

Glad Tidings

“And we bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers...” (Acts 13:32)

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“Williamsburg Blue”

By (Jerry Fite)

In a recent video documentary of the life of Alexander Campbell, host David Kenney provided interesting historical insights. One eye catching moment focused on the mantle in the old parlor room of Alexander Campbell’s house. Serena, Alexander’s second wife, had the mantle refurbished with a brown color. In her memoir, she revealed this fact, giving the mantle’s original color. A color of blue, which had faded, was covered with the new brown color. When historical restorationists preserved the Campbell’s mansion as a historical site, they carefully scraped the brown color down to the original color of blue. They were able to take the sample of blue and match it. It was “Williamsburg blue”, a popular color dating back to Colonial times.

David Kenney refers to the process of restoring the mantle’s original color as a fitting example of Campbell’s life’s work of restoring New Testament Christianity. Along with his father Thomas Campbell, Alexander determined to go back to the New Testament and establish faith and practice solely on what was taught therein. They began the arduous task of diligently scraping away the layers of denominational creeds and

practices that for years had colored Christianity with man’s contradictory wisdom. Thomas Campbell desired to only “Speak where the Bible speaks and be silent where the Bible is silent.” By demanding only what God enjoined upon believers through the revealed Scriptures and using God’s precepts and His approved examples as a basis for fellowship, man could restore Christianity in its original New Testament form.

The Campbells came to America from Scotland and dwelt in Washington County, Pennsylvania. They traveled west to settle in Bethany, Virginia, which is now West Virginia. About 10 miles south-east of Bethany, the Campbell’s joined other believers to establish the Brush Run church. They built a portable wooded building as a place to assemble for worship and began meeting on March 4, 1811.

For a couple of years prior to establishing the local church in the Brush Run valley, the doctrine of infant baptism was being studied and discussed. Is Thomas Campbell going to follow his earlier 1808 message to only speak where the Bible speaks? Where is sprinkling infants in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit taught in the Scriptures?

Alexander Campbell studied books in favor of infant baptism, comparing the affirmations with his study of the Greek New Testament. He was convinced that sprinkling infants was not the practice of the New Testament church.

On the first meeting of the Brush Run church, three individuals sought immersion. Thomas Campbell baptized them in Buffalo Creek. He and Alexander Campbell had not been immersed thinking that “rebaptism” was not necessary. It took the birth of Alexander’s first child, Jane, on March 13, 1812 to cause the Campbell’s to revisit immersion and infant baptism. Baby Jane was not sprinkled. On June 12, 1812, Alexander, his father, mother, sister, and others were baptized on their confession of faith by the Baptist preacher Matthias Luse. Immersion in baptism would also follow with others in the church.

Chipping away from denominational creeds and practices, the church partook of the Lord’s supper every first day of the week according to Acts 20:7 and the contributing revelation of I Cor. 16:1. The church was still seeking denominational associations, but they would eventually chip away from such ties not found in the Scriptures. New Testament Christians never should lose sight of the Original!