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Mr. John Woodard
Baptist Historical Collection
Wake Forest University Library
Winston-Salem, North Carolina 27106

Dear Mr. Woodard:

The N. C. Genealogical Society newsletter item about your Work in Progress is of some interest to me. I would like to know what sort of material you intend to include in your "N. C. Baptist Ministers' Biography File", whether it is to be published, and whether we might exchange for mutual benefit in this area.

In the course of pursuing my genealogy hobby I have found that two N. C. Baptist ministers were my 3x-gr-grandfather Stephen Stilley [called Elder Stephen Stilley] and his brother Levi. They were born in Somerset Co., Md., 1750s-1760s, sons of John and Grace (Fountain) Stilley, and were brought to Craven Co., N. C., as children ca 1773. Levi settled in Beaufort Co. near Edward, but preached many years at Washington. He married 13 Dec 1800 in Craven Co. to Rachel Walker, sister of Comfort Walker who married his brother Fountain Stilley. These sisters were daughters of Thomas Walker, Sr., and his wife whose name is unknown to me. Levi and Rachel (Walker) Stilley are said to have been original covenantors of the Primitive Baptist Church organized in 1808 in Beaufort Co. They are buried in the Stilley Cemetery off Highway 33 about 2 miles east of Cox Crossroads, Beaufort Co., N. C.

Stephen Stilley married 9 Feb 1791 in Craven Co. to Elizabeth Whitford, daughter of Baptist Rev. Martin Whitford and his wife née Sarah Purefoy. They set out for the frontier, leaving obscure tracks in several Tenn. counties. The Rev. Martin Whitford, who seems to have been widowed by then, went with them as far as Stewart Co., Tenn., where he stopped; at least, some of his sons remained there and left descendants. Elder Stephen Stilley never owned any property as far as I have been able to tell. He died intestate, and has been exceedingly difficult to pin down. I do not know when or where Elizabeth died, or how many children she had. Stephen was preaching in Trigg Co., Ky., in 1803, and in Jackson Co., now Mo., in 1805. In 1806 he organized what has been called the first permanent Baptist congregation in Ill. at Big Creek. It is still there, about 2 miles west of Elizabethtown, Ill., on the Ohio River, though not in the original building. He was active in Baptist affairs thereafter until his death in 1841. According to some accounts he was too active for the tastes of some of his congregation.

Stephen's son Alfred Stilley, my 2x-gr-grandfather, was born ca 1802 in Tenn., probably Sumner Co.; married Jane Cox, niece of Jesse Cox, another Baptist minister in Trigg Co., Ky., at the time Elder Stephen was there. The Coxes came from Marlboro Co., S. C., where many of them and their Brown uncles/cousins were also Baptist clergymen in the Welsh Neck area of the Pee Dee Valley. The Browns are said to have descended from the Baptist Rev. Chad Brown who came from England to Boston in 1638, and whose grandsons gave their name to Brown University in R. I. I have never seen proof of this lineage.

The Stilleys descended from Swedish farmers in the New Sweden Colony from 1643. They raised tobacco in Md., and it may have been the prospect of better tobacco land in N. C. that caused their descendants to move south in the 1770s. As you may know, there are a number of Stilleys now in Beaufort, Craven, and other N. C. counties, including Forsyth (connection between W-S Stilleys and those farther east so far unrevealed); most of them are traceable to one or another of the many sons of John and Grace (Fountain) Stilley who first settled in Craven.

I will be happy to share whatever I may have of interest on these families with anyone who may be interested, even though what I have is sketchy with many unanswered questions.

Cordially, Van A. Stilley