

BAPTIST MISSIONARY ASSOCIATION THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

LANDMARKISM: THE BEGINNING OF TRAVAIL THAT BIRTHED THE BMAA

A RESEARCH PAPER

SUBMITTED TO DR. PHILIP BRYAN

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT

OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE COURSE

SURVEY OF BAPTIST HERITAGE (CH621)

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MAY 6, 2004

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Introduction

“Why another study of the beginnings of the Baptist Missionary Association of America?” one might reasonably ask. Certainly there have been a number of eyewitness accounts printed in the half-century since the BMAA¹ began. And certainly few would better know the details of those events than those that witnessed them.

However, those closest to the facts are typically also the ones more closely involved in the feelings, and this has the potential of making objectivity more difficult. The contemporary Southern Baptist historian H. Leon McBeth candidly admits this difficulty in evaluating more recent happenings when he writes, “One lacks perspective to assess recent events, and judgments made in the midst of the facts run the risk of distortion.”² Consequently, the examination and evaluation of the facts by one who is a generation removed from them may offer some unique assets.

Virtually every history study begins by “jumping into the middle of things,” for rare is the event that is totally independent of everything preceding it. Such is the case with Baptist history in general, and the birth of the BMAA in particular. However, looking back at the events that ultimately begat the BMAA, the rise of Landmarkism in the 1800’s seemingly provides the most definitive starting point. Dr. Philip Bryan, BMAA seminary professor, concurs: “The primary historical roots of the Associational Baptist movement lie in the ‘Landmark Controversy’ of the mid-nineteenth century.”³

¹ The Baptist Missionary Association of America (BMAA) was originally called the North American Baptist Association (NABA).

² H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage* (Nashville: Broadman, 1987), 693.

³ Philip Ray Bryan, “An Analysis of the Ecclesiology of Associational Baptists, 1900-1950” (Ph.D. diss., Baylor University, 1973), 11.

While a fuller study of the beginnings of the BMAA would be desirable, the subject of Landmarkism is such a significant component in itself that this study will be limited to this one issue. Additional chapters dealing with other elements in the BMAA's formation must be postponed to a future point in time.

The Forefathers of Landmarkism

L. D. Foreman and Alta Payne relate that “[t]he term ‘Landmark’ first appeared in 1854,”⁴ but this certainly was not the unveiling of its ideologies. Landmarkers hold to the antiquity of their doctrines: “Landmarkism was not a mid-nineteenth century mutation of the faith. Instead it was, especially to Baptists then emerging on the Southwestern frontier, a renewal of the New Testament principle of local church sovereignty in kingdom affairs.”⁵ However, McBeth states, “Landmark ingredients originated in New England, perhaps as exaggerated expressions of the views of Francis Wayland.”⁶ These “ingredients” apparently arose in the 1820's.⁷ Some elements of Landmarkism are said to be included in the 1833 New Hampshire Confession of Faith.⁸

Although the many elements of Landmarkism were known before, the mid-nineteenth century discovered the man to establish the movement. “Although the various ingredients of

⁴ L. D. Foreman and Alta Payne, *The Life and Works of Benjamin Marcus Bogard*, II (Little Rock, AR: Foreman and Payne, 1966), 213.

⁵ Robert Ashcraft (ed.), *History of the American Baptist Association* (Texarkana, TX: Baptist Sunday School Committee, 2000), 35.

⁶ McBeth, 447. See Ashcraft (p. 38) for more information about Wayland's situation and his beliefs.

⁷ Ashcraft, 38.

⁸ McBeth, 447.

Landmarkism existed earlier, in the 1850s J[ames] R[obinson] Graves stirred them together into a new mixture.”⁹

James Robinson Graves (1820-1893), known by many as the ‘father of Landmarkism,’¹⁰ likely formed some of his views during his years in Vermont,¹¹ where he lived at least his first two decades. Graves had little formal education, which McBeth believes contributed “to the imbalance and rigidity of the Landmark system.”¹² Despite his limited formal education, Graves was a man with a quick mind, and was eventually self-taught the equivalent of a college degree.¹³

Graves made a name for himself as a debater. “Like many successful debaters, Graves loved conflict and where none existed he tried to create it. He often held audiences spellbound for over three hours at a time and was without doubt one of the most powerful preachers and debaters of his time.”¹⁴ McBeth observes, “Landmarkism . . . owes much to the Baptist effort to refute the Campbell movement by using intense argument and logic to prove the validity of the Baptist cause.”¹⁵ Graves was just the man to adapt this tool of argument and logic for promoting this new movement.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Note that at least some among the Landmarkers do not agree with this designation, feeling that “[t]his movement began long before his [Graves’] birth, its true ‘Author and Finisher’ having now ‘set down at the right hand of the throne of God.’” (Ashcraft, 66.)

¹¹ McBeth, 447; Ashcraft 42-43.

¹² McBeth, 448. Also see this page for additional biographical information on Graves.

¹³ Ashcraft, 40.

¹⁴ McBeth, 448.

¹⁵ Ibid., 447.

Graves was not the only major figure in the early movement of Landmarkism. Other names of the day also included Amos Cooper Dayton (1813-1865) and James Madison Pendleton (1811-1891). These three were often called the “Great Triumvirate” of Landmarkism. In the words of a contemporary Landmarker, “Like the judges and prophets of the Old Testament, the Great Triumvirate was raised up by Almighty God in a time of desperate need. They put ‘iron’ into the blood of the anemic Baptists of their day.”¹⁶

Although not the tenacious student of Landmarkism that Graves was, J. M. Pendleton nonetheless played a vital role in the movement. Believing that only Baptist ministers were valid ministers, Pendleton published a pamphlet imploring all Baptists to abandon the practice of pulpit affiliation. Later Graves re-issued Pendleton’s pamphlet with the new title of *An Old Landmark Reset*, from which the movement got its name.¹⁷ “Dr. Graves named the pamphlet for he said the ‘old Landmark’ once stood but had fallen and needed to be reset.”¹⁸ Pendleton’s greatest impact was through his *Church Manual* in which he set forth the Landmark views on a number of issues.

A. C. Dayton’s unique contribution to Landmarkism was in the form of a novel written in “Bunyan-like symbolism”¹⁹ with Landmark ideas embedded throughout. Extremely popular among the laity, *Theodosia Ernest, or The Heroine of Faith* “. . . depicted a young girl’s quest for the faith and mirrored Dayton’s own struggles in search of New Testament Christianity.”²⁰

¹⁶ Ashcraft, 35.

¹⁷ McBeth, 449.

¹⁸ Foreman II, 312.

¹⁹ McBeth, 449.

²⁰ Ashcraft, 53.

This book in its numerous reprintings subtly instilled Landmark ideas in many people that otherwise would have never been exposed to it.

With no intention of slighting the involvement and impact of Pendleton and Dayton, unquestionably “Graves was the primary founder and exponent of the movement; in the early years Graves *was* Landmarkism.”²¹

Although too young to have been a fourth member of this group, one other person involved in the growth of Landmarkism is worthy of mention. John Newton Hall (1849-1905), called the successor of J. R. Graves,²² “was indeed a Landmarker among Landmarkers.”²³ Hall was an avid debater, a committed preacher, and most of all a tireless editor. It was through his various papers, most notably the *Baptist Flag*, that he aired his Landmark beliefs and openly debated with anyone who dared to challenge him. Hall would later serve as chairman of the committee drafting the *Statement of Principles of the General Association of the Baptist General Association*. Although sick with a fever that would lead to his death a few days later, he insisted on preaching what would be his last sermon at the formative meeting of that Association.²⁴

The Beliefs of Landmarkism

To understand this movement’s impact, one must be familiar with its doctrines as well as its founders. Bob L. Ross provides this synopsis of Landmarkism:

Landmarkism involves the authenticity of a **church** as an organization, the administration and administrator of **baptism**, and the **ordination** of ministers. It is asserted that a

²¹ McBeth, 448.

²² Ashcraft, 191.

²³ Bryan, 112.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 92.

church is unscriptural, baptism is invalid, and ministers are not duly ordained unless there is proper church authority for them. This is Landmarkism's "chief cornerstone."²⁵

Before beginning an extended discussion of its beliefs (which will be examined below), McBeth encapsulates Landmarkism's doctrine into this description: "[T]he system boils down to one bedrock concern: The doctrine of the church. Landmarkism is a system of high church ecclesiology with implications for every area of doctrine and church practice."²⁶

The six major issues within Landmarkism's ideology, as delineated by McBeth, will now be considered.²⁷

Baptist churches are the only true churches in the world. "The Landmark system was exclusive; in this view, Baptists alone represented the true church. . . . According to this view, the church established by Jesus and the apostles was a Baptist church."²⁸

The true church is a local, visible institution. This doctrine is of great importance, for it "is pitted against the ever-threatening villain, the 'universal, invisible church,' which is a veritable root of all evil in the eyes of Landmarkers."²⁹

The churches and the kingdom of God are coterminous. McBeth calls this "one of the most distinctive doctrines of Landmarkism,"³⁰ although there were varying degrees of commitment to this among the early leaders of Landmarkism. Specifically, "Graves taught that

²⁵ Bob L. Ross, *Old Landmarkism and the Baptists* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1979), 9.

²⁶ McBeth, 450.

²⁷ The major points of the outline are taken from McBeth, 450-53. Additional comments by McBeth or others are noted.

²⁸ McBeth, 450.

²⁹ Ross, 11.

³⁰ McBeth, 451.

the church is **local** and **visible** and that the churches collectively compose the **kingdom**.”³¹ From this statement one could easily conclude “. . . not only that non-Baptist religious societies were not in the kingdom, but also that non-Baptist individual Christians were quite outside the kingdom.”³² Graves, however, maintained that he did not believe only Baptists could be saved.³³

There must be no “pulpit affiliation” with non-Baptists. From early times Baptists joined with other denominations in joint endeavors such as union revivals, camp meetings, sharing pulpits, and other such activities. Southern Baptists even “seated” brethren of other denominations in Convention meetings where, although not able to vote, they were welcome to participate in the discussion.³⁴ However, since Landmarkers held that Baptist churches were the only true churches, then ordination and commissioning from an “invalid” church must be equally invalid. The impact this teaching had is hard for the modern Baptist to comprehend for “[w]ithin a generation, Landmarkism effectively halted most pulpit exchanges among Baptists.”³⁵

Only a church can do churchly acts (e.g. baptism, communion, and preaching).

Landmarkers held that “[b]ecause Baptists have the only true churches, it follows that they have the only true ministers, ordinances, and preaching.”³⁶ Landmarkers believed that “[a]ll of these acts have been committed by Christ to His church; no organization but a church can validly perform them;” therefore, these acts sanctioned by any other “society” (i.e., a non-valid church)

³¹ Ross, 11.

³² James E. Tull, *High-Church Baptists in the South* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2000), 18.

³³ McBeth, 451. See also Tull, 41.

³⁴ Ibid..

³⁵ Ibid., 452.

³⁶ Ibid., 450.

are invalid.³⁷ Landmarkers consider such items as pulpit affiliation, alien immersion, and communion to be an issue of “church authority.”³⁸

Tull notes what he considers Landmarkers’ real motivation for this stance. “The attack concentrated on ‘pulpit affiliation’ and ‘alien immersion,’ not because these were in themselves the matters of prime importance, but rather because, in Landmark opinion, these were the channels through which the paganizing errors of Pedobaptism were entering the Baptist fold.”³⁹

Ross discusses how this principle necessitates closed communion (called “double closed communion” by some),⁴⁰ although he notes that not all Landmarkers practice closed communion.⁴¹ Actually, Ross’s marginal notes state that in the earlier days Graves himself did allow for some exception on this issue. A person “of like faith and order,” to use more modern terminology, could join in the communion provided that person was “. . . so well known to all as to need no letter ‘of commendation’ and a unanimous vote was made to include him.”⁴² However, Graves changed to a more exclusive stance⁴³ by 1855.

Bryan later notes that “[t]he theme of final church authority in missions was an addition to the issues of earlier Landmarkism . . .”⁴⁴ which was largely made at the initiative of John Newton Hall.⁴⁵

³⁷ Ibid., 452.

³⁸ Tull, 27.

³⁹ Ibid., 28.

⁴⁰ McBeth, 452.

⁴¹ Ross, 12.

⁴² Ibid., 11-12.

⁴³ See the discussion of Non-Intercommunion by Bryan (pp. 50-52). Cf. Ashcraft, 43.

⁴⁴ Bryan, 111.

The points stressed by this view were rooted primarily in his Landmark insistence on the authority of each local church (Baptist) to do and direct all missionary enterprises. Many of the issues . . . [were a part of] controversies which directly led to the separation of the Associational Baptist movement from the Southern Baptist Convention and ultimately to the division of the American Baptist Association in 1950.⁴⁶

Baptist churches have always existed in every age by an unbroken historical succession.

As already shown, Landmarkism holds that only Baptist churches are true churches. Since it also holds that these churches compose Christ's kingdom which can never pass away, true Landmarkers are left with the logical necessity that at least one active Baptist church has existed at every moment in time since the days of Christ.

However, many, perhaps most, Landmarkers take this concept one step further. These understand succession to be an unbroken chain of Baptist churches linked mother-to-daughter since the time the church was first established,⁴⁷ although they largely make such assertions based upon faith, not on hard data. "The system [of Landmarkism] further involves the **perpetuity, succession, or continuity** of Baptist churches through which authority has descended through the ages and will continue. . . . Landmarkers in general profess either an **inability** to demonstrate the succession or **no necessity** of doing so. . . ."⁴⁸ This chain-link succession is the view espoused in the popular booklet *The Trail of Blood* (J. M. Carroll), and is also foundational in G. H. Orchard's *History of the Baptists*.

Ross summarizes this doctrinal position thusly: "Graves' basic presupposition, or axiom, was that *the commission was given to the church as a corporate, visible organization or*

⁴⁵ See Bryan (pp. 109-12) for a synopsis of Hall's views.

⁴⁶ Bryan, 109.

⁴⁷ Ashcraft (p. 64) notes that "J. R. Graves did not take the rigid chain-link theory of church succession of some today."

⁴⁸ Ross, 10.

institution. He also held that the authority of Christ can come only through this church institution, so that the authority of Christ, in this age, is synonymous to the authority of the church.”⁴⁹ Ross then makes a criticism not uncommon among Landmarkism’s opponents: This group is guilty of the same type of evils as those found in Roman Catholicism. “Both agree that the authority of Jesus Christ is now residing in the visible church as a structured organization and can be received from no other source,”⁵⁰ and he later notes “Landmarkism therefore makes the same identical claim to authority as the church of Rome and the Pope.”⁵¹

The Rise of Landmarkism in the Early Years

“From their earliest history Baptists have been a contentious lot, a tradition amply upheld by the Southern Baptist portion of the family.”⁵² Probably few statements better describe the situation caused by Landmarkism as it immersed within the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) in the pre-civil-war period of the mid-nineteenth century.

At the age of twenty-five Graves moved to Nashville, Tennessee, and soon his Landmark teaching spread widely through the South via *The Baptist* (later changed to the *Tennessee Baptist*) which he published. His teachings found a receptive readership, and before long “Landmarkism became the main method by which Baptists convinced themselves that theirs were the only true churches and all others mere human societies without valid ministers or ordinances.”⁵³

⁴⁹ Ibid., 21.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 22.

⁵¹ Ibid., 25.

⁵² McBeth, 679.

⁵³ Ibid., 447.

In 1851 Graves called for a council to consider problems of pulpit exchange, union meetings, and recognizing the ordination of ministers from other denominations. This meeting was held at Cotton Grove in Jackson, Tennessee. The *Cotton Grove Resolution*, concluding much along Landmark lines, was the outcome of that meeting. “Many mark this resolution, together with the publication of J. M. Pendleton’s *An Old Landmark Reset*, as the beginning of the Landmark movement,”⁵⁴ although Landmarkers rather consider this as nothing more than a restatement of ancient Biblical teaching.

In 1855 Graves republished Orchard’s *History of the Baptists* to lend support to the movement. To this edition Graves added an “Introductory Essay” which affirmed that “*all* Christian communities during the first three centuries were of the Baptist denomination.”⁵⁵

However, Graves grew discontent with what he considered to be growing problems within the Southern Baptist Convention system, and soon went to work to effect change within the Convention itself. He tried unsuccessfully to force greater Landmark views into the literature used by the SBC. Failing that, in 1857 Graves established the Southern Baptist Sunday School Union for the purpose of producing and distributing his own line of Sunday School materials, which naturally held a strong Landmark stance.

Then in 1859 J. R. Graves attempted to persuade the SBC towards the “Direct Gospel Missions Movement.” This effort failed, although over the next year and a half many feared that Graves might still accomplish his desire. This change never materialized, largely due to the Convention’s desire to avoid another controversy (e.g. fairly recent encounters with Campbell and also the Hardshell Baptists), as well as the disruption resulting from the Civil War and

⁵⁴ Ashcraft, 45. See also Tull, 3.

⁵⁵ McBeth, 59.

Reconstruction.⁵⁶ McBeth notes, “[T]he Civil War intervened and probably prevented Landmarkism from gaining more influence. . . . [T]he crash of 1873 brought bankruptcy from which he [Graves] never recovered.”⁵⁷

The Rise of Landmarkism in the State Works

Although Graves was to have little personal widespread impact from this point, the world of Baptists was only just beginning to feel the impact of the movement he inaugurated. Landmark voices would remain quieted for a short while, but the last decade of the century would see yet another eruption of the Gospel Missions movement.⁵⁸ This was primarily a reaction to changes in the conventions’ missions structure begun the previous decade, and which included the creation of the new position of superintendent of missions. From the SBC’s perspective, the storm was quieted by the dismissal and resignations of some problem missionaries. Regardless of the Convention’s contentment, the final word had yet to be heard, for “[t]he issue did not die among many Landmark Baptists, however, and the Associational Baptist Movement was born.”⁵⁹

Texas

“The struggle for the soul of Texas Baptists has been waged at least since the 1840’s. . . . The progressive or ‘missionary’ Baptists formed a convention in 1848 . . . [but] the ‘anticonvention’ party, quite numerous in East and North Texas, opposed that denominational

⁵⁶ Bryan, 120.

⁵⁷ McBeth, 448.

⁵⁸ Conrad N. Glover and Austin Powers, *The American Baptist Association 1924-1974* (Texarkana, TX: Bogard Press, 1979), 154.

⁵⁹ Bryan, 120.

program.”⁶⁰ The latter group adhered to the teaching of Graves, and found a leader in Samuel A. Hayden. For a time Hayden pastored in Dallas, Texas, but he was best known as an editor. Hayden owned and edited the *Texas Baptist Herald* (alternately called *The Texas Baptist* and *Texas Baptist and Herald*).⁶¹

In 1894 Hayden proposed Landmark reforms to the missions program in the Baptist General Convention of Texas (BGCT). When the convention refused, Hayden blasted Texas leaders via his paper. The State convention tolerated this for a while, but eventually fought back and twice (1897 and 1898)⁶² refused to seat Hayden as a messenger. Hayden filed suit, claiming “the state convention was made up of *churches*, and the convention could not refuse to seat delegates without violating the autonomy of the local church.”⁶³ “Church sovereignty”⁶⁴ became the banner under which Hayden’s group fought, all the while accusing their opponents of espousing Episcopal government.

After years of verdicts, appeals and reversals, the lawsuits were settled out of court “primarily to deny Hayden the benefit of the continuing publicity.”⁶⁵

After a number of years of controversy in the Baptist General Convention of Texas, the Landmarkers formed a rival state convention in 1899. “This was partly an effort to resurrect the rival state convention which had prevailed in that area before the 1886 unification of Texas

⁶⁰ McBeth, 749.

⁶¹ Cf. Bryan, 123; McBeth 458, 750.

⁶² So McBeth (p. 458), but Bryan (pp. 123-24) also includes 1899 and 1900.

⁶³ McBeth, 458.

⁶⁴ Bryan, 124.

⁶⁵ McBeth, 459.

Baptists.”⁶⁶ The following summer⁶⁷ this group organized the East Texas Baptist Convention, although the name was changed later the same year to the Baptist Missionary Association of Texas (BMAT).

Ashcraft lists three root causes for this split in the Texas work: (1) the money basis of representation; (2) the Ninth Article to the Constitution which allowed the Convention great latitude in deciding which messengers it would seat; and (3) the removal of the Rusk Academy from control of the Cherokee Baptist Association without that Association’s approval. In short, “Texas Baptists divided over the question of church sovereignty versus convention sovereignty.”⁶⁸ Interestingly, “Landmark issues appear to have been the basis of the controversy, although Landmarkers were on both sides of the question.”⁶⁹ It appears that Hayden did not approve of the new association at first, but did come to affiliate with it.⁷⁰

McBeth touches on some noteworthy insights concerning the churches in the BMA of Texas:

Most of the BMA churches remained small and retained the Landmark flavor of their origins. Like most Landmarkers, they sought to pursue missionary work only through the local church. . . . [T]he result was that their churches did very little missionary work by any method, and they rapidly acquired the reputation of being antimissionary despite their name.⁷¹

⁶⁶ Ibid., 750.

⁶⁷ Bryan (p. 122) gives the date as July 6, 1900, and Ashcraft (p. 157) lists it as the following day. McBeth (p. 750) gives it as June, 6, 1900.

⁶⁸ Ashcraft, 155.

⁶⁹ Bryan, 122.

⁷⁰ McBeth, 751.

⁷¹ Ibid.. However, McBeth does later note (p. 754), “The antimission image that clung, often unfairly, to earlier Landmark groups has not attached itself to the BMAA.”

And concerning the new Association itself, he notes,

The BMA group in Texas might have amounted to more but for the rise of a larger Landmark schism in 1905 which tended to preempt the field. In 1924 the BMA group merged with the new group, the American Baptist Association (ABA), but in 1950 a remnant withdrew to reaffirm the BMA heritage.⁷²

Arkansas

Benjamin Marcus Bogard was a man of amazing talent and varied interests. He was active in community and government affairs, it appears he was influential in home schooling, and somewhat surprisingly, at one time was an active member of the Ku Klux Klan.⁷³ But Bogard was best known as the champion of the Landmark cause in the state of Arkansas.

In many ways Ben Bogard became Arkansas' version of Hayden. "Landmark efforts to capture Southern Baptists took many forms. One of the greatest leaders since Graves was Ben M. Bogard, . . . leader of the Landmark schism in that state."⁷⁴ Following in Graves' pattern, Bogard was an avid debater and was not afraid of a good fight. His biographers write,

Ben M. Bogard was a fighter. He made no apologies for it. Rather, that was the way he wanted it. "Whatever else is put on my tombstone," he would say, "I want it to say I have fought a good fight. . . ." He was a product of Kentucky . . . the battleground for bitter controversies, the storm center of conflicting doctrines and opinions and Baptists there have a history of eristic contentions as they fought to keep the purity of the faith.⁷⁵

Besides being a debater, Bogard was also a pastor and editor. Having been converted to Landmark views, "[f]or several years he wrote articles advocating his gospel missions views."⁷⁶

⁷² McBeth, 751.

⁷³ Foreman II, 393.

⁷⁴ McBeth, 751.

⁷⁵ Foreman II, 297.

⁷⁶ Bryan, 133-134.

Bogard purposed to have a positive (constructive) as well as negative fight against the evils he perceived in the system, and was surprised at the lack of people that shared this sentiment.⁷⁷

In the late 1890's Arkansas Landmarkers, with Bogard as their leader, attempted to make reforms within the state convention. Being convinced that the Mission Board approach was unscriptural, Bogard made a number of attempts to abolish the position of corresponding secretary in the state and national conventions. But the proposed change was never approved.

According to Bogard's journal, at the 1901 Arkansas Convention . . .

I made a speech of one hour and forty five minutes length in the great debate on the propriety of having a corresponding secretary to superintend the mission work of the state. I argued against such an office but by manipulation and wire pulling the vote was not taken until after nearly half of the messengers had left the convention and the vote went against me.⁷⁸

With the desired reforms unrealized, many of the dissenters held a preliminary meeting in April 1902 and there formed the General Association of Arkansas Baptist Churches⁷⁹ – “the second state association which the Landmark Baptists organized.”⁸⁰ This group sent a list of demands to the state convention which, they said, must be met in order to heal the division.

These “Terms of Peace” were:

1. The Scriptural right of individual churches to commission and send forth missionaries,
2. The arranging of missionary methods so that the reports of missionaries shall include only the work actually performed by the missionaries and paid for by missionary contributions,

⁷⁷ Foreman II, 311.

⁷⁸ Ibid. II, 315.

⁷⁹ Subsequent name changes for this same group include State Association of Arkansas Baptist Churches (1907) and State Association of Missionary Baptist Churches of Arkansas (1922) (Bryan, 138).

⁸⁰ Bryan, 133.

3. The recognition of each church as a unit and entitled to equal representation with any other church in Association or Convention,
4. The absolute abolition of the office and expense of the Corresponding Secretary under whatever title,
5. The right of the churches to instruct their messengers on any subject to be recognized, and
6. The abolition of the present plan of cooperation with the Home and Foreign Mission Boards of the Southern Baptist Convention.⁸¹

“The similarity with views of the Hayden movement in Texas is obvious.”⁸²

The Convention referred this issue to a study committee which surprisingly agreed, albeit reluctantly, to the demands and recommended its approval to the body. However, the Convention instead opted to accept the minority report, which apparently was drawn up by a single member of the study committee.⁸³

Unable to rectify the differences, the new group became a permanent Association. Their first official meeting (i.e., annual session) was October 31 – November 3 in Texarkana.

Other States and Regions

As has been shown, Arkansas and Texas were in the forefront of the Landmark movement from which the BMAA eventually arose. Although information is scanty, other states were also involved in the movement and played a role in its developments. These states will be briefly mentioned.

The State Association of Baptist Churches of Mississippi, which was organized in November 1908, is “[o]ne of the oldest of the state associations established by Landmark

⁸¹ Ashcraft, 188. Bryan (p. 134-136), however, attributes this list to the work of the October/November assembly as a follow-up to an unsuccessful attempt of reconciliation earlier in the year.

⁸² McBeth, 752.

⁸³ Bryan, 137.

Baptists.”⁸⁴ They have also operated under the names of General Association of Baptist Churches of Mississippi, Mississippi State Association of Regular Missionary Baptists (1923), and Mississippi Baptist Association (1954).

Missouri was home for both the Meramec Landmark Baptist Association (1870) and the Missouri State Association of Landmark Missionary Baptist Churches (1928). Prior to 1957 the Meramec Association was simply a local association within the larger state work. There also appears to have been another Missouri state association of Landmark Baptists prior to the 1928 group.⁸⁵

Bryan notes that “[t]he 1936 [BGAO] minutes state that a ‘Baptist General Association (of Landmark Baptist Churches) of Indian and Oklahoma Territories’ was organized . . . November 27-28, 1903.”⁸⁶ In a list that apparently is composed of those in agreement with Landmark tradition, Glover also includes The Louisiana State Association of Regular Missionary Baptist Churches (1924), and mentions state associations in Florida, Kentucky, Tennessee, Colorado, and probably Alabama.⁸⁷

The emerging Association also attracted the attention of a splinter group in Illinois. In 1906 problems with the University of Chicago raised the ire of a strong Landmarker, William P. Throgmorton – the “J. R. Graves of Illinois.”⁸⁸ Throgmorton called for a separation of Landmark churches, which formed their own state association the following year. Throgmorton

⁸⁴ Ibid., 139.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 141.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 147.

⁸⁷ Glover, 100.

⁸⁸ McBeth, 624.

wanted the churches to join with the Bogard group, but the majority voted to join the SBC instead.⁸⁹

The Rise of Landmarkism in the National Work

General Association of Baptist Churches

The Landmarkers, having established a number of state associations, now turned their attention to the unresolved difficulties with the national convention. “On January 29, 1905, Bethlehem Baptist Church, Little Rock, Arkansas, where Bogard was a member, adopted a letter calling upon ‘the Landmark Baptist Churches of the United States’ to have a special meeting”⁹⁰ to address this situation.

Even while waiting for this special meeting to convene Bogard was not inactive. On March 12-17 he attended the SBC meeting in Kansas City, Missouri, and “presented a ‘Memorial’ from the General Association which looked to peace between the two factions of Baptists. . . .”⁹¹ The SBC, however, refused these efforts.

At this point some of the details become unclear and even conflicting. As already stated, a meeting was called by the Landmarkers in early 1905. According to BMAA historian John W. Duggar’s recounting, which conflicts with Bryan’s statement cited earlier, this meeting was largely at the initiative of the BMAT.

By 1905 a number of southern states . . . had already organized associations that were independent of the Southern Baptist Convention, but Baptists of the state associations felt a need for a national fellowship to carry out a worldwide mission work. An invitation

⁸⁹ Ibid., 624-25.

⁹⁰ Bryan, 148.

⁹¹ Foreman II, 320.

from the BMA of Texas was extended for all interested churches to send representatives to organize such a cooperative work.

On March 22, 1905, messengers from churches in Mississippi, Texas, Missouri, Tennessee, Colorado, Oklahoma, Kentucky, and two foreign countries met [in Texarkana] for a tentative organization of the General Association of Baptist Churches. It is possible that several other states were represented. . . .

. . . A committee was appointed to make an appeal to the Southern Baptist Convention to amend its Constitution. . . .⁹²

Ashcraft agrees with the diversity of the states represented, although he includes Arkansas in his list – Ben Bogard being one of the officers elected at it. He agrees with Bryan that the meeting was called by Bogard’s church.⁹³

McBeth, on the other hand, describes this meeting as nothing more than the continuation of the Bogard movement, and limited to the state of Arkansas:

. . . under Bogard’s dynamic leadership the issues escalated to challenge the entire Southern Baptist Convention. In early 1905 messengers from fifty-two Arkansas churches met in Texarkana and drafted a memorial to the upcoming meeting of the SBC.⁹⁴

Furthermore, McBeth relates that the two principle groups, those from Arkansas and Texas, remained separated for yet a couple of decades until “1924 [when] the two groups merged under the name of American Baptist Association. . . .”⁹⁵ Bryan’s record indicates that the BMAT was still a separate entity as late as the 1930’s.⁹⁶

Apparently the 1905 meeting did include churches from a number of states, but was largely at the initiative of the Arkansas group. Furthermore, it seems the group, although having

⁹² John W. Duggar, *The Baptist Missionary Association of America (1950-1986)* (Texarkana, TX: Baptist Publishing House, 1988), 25, emphasis added.

⁹³ Ashcraft, 191. Presumably Duggar’s omission of Arkansas was error.

⁹⁴ McBeth, 752.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 753.

⁹⁶ Bryan, 127ff.

more of a national composition, remained largely under the control of the Arkansas group – most notably in the person of Ben Bogard. And although some Texas churches were represented in the 1905 meeting and may have become permanent members of the Association, the BMAT remained unaffiliated with the new group for a number of years afterward.

These uncertain details notwithstanding, church messengers met in Texarkana and “the General Association of the United States was organized . . . on March 22, 1905.”⁹⁷ Bryan notes that “[t]he messengers were divided as to whether or not the new organization should be considered permanent,”⁹⁸ still hoping for reconciliation with the Convention. The decision was postponed until the November meeting.

Ashcraft lists three important results coming from this meeting: 1) A Statement of Principles and Methods of Work was approved, officially organizing the General Association; 2) Missionaries were elected to Syria and Persia; and 3) “A committee was appointed ‘to memorialize the Southern Baptist Convention to so amend its Constitution and methods of work that it may be possible for all Baptists to work together, and thus avoid permanent division.’”⁹⁹ This memorial concluded with, “If you reject this . . . we shall consider that we have done our duty and shall trouble you no more.”¹⁰⁰

Once presented to the Convention, the “Texarkana Memorial” was referred to a special committee chaired by W. E. Hatcher of Virginia – a man who had little sympathy for the Landmark cause. “The committee replied courteously but firmly, rejecting all the Landmark

⁹⁷ Ashcraft, 189.

⁹⁸ Bryan, 150.

⁹⁹ Ashcraft, 189. From all indications this “memorial” is not to be confused with the one Bogard had earlier presented to the SBC on March 12-17.

¹⁰⁰ McBeth, 752.

demands,”¹⁰¹ and thereby set the course for the new group. On November of that same year this new body met again in Texarkana for permanent organization as the General Association of the United States of America.¹⁰² McBeth describes the impact of the SBC’s response on the

Landmarkers:

Thus failing to capture the SBC to their extreme views, the Landmarkers separated and sought to create a rival national organization. They gathered up smaller Landmark groups here and there.... The branching out of Bogard’s movement undercut and eventually absorbed Hayden’s BMA movement in Texas. In 1924 the two groups merged under the name of American Baptist Association (ABA).¹⁰³

Thus the Landmarkers, although not achieving their higher goal of changing the Convention system, did manage to form an association of churches committed to working by their cherished principles. “Thus the division created in the Convention over principles and methods resulted in the calling together of the old fashioned, Landmark Missionary Baptist Churches to fellowship together in a friendship of churches.”¹⁰⁴ It would be an association cherished for years to come.

Churches of both the American Baptist Association and the Baptist Missionary Association of America point with pride to their predecessor, the General Association of Baptists in the United States of America, commonly called ‘The Old General Association.’ They regarded that association as their link with associations of the past which were much older than any other conventions among Baptists.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 753.

¹⁰² Ashcraft, 189. However, Duggar (p. 26) gives this as the General Association of Baptists in the United States of America. Bryan (p. 152-53) gives the November 1905 official name as Baptist General Association, with a change in 1907 to General Association of Baptist Churches, a subsequent (1915) return to the original name and finally Missionary Baptist General Association (1920). Bryan further notes, “With all the name changes, one is not surprised that this association usually has been referred to as the “General Association.”

¹⁰³ McBeth, 753. McBeth’s term “merged” would probably be more appropriately rendered as “affiliated.”

¹⁰⁴ Foreman II, 321.

¹⁰⁵ Duggar, 25.

American Baptist Association

The new General Association was not without its own problems. Duggar notes, “The Old General Association continued its program of cooperative work for almost twenty years, but it never really attained national status or enjoyed the full support and cooperation of all association-minded churches.”¹⁰⁶ Bryan concurs.

[T]he General Association did not gain the success nor the momentum that had been envisioned. In brief, the association was not successful chiefly because a great number of the churches in the Baptist Missionary Association of Texas did not participate in its cooperative work. The Texas association even had its own missions program, including foreign missionaries.¹⁰⁷

Foreman further explains the problems associated with the Texas state work.

The work of the General Association in other areas had not as yet gained the momentum of the Arkansas work. This, too, was to result in a fight between the Convention element in the B.M.A. [of Texas] and the Landmark element. Terrible controversies, bitter battles and wounds were inflicted during this period that could never be healed.¹⁰⁸

Quoting a February 25, 1966 letter from Dr. A. J. Kirkland, Foreman provides further detail.

Some eight or ten years after the B.M.A. [of Texas] was organized, they continued to support the program of the Southern Baptist Convention. One reason for this was that the leaders hoped to get the Southern Baptist Convention to recognize the B.M.A. as officially representing it instead of recognizing the General Baptist Convention of Texas.¹⁰⁹

The feelings and battles were bitter at times. One of the stranger situations involved the murder of one of the Landmarkers’ outstanding preachers and debaters, which was apparently the result of some of the conflicts.¹¹⁰ But regular efforts were also attempted in an effort to

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 27.

¹⁰⁷ Bryan, 156-57.

¹⁰⁸ Foreman II, 326.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 337.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 328-30.

bridge the gap between the two groups, including a decision to hold the 1915 General Association in Jacksonville, Texas.

Eventually a number of negative developments, mostly related to two schools (one in Dallas and the other in Jacksonville), dampened the chances of the SBC recognizing the BMAT. Thereafter many returned to the Convention, and those remaining realized the uselessness of trying to keep the state work going. Some of those remaining “. . . saw it was futile and then struck out for a new name, the name ‘American Baptist Association.’. [sic] This helped the opposition to save face.”¹¹¹

Based largely upon a desire to improve mission work among Landmarkers,¹¹² a resolution in the 1922 session of the General Association called for a committee to look into unification. The committee, after meeting with the various state works, recommended a meeting of all churches interested in such a undertaking.

The resulting “Unification Conference” met in Texarkana on March 4, 1924. In that meeting the following resolution was made:

1. That the results of our work here be reported to the churches composing the State and General bodies composing this conference, for their approval or disapproval during their annual meetings this fall.
2. That the temporary organization under which we have been working, be made provisionally permanent, until we meet as herein provided for.
3. That when we adjourn tonight it be to meet here in Texarkana December 10, at 7:00 p.m., to elect officers and arrange to take up the work for which the American Baptist Missionary Association of Churches has been organized.¹¹³

Thus the stage was set for the new association of Landmarkers.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 339.

¹¹² Glover (p. 122) states that only \$2,079.73 “was collected by the association for all phases of the Mission Program” in 1922.

¹¹³ Ashcraft, 235.

On December 11, 1924, the Missionary Baptist General Association adjourned “Sine Die” in Texarkana.¹¹⁴ The new association, operating under the name of American Baptist Association – which was slightly different than the Unification Conference specified – was officially formed when the older one completed its business on December 10.¹¹⁵ Consequently,

[t]he churches in Texas finally came into the association and by 1924 the unification of the work was effected. He [Bogard] attended the General Association in Texas on December 9-10 [1924] and noted in his journal [sic]: “Thus the twentieth and final year of the General Association, The American Baptist Association was formed and what was called the unification was effected.”¹¹⁶

There were still hard feelings to mend and difficulties to iron out, especially pertaining to the BMAT. “Many of the Texas brethren were still angry with Bogard and thought Arkansas was trying to control the work.”¹¹⁷ Conversely, many Arkansas and Oklahoma messengers apparently feared that the Texas brethren, as a single voting bloc, would exert undue sway on the Association.¹¹⁸

In spite of the difficulties, this new association “was the culmination of several years movement toward a ‘unification’ of the various Landmark Baptists.”¹¹⁹ And as it progressed through its various stages of development, “Landmark ecclesiological tenets and presuppositions have always been vitally connected to this movement.”¹²⁰

¹¹⁴ Bryan, 153.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 156.

¹¹⁶ Foreman II, 366.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 367.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 372.

¹¹⁹ Bryan, 153.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 168.

Conclusion

As noted earlier, it is difficult to find the absolute beginning of any major movement, and the BMAA is no exception. It seems fair to consider the Landmark movement of the nineteenth century to be the headwaters, but realizing that even those headwaters are fed by currents under the surface which come from unknown distances. Although the first streams that would swell into the BMAA may be hard to ascertain and may include many other tributaries, the fact that Landmarkism has played an important role in its origin, and exerts significant force even yet, is beyond question.

While continuing many of the older emphases, the BMAA represents a more moderate form of Landmarkism. Over the years they have absorbed many emphases of the Fundamentalist movement, in some ways the successor of the Landmark movement among Baptists.¹²¹

Many a squall was yet to be weathered before the harbor of a yet undiscovered Association was reached in the middle of the twentieth century. That notwithstanding, the ship was launched and the sails were set, and the crew now awaited the Breath of Heaven to blow her as He willed.

¹²¹ McBeth, 754.

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