Session 1865, pp. 16-7.
4. Ibid., p. 15.
5. Ibid., p. 15.
6. The Seventh-Day Baptist Memorial, Vol. 2, No. 3, July 1853, p. 133.
7. Don A. Sanford, A Free People in Search of a Free Land, p. 24.
8. Ibid., p. 25.
9. Ibid., p. 25.
10. Seventh Day Baptists in Europe and America, Vol. II, pp. 827-8. Records of the General Conference of the Seventh Day Baptist Church as late as 1852 give the founding date of the New Salem, VA, church as 1745. The Seventh-Day Baptist Memorial, Vol. I, No. 2, April 1851, p. 96.
11. Ibid., pp. 827: 831-2.
12. April 9, 1781, John Swearingen, Sr., had registered in Clarksburg "400 acres on Ten Mile Creek, a branch of the West Fork at Nicholas Carpenter's camp in the right of residing and making corn before 1778." Henry Haymond, History of Harrison County, pp. 29-30.
13. Seventh Day Baptists in Europe and America, Vol. II, p. 833.
14. Ibid., p. 843.
15. Henry Haymond, History of Harrison County, p. 364.
16. Corliss Randolph, A History of Seventh Day Baptists in West Virginia, p. 55.
17. Ibid., p. 58.
18. Ibid., p. 85.
19. Ibid., 205.
20. The reply of the general conference to the West Fork River Church read in part: "We do not blame you for loving Christians of any denomination . . . for we find many sweet and comfortable hours in joining with our first-day brethren in worship of our God; yet, for the sake of good order and discipline in God's house, we think it necessary to take up the cross on that one point, that is, to withhold our external fellowship . . . We hope you will see the propriety of our conduct and put on charity for us." Seventh Day Baptists in Europe and America, Vol. 1, p. 163.
21. Corliss Randolph, p. 137.
22. Seventh Day Baptists in Europe and America, Vol. II, pp. 168, 171.
23. Corliss F. Randolph, p. 86.
24. Sarah, daughter of Joshua E. Davis, married Reverend Peter Davis, minister of the New Salem church. Susie Davis Nicholson, Davis, the Settlers of Salem West Virginia, p. 20.
25. New Salem Seventh Day Baptist Church, Harrison County, VA. Second Book of Records.
26. Corliss Randolph, pp. 94-5.
27. Abigail Jackson Hughes, wife of Jonathan Hughes, was received into the New Salem church May 14, 1819. Johnathan Hughes and his children Martin, William F. Randolph, and Elizabeth Hughes were received into the New Salem church May 15, 1819. Corliss F. Randolph, p. 127.
28. New Salem Seventh Day Baptist Church, Second Book of Records.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid.
31. Corliss F. Randolph.
32. Ibid., p. 106.
33. William Randolph took four of his children in a road wagon to St. Mary's, where the children boarded a boat to carry them to catch a train in Ohio north of Wheeling. They rode another train from Cleveland, Ohio, to Alfred, NY. Preston, one of the children, campaigned for Abraham Lincoln in New England during the summer of 1860 and was in charge of Quincy Academy near Gettysburg, PA, when Confederate forces marched into Pennsylvania. The battle of Gettysburg closed the school and Preston Randolph walked to Cumberland, where he found trains running. He returned to Salem after an absence of more than seven years. The Salem Herald, Historical and Industrial Review of the City, Salem, West Virginia, 1905.
34. The Sabbath Recorder, Plainfield, NJ, April 9, 1891.
35. Ibid., April 30, 1891.
36. Ibid., February 12, 1891. The academy inspired students to seek further education. Burdick said that between 1871 and 1890 forty West Virginia scholars had entered Alfred University. Ibid.
37. Corliss Randolph, p. 98.
38. Record Book, New Salem Seventh-day Baptist Church 1878-1907.
39. Ibid.
40. Ibid.
41. Corliss Randolph, pp. 114-15, 369.
42. Theodore L. Gardiner, Memoranda, Aug. 25, Sept. 7-11, 22, 1891.
43. The Sabbath Recorder, March 17, 1892.
44. S. Orestes Bond, The Light of the Hills, p. 83.
45. Dorothy Davis, History of Harrison County, p. 402.
46. T. L. Gardiner, The Sabbath Recorder, June 2, 1892.

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