A Gentleman of the Old School
Thomas E. Skinner, Baptist Pastor, 1825–1905

J. Daniel Day
State Library of North Carolina

Raleigh

Presented by

J. Daniel Day
A Gentleman of the Old School: Baptist Pastor Thomas E. Skinner, 1825-1905
Day, John Daniel

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Unless otherwise indicated all images are taken from Thomas Skinner’s
Sermons, Addresses and Reminiscences, to which is appended Briefs, Sketches,

Scripture translations are from the King James Version, unless otherwise noted with the text.

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Dedicated to the memory of John M. Lewis, Th.D. (1915-2007) who, like Thomas Skinner, also served the people of Raleigh’s First Baptist Church as the great work (1960-1987) of his life

“The Lord buries his workmen but carries on his work.”
“He was one of the broadest minded ministers and profoundest theologians of his day, and a gentleman of the old school.”
Moses N. Amis, Historical Raleigh, 1913

“It was the homage my mind paid to Dr. Skinner, [this] ideal Baptist man, that I could think of him fittingly, as possibly something else than a Baptist. There was a broadness of quality in him that caught my heart and set my ideal. He summed up eighty years of what was best in North Carolina Baptist history; and not only what was best, but what was finest.”
John E. White, Second Baptist Church
Atlanta, Georgia, April 19, 1905

“Few men among us have enjoyed the confidence and friendship of so many influential men ... he helped them all by his wise counsel ... Until the last he loved the company of young men and out of rich store houses gave them reminiscences and advice that was helpful. He never judged men sternly, but charitably. He made allowances for the mistakes of youth and always carried about the mantle of charity to throw about the short comings of his fellow men. He remembered that they were frail. He looked for the good in men and found it and magnified it, and sought to lead them in right paths by appeals to their highest and noblest aspirations.”
Raleigh News & Observer, April 7, 1905

“Churches grew under his tending; and ministers sprang up where he labored... . His greatest work was that of making the First Baptist Church of Raleigh what it is... . The poor of Raleigh never had better friends than he and Mrs. Skinner... . He was an able preacher, a worthy servant of our denominational enterprises, a useful citizen. But he will be remembered ... most for his rare personal qualities. In no other man have we known to be combined so perfectly the graces of a Christian with the accomplishments of a man—a full-blooded, life-loving man.”
Biblical Recorder, April 12, 1905
First Baptist Church of Raleigh – 2008

EXTERIOR PHOTO BY DON KLINE

INTERIOR PHOTO BY TAKAII IWABU, USED WITH PERMISSION FROM NEWS & OBSERVER
FOREWORD

During the eleven years it was my privilege to be the pastor of First Baptist Church of Raleigh, I led worship in the building Thomas Skinner built in 1858-59. Each Sunday it was my joy to preach, standing in direct view of the colorful rose window which he is thought to have given the church. But only when I chanced upon a copy of Dr. Skinner’s 1894 book (which I did not even know existed) in Stevens Book Shop in Raleigh did I realize that Thomas Skinner was more than just a historical benefactor of the church; he was a man I needed to spend time with and a man many others ought to know. This sketch of his life is my attempt to carry out both impressions.

Many persons’ work is represented in these pages. Not least of all are the many members of First Baptist Church of Raleigh who were wise enough to preserve records and memorabilia concerning the church’s history. Leading their number are persons of earlier years like Jordan Womble, Jr., J. A. Marcom, T. H. and Willis Briggs, and more recently, Ed Wyatt and Thornton and Fannie Memory Mitchell; Fannie Memory was even kind enough to donate her professional editorial skills to this manuscript. But the list of those whose work is represented here extends far beyond Raleigh. Nancy and Peter Rascoe, owners of the historic Fletcher-Skinner-Nixon house near Hertford, N.C., and now operated by the Rascoes as the 1812 on the Perquimans Bed and Breakfast Inn, widened my fascination with the Skinner clan. They also introduced me to Beth Taylor of Edenton, N.C., a most helpful resource for Skinner family genealogy and lore.

I must also acknowledge the ready assistance given me by the staffs of the Perquimans County Library in Hertford, the Tyrrell County Library in Columbia, as well as the frequent assistance given me by the always helpful staff at Wake County’s historical treasure chest, the Olivia Raney Library in Raleigh. Much thanks also to Douglas Brown and Kim Cumber at the North Carolina Office of History and Archives, and to Julia Bradford, the coordinator of Wake Forest University’s Z. Smith Reynolds Library Baptist Collection, and to Ed Morris, Director of Wake Forest’s Birthplace Museum. Also to be thanked are Bruce Miller and Joe Freed whose research on those interred in Raleigh’s Oakwood Cemetery was a great help in launching my explorations. Mrs. Marshall DeLaney (Margie) Haywood, Jr. graciously reviewed a portion of the manuscript to assure its accuracy. First Baptist Church member, Matt Bullard, provided valued assistance interpreting legal documents, and Dr. Glen Jonas, Dr. Tony Cartledge, and John Woodard read early drafts of this manuscript with critical and rescuing eyes; my deepest thanks to them. I especially thank my friend and most competent historian, Jim Clary, whose commitment to primary sources and “turning over every rock” has—along with his frequent and lavish encouragement and publishing expertise—made this a far more thorough work than it would otherwise have been. Finally, I want to record my debt to two Campbell University Divinity School graduates: Susan Ulrich, who made the initial effort to convert my jumbled sentences into sequential paragraphs, and to Jamie Kipfer who finished the task with great care and expertise. And, as always, I remain unbelievably blessed by the unfailing support of my wife, Mary Carol, who often has been almost as eager as I to learn more about Thomas Skinner.

J. Daniel Day, 2009
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Introduction

In his sixty-ninth year of life the Reverend Dr. Thomas Edward Skinner penned some reminiscences of his years as pastor of the First Baptist Church of Raleigh, North Carolina. With obvious pride he described the church’s neo-Gothic building as a “grand old edifice [which] still rears its graceful steeple to the skies, indicating God’s help and the people’s aspiration.” That “grand old edifice” was actually only thirty-five years old at the time, having been built during Skinner’s first term of service (1855-67)—he would return for a second term (1879-86). One hundred and sixteen years later it still serves as a graceful place of worship for the church and as a landmark in downtown Raleigh, being one of only four extant antebellum buildings facing North Carolina’s capitol city’s Union Square.

Unfortunately, the story of the man behind its construction, Thomas Skinner, has not fared as well as his grand edifice. That building has undergone a modest expansion and several restorations, but the story of this remarkable pastor whose ministry reached beyond Raleigh to Nashville, Tennessee, and to Columbus, Athens, and Macon, Georgia, as well as to institutions like Wake Forest and Shaw universities and Meredith College—this man’s story has regrettably been neglected.

The contours of his story, fortunately, may be reconstructed from his memoirs, as well as from tributes written about him by those who knew him well, and from the histories of the various churches, institutions, and cities that were a part of his life. Those several pieces, when reassembled, reveal the portrait of a most remarkable man: born into privilege, he lived as a servant of Baptist people and their Lord; a child of the genteel antebellum South, he lived and preached through America’s bloodiest war, its anguished reconstruction era, and into its twentieth century. John  

1 Thomas E. Skinner, Sermons, Addresses and Reminiscences, to which is appended Briefs, Sketches and Skeletons of Sermons, Covering a Wide Range of Subjects (Raleigh: Edwards & Broughton Power Printers and Binders, 1894), 354-355, hereinafter cited as Sermons.
Quincy Adams was president when he was born; Theodore Roosevelt was president when he died. He was a product of the fields and rivers of North Carolina but was equally at home on the streets of New York City, London, Paris, and Geneva; he was a lover of laughter and wit, yet he walked more lonesome valleys than most want to contemplate. A visionary of God's kingdom, he crafted a struggling nineteenth-century mission-station in Raleigh, North Carolina, into a church with a name, a place, a style, and a stature that endures to this day. Moreover, every contemporary of his credited him with being a man of deep friendships and of broad faith, but how those treasures were gained and how they were nurtured is a tale that is as instructive as it is inspiring.
A Notable Family, a Carefree Youth

The Skinner family name was well established and respected in the northeastern corner of North Carolina long before Thomas Skinner was born there on April 29, 1825, to Charles Worth and Mary Creecy Skinner. Skinners from the Albemarle Sound area and its contiguous counties of Pasquotank, Perquimans, and Chowan had served with distinction in North Carolina's colonial government, in the Revolutionary War, and in the chambers of the state's political infancy, but none appears to have pursued an ecclesiastical career until his father's generation. That generation saw three of the eight male children of Joshua and Martha Skinner of Perquimans County attend the College of New Jersey (later known as Princeton). One, Joseph Blount Skinner, became a respected attorney in Hertford, North Carolina; another, Collins Blount Skinner, became a valued doctor in Edenton, North Carolina, while the third, Thomas Harvey Skinner, became the family's first clergyman—a Presbyterian who, unlike his brothers, chose not to return to his native state upon completion of his academic degrees.

The Reverend Dr. Thomas H. Skinner (1791-1871) served as the pastor of churches in Boston, Philadelphia, and New York City but distinguished himself most as a faculty member of Andover Seminary, as a founding board member in 1836 of New York City's Union Theological Seminary and, from 1848 until his death in 1871, as Professor of Sacred Rhetoric and Pastoral Theology at Union Seminary. Although his career was geographically distant from the family's Perquimans homeplace Dr. Skinner was to play a

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crucial role in the spiritual life of his nephew, Thomas E. Skinner, as well as in that of Thomas’ father, Charles Worth Skinner.

Charles Worth Skinner (1784-1870), another of the eight sons of Benjamin and Martha Skinner, was never formally educated. His interests were more in the fields and forests and waterways of Perquimans County than in quiet libraries. But being as diligent in his pursuits as his brothers were in theirs, he soon became a most prosperous planter. However, his comfortable life of agrarian affluence and familial pleasure was shattered when Charles Worth’s beloved wife Mary suddenly fell ill and died; his youngest son, Thomas, was not yet two years old. The forty-three-year-old planter was devastated, “plunged into a sea of uncontrollable grief, and his physician, his own brother [Collins Blount Skinner], feared the consequences upon his mind.”

In his despair the stricken man prayed incessantly, finally asking in brash agony that when he arose from his knees God might let him open his previously ignored Bible to a passage that would bring him comfort. He opened the Bible and his eyes rested on Isaiah 43:2:

When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee; when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned.

He began to feel his prayer was being answered. He continued to verse five: “Fear not, for I am with thee,” and then discovered 41:9-10:

3 Sermons, 333. The tormenting grief experienced by Charles Worth Skinner is all the more remarkable when one learns of the remarkable piety, home worship services, and daily prayer that, according to his brother, was the pattern in the family home during the days of their childhood and youth. See Thomas H. Harvey, A Sketch of the Life and Character of the Late Joseph B. Blount by his Brother (New York: E. French, 12 Bible House, Astor Place, 1853), 75-77.
Thou art my servant, I have chosen thee and will not cast thee away; fear thou not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God; I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.

Interpreting those verses as personal promises of God to him, Charles’ crisis passed; peace and hope came to him. Determined to signalize this wonderful transformation, he immediately traveled the twenty miles to Edenton, North Carolina, where he booked passage on a steamer to New England to confer with his preacher-brother, Thomas Harvey Skinner. Upon finding him he made his profession of faith public and “connected himself with the Presbyterian Church.” Unfortunately for the Presbyterians, Charles Worth Skinner’s tenure as a Presbyterian was extremely brief.

For his defection the Baptists have no less a person to thank than the Reverend Thomas Meredith who was then the pastor of the Bethel (Baptist) Church near the Skinner homeplace on the peninsula known then and today as Harvey’s Neck. Of his father’s entrance into the Baptist fold, Thomas Skinner wrote that Thomas Meredith, “the brains, head, heart, and eyes of this lion of the tribe of Judah—the Baptists of North Carolina,” simply

4 Sermons, 333.
“instructed him [Charles Worth Skinner] more thoroughly in the way” and during a revival meeting at the Bethel Church led by the Rev. Robert T. Daniel (who in 1812 had been the founding pastor of Raleigh’s [First] Baptist Church), Charles W. Skinner was baptized as a Baptist. The benefits the Baptists received by that addition to their numbers were immense.

Beginning as an eighteen-year-old renter of sixty acres (his father had given him one plow horse and one Negro boy old enough to plow), Charles Worth Skinner eventually owned more than thirteen hundred cultivated acres plus several hundred more acres of woodlands and extensive fisheries in the Albemarle Sound, making him one of the wealthier men in that region of the state. And from the day of his entrance into the Baptist fold until the financial devastation brought by the Civil War, he lavishly poured out his resources on Baptist causes and put his business acumen at their service.

He was one of the fourteen founders of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina—no doubt brought to the 1830 chartering meeting in Greenville, North Carolina, by his pastor Thomas Meredith, the organizing impetus of the convention. Skinner was also one of the original trustees of Wake Forest College, presenting it with its first bell and a cash gift of $500 at the first board meeting in 1834. In subsequent years a host of other gifts of cash and expertise would follow. He and his neighbor-friend Richard Felton made very generous contributions to the building of the Baptist church in the Perquimans County seat town of Hertford—a prominently displayed marble plaque in that church’s sanctuary still offers tribute to their indispensable roles in that church’s early years. And the needs of mission endeavors beyond North Carolina were also important to him; each year he devoted the profits from one

5 Ibid., 334. Rev. Martin Ross (1762-1827), a close friend of Meredith’s and an earlier pastor of the Bethel Baptist Church, is often considered to be the “Father of the Baptist State Convention;” he was married to Mary Skinner, an aunt of Charles Worth Skinner.
of his fields to mission endeavors and no person’s “informed theology” could disturb his belief that God always caused that selected field to bear a more bountiful harvest than any of his other fields. But one of his greatest gifts to North Carolina Baptists, as well as to Baptists of the South, was his son Thomas Edward.

Nothing is known of the childhood of “Tommie” Skinner although the lifelong collegiality of father and son leads one to believe the two developed an early warm relationship. Credit for some of that warmth must surely be given to “Tommie’s” stepmother, Anna Squires (she and Charles Worth were married on April 7, 1827), for Thomas wrote glowingly of her as his “mother” and as a woman of great faith—the first person from whom he sought prayer when he began to be concerned about his own salvation, and was told: “Thomas, I have prayed for you since you were an infant upon my lap, that God would convert your soul.”

But neither his mother’s piety nor his father’s Wake Forest connections could grant young Thomas admission into that school’s founding class. The boy was one year too young for the academy’s entrance requirement. So, at age eleven, Thomas was sent 200 miles east of Perquimans County, to a Hillsborough, North Carolina academy


Moore’s tribute also included an interesting defense for his slaveholding, as well as for the practice itself. The U. S. Census [Slave Schedule] indicated that C. W. Skinner owned more than sixty slaves in 1850, which would have been a high number among North Carolinians at that time according to William S. Powell, North Carolina Through Four Centuries (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 328, hereinafter cited as Powell, North Carolina: “There were [in 1860] 85,000 farmers in the state, but less than 27,000 of them owned any slaves at all. Among slave owners in the Coastal Plain only about 1 in 20 had 20 or more slaves, and in the Piedmont only about 1 in 50 had that many. Ownership of 20 or more slaves marked one as a ‘planter’ ….”

7 Sermons, 343. Her tombstone in the cemetery at the Bethel Church has a singular ascription of praise inscribed on it: “A mother in Israel.”
taught by the Scottish Presbyterian minister, William J. Bingham, Sr., whom Thomas later characterized as a "celebrated bad-boy-breaker." Apparently Bingham did not fully succeed with "Tommie" for when the youngster departed for Wake Forest the next year he was, if not a bad boy, certainly a lively lad.

Skinner himself enjoyed telling of some of his escapades in those days when the school required manual labor as part of the boys' studies. As Skinner told it, he was sent one day into the cornfield and ordered to "hill the corn" but rather than "hill the corn" he chopped it down. That brought a punishment of twenty stripes, and as those were being delivered by President Wait, he remembered seeing President Wait's wife standing nearby with uplifted hands, praying: "Hold, enough!" Skinner said, "I thought she was the greatest, best and most charitable person ever encountered." A few weeks later he and the two classmates who had joined him in the corn destruction (and its punishment) were caught "grabbling potatoes" in Professor White's potato patch. They had mistakenly thought the object they saw in the corner of the patch was a barrel when in fact it was the professor. Skinner did not record the punishment received for that second offense but delighted in the fact that both of his accomplices, as well as he, became preachers. "It seems," he wrote, "to be congenial for preachers in embryo to be potato grabblers ... ."


Perhaps the most humorous of Skinner’s early-teen pranks was one reported not by Skinner but by Baptist historian George Paschal, who noted that the man who oversaw the students’ manual labor was predictably not a favorite of the boys. One frosty morning, rather than do his bidding, some of the lads actually pitched the overseer into an icy creek but, fearing the consequences of their foolhardy deed, they then fished him out and purchased his silence about the event with all the money in their possession: three dollars. Thomas Skinner was among the group who did the pitching and the bribing—and then completed the work earlier assigned them.\(^{11}\)

On the more cultured side of the ledger, Paschal noted that Thomas Skinner played the violin in the school’s “band,” and that was also attested to by Skinner himself. As an 1882 edition of the *Wake Forest Student* reported, “We have heard Dr. Skinner, President of our Board of Trustees, say that in old times three persons formed the Commencement band at Wake Forest. Of these the two prominent ones were Dr. Wait and the present Dr. Skinner. The former played the flagelot [a type of wooden flute], marching to time at the head of the procession; the latter was the then little Tom Skinner, regarded as somewhat of a prodigy because he was only eleven [sic] years of age and played the fiddle.”\(^ {12}\)

As the *Student* entry revealed, “little Tom Skinner” eventually would serve with great distinction on Wake Forest’s Board of Trustees—even as board president for a period. But during his days as a student there (1837 – 40) his most laudable accomplishment may have been his befriending of another young North Carolinian, Matthew Tyson Yates.

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\(^{11}\) Paschal, *History of Wake Forest*, vol. 1, 91, footnote 56.

\(^{12}\) Ibid., 462, n.8; *Wake Forest Student*, May, 1882 (vol. 1, no. 5).
Yates was six years older than Skinner and came from a very different socioeconomic setting. His family’s poverty revealed itself in Yates’ pronounced educational deficit. But through exceptional discipline young Yates’ native intelligence blossomed to such a degree that he was remembered not for any academic lack but for his profound devotion to Christ and his yearning to serve as a foreign missionary. Only future years would reveal what astounding ministry gifts Yates possessed as Southern Baptists’ first missionary in Shanghai, China, and how enduring was the bond between Skinner and Yates.

After completion of his days at Wake Forest Skinner spent another year at William Bingham’s Hillsborough school, where he became friends with the later much-celebrated Confederate General James Johnston Pettigrew. The following year found him at Greensboro’s Caldwell Institute, where he was a classmate of future Governor Alfred M. Scales (1884-88). Then, with all his prep school days completed, Thomas Skinner finally arrived at Chapel Hill and the University of North Carolina. The year was 1844 and he was nineteen years old.13

It was an election year and, mirroring his father’s political opinions, Thomas became an ardent supporter of Henry Clay, the Whig candidate in the presidential campaign. As election day drew near, youthful bravado led him to post an open bet on Clay’s election on the belfry near the college well. When the votes were counted and it was clear that Clay had been defeated, the penniless young man had no other recourse but to call upon his father to cover the $600 obligation he had incurred. Charles Worth eventually sent the requested money—with a one-sentence admonition: “It is said that the constant dripping of water

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13 The paucity of young North Carolinians (and all were male at this juncture) who were privileged to have such advanced educational opportunities can be glimpsed in William Louis Poteat’s summary: “Even in 1840 the 632 primary and common schools, financed by the income of the [state’s] Literary Fund and local taxes, enrolled about 15,000 children out of a school population ten times as great. The 141 private academies had 4,398 pupils, and the only two colleges in the State, the University and Wake Forest, showed a combined enrollment of 158. That in 1840,” Poteat, “Growth of Education 1830-1930,” in The Growth of One Hundred Years: Addresses Delivered at the First Centennial Session of the Baptist State Convention (Raleigh, N.C.: General Board of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, 1930), 58.
will wear away the hardest stone.” Thomas’ response? “I was too happy to respond, but I thought that I loved him more than I ever had done.”

Other glimpses of collegiate days would take longer to come to light. For instance, “Old Aunt Rita” was a Negro lady who worked as a cook in Chapel Hill during Skinner’s student years. Later, during his first pastorate in Raleigh, she regularly attended worship in the then biracial church. According to Skinner she was “a very large and fleshy person, a true Christian, and very demonstrative, as when, in the gallery, she lifted up her voice to shout, so that no other voice could be heard.” When he privately asked her to restrain herself she explained that his hushed listeners “were not at Chapel Hill, as I was, and they did not know of you there...and when I sees you in dat dar pulpit and hears you preach, I ‘clare fo’ de Lod, I can’t keep from shouting.”

In 1847 Skinner was among the thirty-six young men to whom the university granted a diploma, and he candidly admitted “it was granted—yes, granted—never earned.” Thus he left the University of North Carolina enriched, if not with academic accomplishments, then with friendships with young men like “Pettigrew, my most intimate classmate, and [Senator-to-be Matthew W.] Ransom ... and [John] Pool, the first United States Senator of the class.”

But the lives of all of them would be tragically and permanently defined by the darkening skies over America. That Skinner was aware of the nation’s growing political division was apparent in his brash wager on Henry Clay, but it is doubtful if he was also aware or even cared about a similar rift occurring within his father’s beloved Baptist family. The year Thomas left Wake Forest (1840) the North Carolina Baptist Convention his father had helped to establish sent a strong resolution to their northern brethren, imploring them “to disavow in some form all

14 Skinner also averred “from that happy morn until now, I have never bet one cent on anything.” Sermons, 337.
15 Ibid., 354.
16 Ibid., 337.
17 Ibid., 337.
concurrence in the late schismatical movements of the abolitionists” and warning that unless that was done “the present friendly relations between Northern and Southern Baptists will be seriously endangered.” The warning went unheeded and five years later, during Thomas’ second year at Chapel Hill (1845), Baptists of the South severed relationship with their northern counterpart and formed a new Baptist body: the Southern Baptist Convention. But there is no evidence that the freshly deceeded Thomas E. Skinner had any interest in this Baptist fissure.

He returned to the gentle waters of the Albemarle Sound and to the abundant forests and fields owned by his family in Perquimans County, happily taking up the life of a farmer. The following May (1848) he married a young lady from across the sound in Tyrrell County, Ann Eliza Halsey, the sister of two of his Wake Forest classmates. In December their first child, Edloe, was born—but only a month later, January 30, 1849, the child died. The sadness that loss brought to the young couple was incalculable but it may have been softened when, in February of the following year, Thomas’ father deeded to him a 538-acre plantation and residence known as Woodlawnn. And most certainly delight returned to them on July 7 of 1850 when a second child was born to Ann Eliza and Thomas. They named her Sarah.

The United States Census of 1850 entered Thomas’ name next to his father’s (indicating the two lived on adjacent lands) and declares

18 Paschal, *History of Wake Forest*, 236, footnote 13 gives the complete text of the warning resolution. Paschal also noted in the same place the extreme duress experienced by Wake Forest at that time because “the entire faculty with the exception of tutors were Northern men” and supposedly of abolitionist sympathies. Even Charles W. Skinner, along with Thomas Meredith, withdrew his support from the school for awhile, perhaps for that reason.

19 Ann Eliza Halsey was the child of Mary R. (1797-1854) and Joseph Halsey (1790-1854) who married in 1823 in Tyrrell County, N.C. Ann Eliza was born September 14, 1827, the third of her parent’s five children. An older brother, William Wynne Halsey, and a younger brother, were at Wake Forest during the 1837-40 terms attended by Thomas E. Skinner [See *Wake Forest Alumni Directory* (Winston-Salem, N.C.: Wake Forest College, 1961), 109]. Her father was frequently named as an executor in the wills probated in Tyrrell County during that period, suggesting that he was a person held in high regard. Something of the family’s values and financial means may be ascertained not only from the presence of two sons at Wake Forest but also from the first bequest in Ann Eliza’s mother’s will: “My executor to purchase the lot near Columbia [N.C., seat of Tyrrell County] now occupied by Revd Jon C. Elwell & make a deed to sd [said] Elwell” (“MARY R. (x) HALSEY) widow of Joseph Halsey” in Tyrrell County North Carolina Wills 1812-1900, abstracted by Dr. Stephen E. Bradley, Jr., (Virginia Beach, VA, privately published, 1994), 26, 110.

20 Perquimans County Book of Deeds, CC, 403.
the value of real estate owned by the younger Skinner to be $2,000 (his father’s is listed at $25,000). The U.S. Slave Schedule for the same year also revealed that Thomas E. Skinner owned nineteen slaves ranging in age from a seventy-two-year-old male and a sixty-six-year-old female to several preschool age children.

It would appear that the young Tar Heel’s course of life was set and that “the lines had fallen into pleasant places” for him. But the defining voice of God had yet to be heard.

The residence of Woodlawn
(built ca. 1795; the second story porch was added much later)
PHOTO TAKEN BY THE AUTHOR IN 2009
The Conversion, Calling and Preparation of a Pastor

In November, 1850 a threatening afternoon rainstorm sent the twenty-five-year-old farmer-businessman into his flat fields to assure himself that its water drainage systems were clear. As he returned home he saw one Mr. Parker, an area wheelwright, riding by on the ever-worsening muddy road and invited him to find shelter for the night in his home. Parker accepted the thoughtful invitation and thus the two were thrown into conversation that evening over after-dinner cigars. The University of North Carolina graduate quickly came to see that “this most excellent Christian man, though wholly illiterate, was far from being an ignorant man in the most vitally important matters.”

The humble wheelwright began by asking about the fishing enterprises that Skinner, and his older brother Charles, Jr., had begun and about the markets for their wares, expressing his own interest in purchasing a barrel of shad or herring from them next season. Then Parker asked Thomas what he thought of fishing on Sunday. A lively discussion of Sabbath-keeping ensued, with Parker respectfully contending that, contrary to the Skinner sons’ practice, it would be wiser to honor the Sabbath commandment and lose a potential $2,000 per season than to disobey the Lord for such an ultimately small sum. Despite his educational advantage Thomas found no way to refute the man’s logic, so he changed the subject, suggesting it was time to go to bed.

The next morning Skinner asked if his guest had slept well and was told he had not. When asked why, Parker replied: “Well, I got to studying about you, and praying to the Lord, who was surely in that room last night, that He would convert the soul of my good friend, who had sheltered me from the storm, and noticed me so kindly.” Skinner had “never had any person to speak thus to me and show such heart sympathy.” He was stunned and when they sat down for breakfast, “for the first time in my life I asked Mr. Parker to ‘say grace,’ as the phrase went.”
After the meal, Skinner attempted to bid his guest farewell with a handshake but the wheelwright would not release the young man’s hand. He promised he would be praying for Thomas’ conversion as he traveled home and asked Skinner to pray to that end also. “But what is the use of a man who has not prayed in twelve years attempting any such thing?” asked Skinner. But then, as much to dismiss Parker as to comply with his request, he agreed to do so. Parker continued to press, wanting to know when Skinner would do his praying and Skinner promised, “Tonight, when I go to bed.”

But that pledge led to more than an obligatory bedtime prayer. A disturbed Thomas Skinner went immediately inside his house, locked himself in an upper room and began to pray. And not just in a perfunctory manner. Indeed, his search for the Savior and for peace for his inflamed conscience and heart persisted for weeks. He began holding family prayers. Even his slaves who, according to Skinner, “have more intuitive knowledge and good horse-sense than we are accustomed to crediting them with,” began to whisper: “I tell you master is struck, de Lord’s got hold of him, sure.” In his ongoing search Skinner was especially encouraged by old Uncle Ben, “a shouting Methodist” on the plantation. He also sought the prayers and counsel of his stepmother, and only his respect for her honesty convinced him she had not informed Pastor Quinton Trotman of the Bethel Church of his anxious state, so pointed were Trotman’s sermonic words one Sunday morning.

Finally Skinner mustered enough courage to ask for a visit from Trotman, and the pastor came—but not until a month later, on the next stated weekend when Trotman was to conduct services at the Bethel Church. The two spent a long Saturday night in conversation and the next morning Skinner, awaking early, made his way to the parlor, built a fire, and mused upon the Lord’s dealings with him in the past weeks. When Rev. Trotman descended the stairs, Skinner told him that he would like to be baptized that morning if the pastor thought he was a fit candidate.
Trotman replied, “I saw last night that you were converted, brother Tommie, but I preferred to say nothing, and let the Spirit teach you.”

An hour or so later Skinner’s father and mother stopped by his house to ask if Thomas and his wife were going to church and were told that “Tommie” was to be baptized that morning at eleven o’clock. The couple had to ‘put the whip’ to their horses to reach the church in time to witness the baptism of Thomas Edward Skinner, on January 19, 1851.

Four months later he was enrolled in Union Theological Seminary in New York City. But, what of Skinner’s “call” to ministry? His account of this “call” is as unusual as his conversion was dramatic.

In December, 1850, while he was anxiously awaiting Pastor Trotman’s visit, Skinner had paid a Sunday morning visit to Old Uncle Eden, a “colored” overseer of the spiritual affairs and daily labor of the servants on the plantation of one of Skinner’s uncles. Uncle Eden was esteemed for his spiritual insight by whites as well as blacks. The old man quickly sensed “Mars [Master] Tommie’s” spiritual state and, against the strong protestations of the young man, insisted God was calling him to preach. Skinner recreated Uncle Eden’s concluding words and their effect on him:

And now you, my youngest Mars Tommie, gwine ter preach de gospel sho as you born, dat’s so. Now, Mars Tommie, you sees my people comin’ up as de bell tolls to de reglar Sunday meetin’. I ax you, Mars Tommie, to read de Scripture and to pray for us all, that we might serve de Lod and git to heabben at las’.

How could I refuse, looking upon these poor untaught souls? That was my first sermon—call it so, if you please. Had I refused then, do you believe that God would ever have given me another opportunity? That was in December, 1850, and I have been preaching—poorly indeed—ever since.21

21 Sermons, 347. The full narrative of Skinner’s conversion and call is found on pp. 338-347. One might note that Skinner’s conversion in adulthood is representative of that period, when childhood professions of faith were as atypical as they are characteristic in today’s Baptist churches.
From that and other experiences Skinner related, it is clear how much he was guided by the spiritual fires of the black race. Indeed, he offered no other hint of his “calling” to a life of ministry apart from those spoken to him by Uncle Eden. Also, coming as they did several weeks prior to Skinner’s actual profession of faith and baptism, they intimate something of the deeper struggle going on in the young man’s soul. For Thomas Skinner, the call to Christian faith was apparently part and parcel with a call to leave houses and lands and comfortable lifestyle to become a Baptist pastor, subject to pauper’s wages and to a church’s annual vote to retain or release him from his post. For good reason he struggled greatly with that decision.

Fortunately, he chose to follow the Voice and, following his baptism, promptly moved to New York City with his wife, their infant daughter, Sarah, and a mulatto nurse employed to assist with care for the child. Newton Seminary in Massachusetts had actually been Skinner’s first choice for a theological school—Southern Baptist Theological Seminary had not yet been established for young theologians of the southland—but after a frustrating experience in Newton attempting to find housing for his family, Skinner traveled to New York City to seek counsel from his uncle, Thomas Harvey Skinner, a professor at Union Theological Seminary. To his surprise he discovered a Methodist as well as some Congregationalists and Baptists were enrolled in the Presbyterian school and so he promptly joined their number.

His first year at the seminary went well. But the following fall Thomas’ newfound faith and calling were most cruelly tested. His wife, twenty-four-year-old Ann Eliza, died on August 27, 1852, presumably from complications following the June 10, 1852 birth of a son, Thomas Halsey Skinner. Surprisingly, Skinner said absolutely nothing about Ann Eliza’s death in his memoirs, choosing only to report the date and fact of his second marriage on May 8, 1854, to Ann Stuart Ludlow of New
York. The omission of any reference to Ann Eliza’s death surely startles today’s reader but hers is not the only death Skinner chose not to write about in his reminiscences; its omission may be partially understood by his characteristic reserve about his many grief experiences.

Nothing survives of Thomas Skinner’s academic record at Union Seminary but it is helpful to know that that institution had been a recent creation of ardent “New School” Presbyterians. They had established the school out of a desire for a more vigorous evangelism than that then espoused by Princeton’s Calvinist scholasticism. The “New Schoolers” were especially disenchanted with what they deemed nit-picking on the part of Princeton’s “Old School” Presbyterians. The heresy hunts launched by the “Old School” against innovative and effective pastors such as Albert Barnes and Lyman Beecher were evidence to the “New School” that a new seminary was needed, a school with more emphasis upon reaching the growing masses of people—in the exploding metropolitan cities of the East and the western frontier—and less concern for theological hairsplitting. This is not to say that the “New Schoolers” were not rigorous in their scholarship; they were committed to that. But the “New Schoolers” also desired an evangelistic fervor and a generosity of theological outlook which they were convinced were not forthcoming from the “Old School.”

A secondary but nonetheless real concern was the divisive issue of slavery. The “New School” was decidedly abolitionist in sympathy but

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22 *Ibid.*, 349. Ann Stuart Ludlow (b. 1833, d. February 18, 1903) was the daughter of John Reynolds Ludlow and Ann Jane Mollon. Though Skinner said she was “of New York,” it appears she had family connections reaching back to the Bethel Church of Harvey’s Neck. J. D. Hufham, in his obituary report to the convention following Thomas Skinner’s death, said that the maternal grandmother of the second Mrs. Skinner, a Mrs. Mollon, had been baptized in the same Nine Mile Creek as had Thomas Skinner and his father. No other connections or information have been discovered, however.

As for Ann Eliza Skinner, her body was returned to Tyrrell County, NC and interred in the Albemarle Cemetery of Columbia, N.C. Her gravestone records a death date of August 27, 1852, a date that verified that she was indeed the mother of Thomas Halsey Skinner, confirming his inclusion as a grandchild in the will of Martha Halsey (see footnote 19 above). The boy’s birth date is recorded in Thomas Skinner’s own hand as June 10, 1852, in the account book he kept of his management of the funds bequeathed by Mrs. Halsey to the two grandchildren borne by her daughter, Ann Eliza. This account book is in the North Carolina Baptist Historical Collection of Wake Forest University’s Z. Smith Reynolds Library.
was also displeased by the strident manner in which some were advocating it. They were in political agreement with the approach outlined by Daniel Webster: do away with the practice legally, methodically, and wisely, offering financial compensation to slaveholders for their losses. In the evolving life of Presbyterianism, the "New School" became the dominant theology north of the Mason-Dixon line, while the "Old School" prevailed in the South.²³

Thus, if Thomas Skinner's seminary instruction "took," he returned to the land of Dixie and its Baptist churches with a degree from a "New School" Presbyterian seminary, a softened Calvinist theology, a firm evangelistic orientation, a more urban, urbane, and generous outlook than most of his fellow ministers—and more challenges to slaveholding practices than would make any slave owner comfortable. And lest one forgets, he also returned with a Yankee wife.

Skinner's brief tenure at his first pastoral charge in Petersburg, Virginia, is in fact attributable to his wife, Ann Stuart Ludlow of New York. Immediately after their marriage the newlyweds traveled to Perquimans County where Thomas was ordained by and in the Hertford Baptist Church—its handsome new building completed only weeks earlier. They then journeyed to Petersburg, where Thomas had already accepted the pastorate of its Baptist church. However, only eight months later, citing Ann's health as the reason, he resigned and retreated with her and his two children to Avon Springs, a resort near the Finger Lakes area of western New York noted for its healing waters and idyllic summer weather. There, on February 27, 1855, Ann gave birth to their first child, Ann Jane, or as they called her, Annie.

But the availability of such a promising young minister did not

²³ The statement of the originating impulses and theological orientation of the school was based upon the summary provided in Henry Sloane Coffin, A Half Century of Union Theological Seminary 1896-1945 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1954). Coffin's summary was based upon George Lewis Prentiss, The Union Theological Seminary in the city of New York and biographical sketches of its first fifty years (New York: A.D.F. Randolph, 1889).
remain unnoticed in the South. A request arrived from the Baptists in Savannah, Georgia, seeking a visit from young Thomas Skinner concerning their pastoral opening. He agreed to visit them that fall and in November he boarded a southbound train to Savannah. But his journey was interrupted.

Call it providence, the operation of the “good ole boy” network, or whatever one wishes, the fact is that when Thomas Skinner arrived at the Weldon, North Carolina, railroad depot in November, 1855 to make train connections to Savannah, he came upon Dr. William Hooper, the much-respected leader of the Wake Forest faculty. Hooper prevailed upon him to interrupt his journey long enough to attend a portion of the North Carolina Baptist Convention which was assembling then for its annual session in Warrenton, only thirty miles distant. When the two entered the Warrenton church building Skinner was greeted by the Rev. G. W. Johnston, who had served as the clerk in Skinner’s ordination service the previous year. Johnston asked the thirty-year-old Skinner not to leave the meeting until the two had opportunity to talk further. When that conversation was held, Johnston explained that he was serving as the pastor of the church in Raleigh but was suffering from a throat disease that made preaching impossible and therefore he was searching for a successor. Would young Skinner delay his journey southward and accompany Johnston to Raleigh and preach for him Sunday? Skinner agreed to do so and on the following Sabbath day he preached morning and evening to the Raleigh congregation. Then, at a called meeting of the congregation on November 25, 1855, the church did two things. First, it received the resignation of G. W. Johnston and then it gave unanimous support to Johnston’s nomination of his successor, who was described in the church’s minutes as “Elder Thomas Skinner of New York, but a native of North Carolina.”

24 Minutes of First Baptist Church, Raleigh, November 25, 1855, hereinafter cited as Minutes.
for his services in the next year, with half that sum to be received as a subsidy to the Raleigh church from the Southern Baptist Convention’s missions program.

Rather than continuing his trip to Savannah, Skinner returned to New York “to confer with the powers that be—she is still the power, thanks to a merciful Providence—and after a serious and prayerful consideration of the matter, accepted the call to Raleigh, with the distinct understanding that they would, as soon as possible, erect a new meeting house in a more eligible situation.”

Anne Stuart Ludlow

Thomas E. Skinner

DATE UNKNOWN: PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE CHURCH ARCHIVES OF F.B.C. RALEIGH

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25 Sermons, 351. Skinner’s account of the details of his call to the Raleigh church has been followed here although the minutes of the church meeting of November 25, 1855, read somewhat differently. They began: “At a called meeting of the church after the usual morning services, our present pastor, Elder G. W. Johnston stated ….” That varied with Skinner’s report that he preached both morning and evening services and that the called meeting occurred on Monday evening. November 25 fell on Sunday in 1855. Skinner’s statement that half his salary was from Southern Baptist mission funds was not corroborated in the minutes, which said nothing about that significant detail, although many such [important to us] details were regularly omitted from the minutes. Willis G. Briggs repeated Skinner’s statement regarding the salary supplement as well as Skinner’s statement regarding the church’s commitment to erect a new building, another significant detail the minutes failed to report. (Address by Willis G. Briggs on 140th Anniversary, March 16, 1952, Archives of F.B.C., Raleigh, N.C.). In that same address Briggs supplemented the single name of Dr. William Hooper as being the person who intercepted Skinner at the Weldon train station with additional names of those who “chanced to meet” Skinner at the depot. They were “Dr. Jeter, Dr. McDaniel and others” who were “on the way to Warrenton for the Baptist State Convention.” Jeter was on Wake Forest’s faculty and McDaniel was the pastor of the Fayetteville church.
A Stellar Beginning

One shudders to think of the contrast between the City of New York – and the posh Avon Springs resort the Skinners had known most recently – and the small southern town that was Raleigh, North Carolina, in 1855. Although it was the state’s capital (even that designation had, however, been often and fiercely contested by Fayetteville until 1840), Raleigh’s population was still well below five thousand and its expansion had not yet pressed beyond the one square mile laid out for it in William Christmas’ original city-plan of 1795. Pigs and cattle as well as chickens and dogs freely roamed its unpaved streets and occasional wood-plank sidewalks. Although giant strides were being made statewide in education, only three public schools were functioning in Raleigh and their term was restricted to three to five months per year. The first railroad (with locomotives bearing names like Tornado, Volcano, Whirlwind, and Spitfire) had made its appearance in Raleigh only in the preceding decade; telegraph service arrived in 1848. The commodious and elegant Yarbrough Hotel was in operation but so were innumerable ‘grog’ shops (saloons) filled with the ne’er-do-wells known to loiter in a city where politics was king. To be sure, stately homes were to be found, especially along Blount Street, and there was a burgeoning commercial district on Fayetteville Street—so the city did bear evidence of promise. But there were little signs of prominence other than the centrally located State House. Cities such as Wilmington and Fayetteville and New Bern were much more impressive. Raleigh offered little to remind the young pastor and his wife of marvelous Manhattan, nor did it have the established and genteel ambience which had awaited them in uninvestigated Savannah.

So far as the city’s churches were concerned, the Episcopalians were far in front; the handsome stone sanctuary of Christ Church had been occupied one year earlier. The Methodists and Presbyterians had their own less imposing facilities, but the Baptists were housed in a building
which one observer said “had been for all its history in a feeble and languishing condition.”26 Even more telling, the minutes of the Baptist church’s business meetings were a depressing and repetitious recital of ineffective facility repairs and insoluble debt dilemmas, interspersed with sad notations of the parade of arriving and departing pastors. Even the slender “church book” containing these minutes had only a few blank pages remaining within it, but the purchase of a new one had become a source for numbing discussion. Little did that dispirited group realize that in the calling of Thomas E. Skinner they had entered a new and history-shaping period in the church’s life.

On December 16, 1855 Skinner preached his introductory sermon, using as his text 1 Corinthians 11:16: “Woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel.” It was one of the sermons Skinner chose to publish in his 1894 memoirs, and for good reason. In it he delineated much of his personal theology and philosophy of ministry.27

In typical nineteenth-century sermonic style, Skinner spent a good deal of time in ground-clearing preliminaries before presenting his five points. But even those preliminaries were noteworthy. In artful manner his first paragraphs dealt with the “rights” of a preacher of the gospel. He maintained that, contrary to the Apostle Paul’s chosen practice, present-day pastor-preachers had the right to marry and to receive financial payment for their services. (Suspicion of “hireling” clergy was rife in that day, and it was just as common for pledged wages to go unpaid—as was actually the state of affairs in the Raleigh church at that time for Skinner’s predecessor, the well-regarded Rev. G. W. Johnston).

The new pastor then said that “every Christian is called to his own ministry as a servant of Christ” even if it be not as a preacher of the gospel, per se: “He can visit the sick and the poor, feed some of the sheep, and certainly be instant in attendance upon the Word, and, above all else,

26 Ibid., 249. The observer was John W. Moore, state historian.
27 That “Introductory Sermon” is found ibid., 221-235; all citations in the following paragraphs are taken from those pages.
live a life ‘hid with Christ in God.’” But Skinner left no doubt that some were specifically called to preach the gospel and, perhaps unwittingly, he even offered his listeners a not-well-disguised portrayal of his own calling in these exhortative words:

But there are also ... many men following secular employments engulfed in the busy scenes of life, nay who are not even professed disciples of Christ, but who are living in the world without God and without hope, who have been called to preach by their mental gifts, by their advantages in life, and by the waving fields of the plenteous harvest of souls perishing for the want of laborers in the vineyard—men who were called loudly, but would not heed the message of the Master. Woe is unto such, because they would not obey and preach the gospel!

He rounded out his preliminary remarks by stating the contents of the gospel to be preached. “The gospel of Christ means the history of Christ—His doctrines or teachings, His sufferings and death. ... The gospel of Christ is the scheme of redemption, the plan of salvation, wrought out in the councils of heaven and delivered unto us by the incarnate Jehovah—Christ—God manifest in the flesh.” Such a gospel includes not only “the unspeakable blessings of everlasting salvation” but also “the untold miseries of condemnation,” and “the glorious doctrine of Election ... or Predestination, or Divine purposes, or Foreknowledge, or whatever scriptural phrases you may please.” But concerning those latter doctrines he was quick to add that “so long as we fan the flame and wrest the truth of such doctrines, just so long will our hearts burn with the fire, not of spiritual devotion, but of sectional, personal and bitter opposition.”

The ground then having been cleared, Skinner proceeded to speak of various ways in which the preaching of the gospel was done. First, he scorned those who preached only “the palatable doctrines and duties of the Christian life” and failed to mention its necessary self-denial and cross. Second, and just as loathsome to Skinner, those “who tell you of
the peculiarities of the Jewish theocracy, the wonderful achievements of
the sword of Israel, her heroes, her kings, her judges ... the magnificent
proportions of the Temple, its costly furniture, finished walls and
captivating ritual” but fail to speak more of the Christ who fulfills all
these historical types and images. To Skinner all such historical texts had
to be “treated as to trace down, point out and hold up Christ to the view
of the lost soul.”

Warming to his subject, Skinner gave the lengthiest section of his
sermon to a development of “the prevalent and destructive fault of
the age ... Idolatry of Learning.” Here he seemed to be addressing
any apprehensions among the members about their young New York-
educated pastor and perhaps about learned clergy in general. Skinner’s
approach was to reproach those preachers whose learning led them to
a “barrenness of soul” with “the entire loss of sight of the great end of
preaching, which is the strengthening of the faith of the saints first, and
as a consequence the winning of souls to Christ.” To him “the power
that learning confers, if it be unsanctified, is as the power derived from
hoarded wealth, or any other source not consecrated to God’s service—
an engine of evil, a sword in the hand of Satan.” The positive use of
learning he illustrated from Baptist missionary heroes William Carey and
Adoniram Judson. Skinner’s implicit, though never overtly expressed,
pledge was that his learning, like that of Carey and Judson, would be
placed in the service of the Lord and of the Lord’s people.

His fourth point dealt with those whose preaching of the gospel was
marked by controversy, and he claimed that a minister true to his calling
“must necessarily be a controversialist ... contending for the truth as
against error.” But that recognition did not mean that the preacher was
to be a person of strife, “for the servant of the Lord must not strive, but
be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient.” Even when dealing with
legitimately controversial matters, the preacher of the gospel was to be
a persistent and humble teacher of the good as he saw it, remembering
“that in many things we, too, do displease and offend Him, more, perhaps, than these our misguided brethren.”

Finally, Skinner elevated the examples of Jesus’ preaching and of Paul’s as the models for faithful preaching of the gospel. Jesus, he said, was “a plain, bold and searching preacher . . . God-fearing and not a man-pleasing preacher . . . self-sacrificing preacher, condescending to men of low estate, and even choosing from this class of men those who were to follow him and preach his gospel.” The Apostle Paul, he said, “was second to none, save his beloved Master” [as a model for Christians], and that “Self-denial was Paul’s daily habit in life.” Skinner concluded his sermon with a Victorian cascade of scriptures imploring his listeners to pray for him that he might be, like Christ and Paul, a good and faithful preacher of the gospel.

The sermon is tedious to the extreme for today’s tastes, but it might be judged a masterpiece of pastoral and theological sagacity for its time. He forthrightly but tactfully dealt with sensitive issues such as his salary, allayed anxieties about his much learning while not discounting the benefits of education, and challenged his listeners to accept their own role as ministers of the gospel while assuring them that he would be a theologically orthodox minister who, though not afraid of controversy, would neither seek it nor depart from the spirit of Christ in the midst of it. And finally he asked for their partnership—in prayer and in deeds of mercy and faithful attendance—in the ministry that was set before them.

The proof, however, was in the daily grind of ministry and it is through the minutes of the church that Skinner’s opening days of ministry are more visible than in that introductory sermon. Here there are strong indications that he quickly earned the congregation’s respect. For instance, in the church meeting of February 14, 1856, they granted to him and Deacon Peter Francisco Pescud the authority to review the church’s bylaws and rules of decorum. In the conference of October 9, 1856, they also ordered that “the breast works of our present pulpit be taken down and permission
be granted to our Pastor to have such a stand and other fixtures erected in its place as will be agreeable to his tastes and feelings and that the expenses of the same be defrayed by the church.” That last action was surely predicated upon two remarkable displays of his ability that they had witnessed in the first months of 1856.

First, the debt that had shackled the church for years was retired. That action came following a resolution A. M. Lewis had introduced in the March church meeting mandating that each member be assessed a certain sum to retire the debt. However, when the matter was taken up in the May conference, the clerk entered the following clumsy, albeit celebrative summation: “The necessity for the operation of such a Resolution as Bro. A. M. Lewis’ having erased the old church debt having been settled by cash and subscriptions it was withdrawn.” Although one may struggle to understand fully the clerk’s awkward sentence—as well as wonder how such a miracle might have occurred—there can be no questions about a second and much plainer entry in August of that year: “So the old church debt may be considered as settled finally.” Also, in the May 3 conference in which Brother Lewis’ resolution was withdrawn, the church agreed to purchase a new “church book” and took up a more than sufficient collection to pay for it. Hope was budding.

The other remarkable event that occurred in the early months of 1856 was the purchase of a lot for the promised new church building. That came to light in the minutes of May 31:

One states he’s learned that Elder Skinner, A.M. Lewis & R. M. Jones in connection with A. Williams Esq. had purchased a lot from Dr. Jas. H. Cook near the capitol on which it was anticipated to build a new Church Edifice. He desired to know what was the intention of the Church in regard to this matter and also what disposition the purchasers expected to make of their property.

A. M. Lewis stood and informed all present that the named gentlemen had indeed purchased the land with the intention of making at least a
portion of it available to the church for a new building and that they were ready to add additional cash and pledges to assist with its construction. The proffered lot was on the southwest corner of the intersection of the broad Salisbury and Edenton streets which formed the north and east boundaries of the Capitol Square. A new building on such a lot would indeed be well located, facing the handsome new Episcopal facility across the grassy expanse of the Capitol lawn, and with proper scope and design it could be most impressive. Hence, the near-accusatory tones of an unnamed inquiring church member were quickly suppressed by the unanimous congregational acceptance of the gift and in glad anticipation of such a new building.

There was also a poignant personal dimension to the story of that land-gift which must be retold. It concerned the crucial role played in it by a man named Jim Atkins. Skinner told it best:

In the summer of 1856 a lot was purchased from Dr. Cook, consisting of one acre on Hillsboro and Salisbury streets and opposite the Capitol Square, for which we paid six thousand dollars cash, or its equivalent.

It is an interesting story as to how we purchased that lot. This man, Dr. Cook, had a servant man named Jim Atkins; he was a member of the church, which consisted of white and colored members—nearly equal in their number. Jim had great influence with his master, whose playmate he was when boys together. Dr. Cook had agreed to sell this lot to several parties at different times, but always failed to enter into legal steps to consummate the sale. Dr. Charles E. Johnson was one of the parties thus disappointed. When I told him I had purchased the lot—he was my brother-in-law—he smiled and said, he will not confirm the sale legally. I showed him the paper he had signed, and a similar one which I had signed also and delivered to Dr. Cook. "Why Thomas," he said, "you have got him." "Yes," said I, "by the help of Jim Atkins, I have." Jim had been out to spend Sunday night with his master, and as he said, "I will, by the help of the Lord, Mars Thomas,
fetch the old man round, and I will report to you Monday night." Jim was the collector of the Doctor's rents in the city and was his only agent. Jim was a blacksmith and lived in the city. True to his word, he reported to me thus: "Go right out dar Mars Tommie and see him, for he has promised me sure that he will sell you that lot; case he wants to see a fine Baptist church built right there, and will take one thousand dollars less than he has ever asked for it." He was a strong-minded man, but ungodly.

On Tuesday afternoon Deacon Pescud accompanied me out to the Doctor's with the two papers binding each of us, legally, to confirm the transaction. At first the Doctor seemed to be off from what he had promised Jim. He said, "I will come into town tomorrow and confirm the sale," and that his word was his bond. "Yes," I said, "so is my word my bond, but suppose either of us should die tonight, then what? Now, Doctor, we can't exchange words further, for if we do not trade in five minutes, I will return to town and buy another lot before sunset." And, rising to go, I handed him the obligation and asked him if he would sign it. He signed it, and we had the lot. We could not have purchased it without the aid of that excellent Christian man, Jim Atkins. He was a sweet singer, and frequently have I seen the congregation remain in the old church to hear Jim sing, "Home Sweet Home," as he stood in the gallery. His house was next door to Dr. Carter's [the pastor of First Baptist at the time Skinner wrote this account] present residence. It was a plain log-house with one room. That (eastern) side of the entire square was vacant, save two or three hovels on Edenton Street, in one of which Jim lived with his family. The good man died of dropsy, and while visiting him once he pointed to the walls of the church, which were about half erected, and broke out with the apostrophe, "Mars Tommie, I shall not live to see that house completed, but, thanks unto God, I have a house, not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." I loved Jim Atkins.28

The loveliness of that story is made bittersweet to those of a later century by noting that only months after Jim Atkins' indispensable role

28 Ibid., 352-353.
in the acquisition of the lot for the new church building—and apparently in response to the growing attendance at the old church—the church ordered that “the galleries [that is, the balcony of the old church] are ordered to be vacated by the colored congregation and occupied by the children and young persons of both sexes connected with the Sabbath School and the congregation during the forenoon service. The colored congregation to have a special sermon every Sabbath afternoon and permission to use the galleries at night.”

Thomas Skinner had by then led in the elimination of the church’s debt and the acquisition of a prime location for a new church building. There remained before him the crowning accomplishment of his first year of ministry in Raleigh: securing money for the building itself—and like the purchase of the Cook property, that also was accomplished in large part through Skinner’s remarkable individual initiative.

The church was serving as host for the 1856 Baptist State Convention in November and Thomas’ intention was to enlist the financial assistance of North Carolina’s assembled Baptists for the new building. However, a financial crisis was then threatening the continued existence of Wake Forest and an urgent appeal for funds for the school was made in one of the convention’s afternoon sessions. While the school’s spokesperson was issuing that appeal Skinner, his father, and Richard Felton were seen in deep conversation just outside the chamber—the daytime sessions were being held in the House of Commons chamber of the State House. When the appeal was concluded, Thomas Skinner took the floor to announce to the two hundred delegates that his father and Richard Felton had authorized him to announce that those two gentlemen would each give $5,000 to alleviate Wake’s crisis and that young Thomas would add another $3,000 to the sum. The assembly was stunned and displayed its amazement by promptly pledging another $31,000 for Wake Forest’s

29 Minutes, September 5, 1856. In the Minutes of May 25, 1857, it was noted that “the colored congregation” would then return to the gallery “since owing to peculiar circumstances they were compelled to vacate some time ago.”
survival. It was an astounding amount of money for such a small number of persons—$44,000! As a consequence, in the words of one eyewitness, "Wake Forest College was saved and saved forever."\(^{30}\)

But what of Thomas' intention to raise money for the new church building during that meeting? It remained in force. Prior to the convention Skinner's father and Richard Felton as well as two members of the church, A. M. Lewis and Mrs. Alfred Williams, had given him their pledges toward his goal of raising between $18,000 to $20,000 for the new building, a sum he believed would assure the building's erection. His plan had been to announce those pledges during the evening service in the woebegone church building, hoping Baptists in attendance from across the state would want to match them and help erect a more fitting house of worship on the state's Capitol Square. The unexpected generosity displayed for Wake Forest clearly made questionable a second financial appeal during the same convention, let alone on the same day. Wake Forest officials, when they learned of Skinner's intent, feared another appeal would negatively impact the pledges they had just received, so they asked him to abandon his plan. But feeling that he would not soon have another such opportunity, Skinner disregarded their plea and pressed on, knowing he had only $7,000 in hand as the crucial evening session began.

Once the session was called to order the young pastor presented his challenge to the messengers and then, as they discussed his request, he worked among them to solicit gifts for the "grand edifice" which he believed would bring sorely needed pride to all the Baptists of North Carolina. Moving from one potential donor to the next, Skinner would secure a pledge and then electrify the crowd by announcing his mounting tally as he made his way around the packed church auditorium. By evening's end Thomas Skinner had raised the astounding sum of $18,750

\(^{30}\) This narrative is based on the account given by John W. Moore in Sermons, 244-245, and in Paschal History of Wake Forest, pp. 291ff., and with numerical variants in Huggins, History of N. C. Baptists, 242-243.
in cash and pledges for the new building.\textsuperscript{31} Its construction was assured! Moreover, it would not be just the creation of one local congregation, but an expression of many North Carolina Baptists’ desire for excellence.

The Convention of 1856 would become a convocation long remembered and gloried in by Baptists of the Old North State. On one day those in attendance generously gave an unprecedented total of $62,750 to Baptist causes—and, according to Skinner, every cent that was pledged to both causes was fully paid.\textsuperscript{32}

The church itself took note of Skinner’s amazing productivity by renewing his call as their pastor and setting his 1857 salary at $1,000, an increase of 20 percent. Or so said the church minutes of November 5, 1856. However, apparently speaking in summary fashion, Skinner himself said “to the honor of their liberality, … they called on the Home Missions Board no longer for aid, but increased their pastor’s salary, without his wish or expectation, to twenty-four hundred dollars.”\textsuperscript{33} It is unfortunate that Skinner placed that sentence where he did in his reminiscences, thereby creating the impression that his salary was raised to $2,400 for 1857. Such a figure was eventually approved for him, but not until 1863. But the fact remains that Thomas Skinner’s first year of

\textsuperscript{31} Sermons., 362-365. Huggins, History of N. C. Baptists, offered lower sums for both subscriptions efforts. The official minutes of the 1856 session of the Baptist State Convention recorded a total for Wake Forest of $25,125 but attached to those minutes there was an article which appeared in the Biblical Recorder of January 1, 1896, written by Thomas E. Skinner stating that the amount was $44,000 rather than $25,125. Paschal attempted to reconcile those data in History of Wake Forest, 293ff.

There was also a discrepancy in the sum pledged to the church building effort; the convention minutes reported $13,650 rather than the $18,750 stated by Skinner. However, neither of those sums matched the number ($15,433) stated in the July 20, 1857, minutes of First Baptist Church as the church undertook the construction of its new building.

But, as Huggins noted, considering that the treasurer reported a regular income of $5,300 for the convention in 1856, the liberality of the 1856 Convention did make it “the great session of 1856” that Huggins deemed it: “the amount was nearly twice the amount which had been given from 1831 through 1855. And the Convention had to wait for some fifty years before it could have another such experience.”

\textsuperscript{32} Sermons, 365. Endorsing the assertion that the new building was as much the project of North Carolina Baptists as it was of Raleigh Baptists was the fact that when its cornerstone was laid, Charles W. Skinner rather than a Raleigh church member, laid it, saying: “As I now lay this brick in hydraulic cement, so may the hearts of all Christians be united in love” (ibid., 354). Moreover, the minutes of the financially floundering Raleigh church prove that had the construction of the building depended upon Raleigh resources alone, it would not have been built at all.

\textsuperscript{33} Sermons, 352.
ministry in Raleigh was an astounding turnaround year for the church and a landmark year for Baptist’s institutional witness in North Carolina.

And for Thomas and his wife Ann it was a year of personal joy as well; their second child, Emmie, was born May 15, 1856. Also, his encumbrances to the issue of slavery were lessened by his sale that year of the Perquimans County plantation given him by his father. Thus, quite literally deed by deed, his heart was ever more closely turned to the pulpit rather than to the life of a planter.

34 Perquimans County Book of Deeds, Book EE, 187.
Ministry as Joy and Travail

Skinner might have been wise to read the handwriting on the wall when the church, in its January 2, 1857, meeting, committed only the paltry sum of $220.40 toward the new building, and in its March meeting was still attempting to raise the balance due on his 1856 salary. Nonetheless, the church authorized him to appoint a five-member building committee, and he appointed Alfred Williams (a benefactor of the church and well-respected local merchant, whose wife was a member of the church although he was not), A. M. Lewis, P. F. Pescud, Robert M. Jones, and himself. The group quickly engaged the architectural firm of Percival & Grant, designers of several impressive local homes and public buildings, and began their work.35

As springtime came, spiritual blessings also arrived as “the Church began to feel the first movings of a refreshing season from the Lord,”36 and genuine revival sprang up, with sunrise prayer services and evening preaching services yielding conversions virtually every day. For most of the entire month of April and in spite of frequent rainstorms, the meetings continued with overflow crowds standing outside the building and still others having to be turned away. Ministers from the Wake Forest faculty and nearby churches were brought in to assist Skinner with the preaching and personal work. An impressed church clerk left his glowing assessment of their young pastor in this April 13 entry:

Our pastor’s heart and soul and body seem to be engaged in the work of the Lord. He has preached several times during the meeting he delivers an exhortation to his dying congregation every night and speaks words of advice and encouragement to

35 The firm of Percival and Grant soon dissolved but Percival continued the work for First Baptist; a Petersburg, Virginia, contractor, William Coates, received the contract to build the building, according to Minutes of July 20, 1857. Photos of some of the Raleigh homes designed by Percival can be seen in Elizabeth Culbertson Waugh, *North Carolina's Capital, Raleigh, Bicentennial Edition* (Raleigh: Junior League of Raleigh, 1992), 108ff.; and for Percival himself, see William B. Bushong, "William Percival, an English Architect in the Old North State, 1857-1860," *North Carolina Historical Review*, vol. 57, no. 3 (July, 1980), 310-339, hereinafter cited as Bushong, "William Percival."

36 Minutes, April 3, 1857.
those who are mourning on account of their sins. He visits those who are enquiring during the day and in fact nearly every person within his knowledge who is in the least degree concerned on the subject of religion. He has truly shown himself a faithful undershepherd. The Lord bless strengthen and encourage him by rewarding his labor in behalf of the church and the inhabitants of Raleigh.

But regardless of the revival and Skinner’s hard work the coffers of the church continued to be empty, especially with regard to the pastor’s salary. For his part, Skinner, calmly disregarded the oversight and in June announced that the building committee had completed a plan with Percival for the new building and that very soon the work would be let out for bid.

In late July the church received the details of the plan its committee had “made out.” The new building “exclusive of lightning rod, furniture of the church, (such as carpets cushions, Lights, etc.) the seats in the basement and the walling [fence, exterior finish?] around the church” was to cost $20,687.50 and would be completed by September, 1858. The minutes actually speak of “the new church now in process of erection,” so apparently the committee had previously authorized the work on the church’s behalf, confident that the $5,254.50 gap between the cash and pledges then in hand and the contract price would, as they said, “be raised by the liberality of those who feel an interest in establishing the Kingdom of Christ upon earth.”

As the construction progressed the church chose to add a steeple to the design, apply a stucco exterior, install two coal furnaces and only-recently-available gas lighting, place new pews in the basement and an iron fence around the perimeter of the building (the fence itself being donated by Thomas Skinner—although the church bore the installation charge), and, of course, affix a lightning rod. Those added considerably to the final cost of the building, but on July 20, 1857, the church was

37 Minutes, July 20, 1857.
pleased to adopt the $20,687.50 report of its building committee and anticipate its move into a new house of worship.\textsuperscript{38} By year’s end a sale of the building then in use to the Roman Catholics had been negotiated, apparently for a price of $3,000.

During the long months of construction the church members’ spirits and those of all North Carolina Baptists were heartened by the return of Matthew T. Yates on furlough from China. For the previous eleven years the missionary’s financial support had been a high priority in every associational meeting and in most of the churches. He gave a series of well-attended lectures in the Raleigh church in the springtime of 1858; but, surprisingly, when he returned in the fall to attend Raleigh Association’s annual meeting the reception was not nearly so cordial.

It was felt by some in attendance that Yates was dressed too elegantly; some even hinted he was profiting handsomely from whatever he was doing in China. Skinner attempted to counter the whispered displeasure with delicate finesse during a foreign missions report he gave to the assembly, but when he sat down Yates took the floor and spoke more forthrightly. He explained that his suit had been purchased for him eleven years earlier by Thomas Skinner and other friends. That apparently put an end to the malicious talk, for when the Baptist State Convention met two months later and it was discovered that Yates had given $300 toward

\textsuperscript{38} John Moore claimed (Sermons, 250) the building cost a total of $40,000 but there are no extant records to corroborate that figure and little this researcher has seen would indicate that the building’s cost actually doubled its proposed budget. Indeed, a source much closer (1874) to its construction says: “... so great was the enterprise, that it was undertaken in pieces—the main building was the first contracted for at eighteen thousand seven hundred and fifty dollars, then the tower for fourteen hundred and ninety dollars. The stuccoing was an extra job and cost seven hundred dollars; the pews of the basement cost two hundred and twelve dollars; the bill of the architect was nine hundred and thirty-seven dollars and fifty cents; the lot cost seven hundred dollars. The iron railing, a present from Dr. Skinner, cost one thousand dollars, and all these items, with the baptistry, bell, furnaces and furniture, made the grand total amount to about twenty-seven thousand dollars.” Manual of the First Baptist Church of Raleigh, N.C., April, 1874 (Raleigh: John Nichols & Co., Book and Job Printers, 1874), 6-7, hereinafter cited as Manual of the First Baptist Church. But even that report, published within fifteen years of the building’s completion, differed from Skinner’s report that the lot cost $6,000; the price stated within that report was only $700.

In any event, as Moore admitted, the cost “seemed a great sum in the eyes of our people, but God has blessed the investment in so signal a manner that we can have no doubt that such bounty to His cause was well-seeming on High. Our fathers were content to worship in structures inferior to barns in architectural merits, but from this one example we have seen city after city and many villages rearing up fanes that show at last that we [meaning the Baptist denomination?] love and honor the worship of our Lord.” Sermons, 250.
the establishment of what was to be Southern Theological Seminary, others in the room rushed to reimburse the missionary. As for Thomas Skinner—who had given five times that much for the projected seminary and who had played a major role in Yates’ sartorial splendor—he received no reimbursement offers but did wryly comment that he wished he “knew how to keep my clothing so well that I could look as well as Yates did in a suit of clothes eleven years old.”

As the promised date of occupancy of the new building drew near it was obvious the building would not be completed as scheduled. That was a severe disappointment to the Raleigh church leaders because the state convention had been invited to return for its November, 1858, convention and enjoy the brick and mortar fruits of its generous 1856 gifts. But regardless of the building’s unfinished state, the Raleigh Baptists made plans for their guests and invited Rev. J. Lansing Burrows, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Richmond, Virginia, to preach a dedicatory sermon in the partially completed building during the convention.

Even in its unfinished state the building was “a most beautiful structure” according to a Wilmington, North Carolina, correspondent. “And when the tower is completed, on which workmen are now engaged, it will make a most imposing appearance. . . . The windows are composed of stained glass, and with the exception of the center light in the tower, they are of a mild, subdued brown or lead color, and give a very pleasant light for the eyes. The centre light in the tower is composed of all the colors of the rainbow, and is most beautiful to look at. The wood work of the interior is stained a dark walnut color, and seen by gas light, as it was presented to us, it makes a very pleasant sight.”

The “centre light in the tower” was unquestionably the sixteen foot diameter rose window prized today as a signature feature of the building.

In a newspaper article written by Skinner during the construction of the building, he had promised that “Over the doorway there will be a beautiful rose window with rich stained glass … .” A Raleigh Register reporter, offering readers a verbal tour of the finished facility, noted the “the rose window is seen with good effect from the main floor of the Church.” Hence, the window was planned and installed in the original construction although the church records make no mention of it or of its cost or giver, if in fact it was presented as a special gift.

But the church records did record the impressive dedication service on the second night of the convention, Thursday, November 11, 1858.

Notwithstanding the very inclement weather, the house, capable of accommodating more than 1,000, was well and comfortably filled. The choir, assisted by some of the best vocalists of the city and led by Mr. W. D. Cooke, Principal of the Institute of the Deaf and Dumb and the Blind. Dr. Burrows’ text was
a portion of the 7th verse of the 60th chapter of Isaiah. “I will glorify the house of my glory.” His theme was 'the house of God glorified'. ... At the conclusion of his sermon, Dr. B. requested the congregation to rise, when he dedicated the Building to the worship of Almighty God ... 43

And in the best Baptist tradition, before adjournment a collection was taken to assist in paying for the building’s completion! However, not until September of the following year would the congregation actually begin to worship in the new building on a regular basis. But in its construction a giant step had been taken in re-imaging Baptists in North Carolina and in Raleigh. A worthy and elegant-for-its-time-and-place house of worship had been planted at the crossroads of North Carolina’s capital city. There is no way to explain that feat other than to point to the leadership of Thomas Edward Skinner.

First Baptist Church of Raleigh – view of the interior as it appeared in the mid-1800s

43 Minutes, November 11, 1858.
As for the man himself, it had been a wearying season. Only four weeks before the convention’s opening, the three-and-one-half-year-old firstborn child of Thomas and Ann died. Annie, born to them in Avon Springs, New York, died on October 5, 1858. There would be many, too many, such losses in the future. In addition to three-year-old Annie’s grave, the Skinner family plot in Oakwood Cemetery in Raleigh encloses, among others, the graves of two whose headstones bear no inscription save the single, aching word: “Infant.” For Thomas, having previously lost his first child, Edloe, at one month, and his first wife, Ann Eliza, in her twenty-fifth year of life, the valley of grief was not unfamiliar terrain. But Annie’s death was Ann’s first such journey. And, creating a formidable emotional whipsaw for her was the fact that four days after Annie’s death,
Ann gave birth to Johnie, their first son—who would, unbelievably, die only twenty months later.

Also, two weeks after the convention’s closing, to a congregation that was dallying in the seemingly impossible task of paying his promised 1858 annual salary of $1,000, Skinner “signified his willingness to preach the coming year for the same salary; but gave the church to understand in kind but very plain terms that as soon as they were relieved of the present church debt that he should require the sum of $1,500 per year, should they require his services.”

The only recorded response was to stipulate that the pastor’s family was to receive a free pew when a new pew rental scheme went into effect. That scheme was touted to be the answer to the church’s financial woes. Unfortunately, six months later it had proven to be a most disappointing panacea, so canvassers returned to the work of securing pledges to underwrite Skinner’s salary, but even those efforts led to a most unsettling episode.

While carrying out his canvassing mandate, Deacon Pescud innocently approached the editor of the Biblical Recorder, Rev. J. J. James, to ask if James would assist in underwriting Skinner’s salary. James replied he would gladly pledge $100 “if they would get an interesting preacher.” Taken aback by that response, Pescud reported it to Skinner, who went to James personally and heard it repeated to his face with the additional claim that “there were some prominent members of the church who entertained the same sentiments” and that those individuals had told him “that were it not for the liberality of Elder Skinner, that the church would soon dispense with him as Pastor.”

It is no wonder that an alarmed Deacon Pescud brought the matter before the next church conference, believing that if James’ statements were true, then a candid expression of that opinion by the church was due

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44 Minutes, December 3, 1858.
their pastor. A. M. Lewis, aware of Pescud’s intentions to report Editor James’ statements, immediately responded to the report by presenting a formal resolution to the conference:

Whereas, It has been brought to the attention of this church, that disrespectful language has been used by Elder J. J. James (who is not a member of this church) relative to our beloved Pastor, T. E. Skinner, to the effect that he was “an uninteresting preacher,” etc. And whereas, said light and insinuating language was used to one of the Deacons of this Church. Therefore be it

“Resolved 1st, That the church considers such language as unbecoming and unworthy of one Christian minister towards another, and that the conduct of the said James can be construed by this church as nothing less than an unprovoked attempt on his part to come between Pastor and people.

“Resolved 2nd, That this church utterly and entirely denies the charge of said James, as made against our highly esteemed, much loved and appreciated Pastor, and with pleasure they have watched and witnessed the growing and increasing improvement of him, more particularly as a preacher, which gladdens their hearts and make them feel proud of him.

And when they reflect upon his usefulness and efficiency here; upon what he has done for them as a church and as a denomination, they feel it no more than shere [sic] justice to thus repel this unwarrantable and officious attempt on the part of the said James, whether made to cast a fire brand among a united, quiet and contended church and Pastor, or to wound the feelings of the said Pastor.

“Resolved 3rd, That a copy of these resolutions be sent to the Pastor, Elder T. E. Skinner, for his private use.”

45 Minutes, July 1, 1859 (underlining in original). In that episode Skinner was introduced into the pressurized role of a “city church” pastor, a role which the pastor of First Baptist Church of Charleston, S. C. and later president of the University of Alabama, Dr. Basil Manly, Sr. (1799-1868) found impossible to fill. He said that he had “seen enough ... of the pastorate of our city churches.” An urban pulpit, he said, “offered a vacuous prominence, an empty notoriety, the tyranny of custom, subjection to continual judgments and comparisons, and always, the pressure of competition with other clerical notables. The workload was unreasonable: townfolk demanded proficiency in the pulpit, the lecture room, the Sabbath school, the prayer meeting, the mission board,
The clerk for that July, 1859, meeting stated only that this resolution was "adopted." That solitary word, shorn of any adverb such as heartily or unanimously, allows one to wonder if Editor James had some grounding in fact and if acids of discontent were present within the church's membership. Although the handsome new building was entered only weeks after "adopting" A. M. Lewis' resolution, there were troubling signs that all was not well as 1859 drew to its close.

One sign may possibly be found in the leave of absence the church granted Skinner just one month later to attend the annual meetings of various Baptist associations on behalf of "the Baptist Female School now about to be established in this City."46 The desire for a school for Baptist girls had been advanced for decades by many, including one of Skinner's predecessors, Rev. J. J. Finch and his wife, who had opened such a school in Raleigh during Finch's tenure as Raleigh pastor [1844-48]. And, in 1859 A. M. Lewis, P. F. Pescud, John Williams, J. S. Walthall (all Raleigh church members) and Skinner had acquired the Eagle Hotel building diagonally across the street from the church for the purpose of continuing Finch's vision. Even with the well-earned reputation Skinner had earned as a fund-raiser, one may still wonder if underwriting such a school at that time was of such urgency as to be the only motivation for releasing him from his preaching duties for the month—especially in the critical final months of the new church's construction.

Another indication that all was not well is found in the November 18, 1859, notation that Skinner was resolute in his desire for $1,500 for his 1860 services, but that conversations were ongoing about that sum.

46 Minutes, August 8, 1859.
In subsequent meetings he essentially agreed to a nine-month contract, albeit at the requested annual rate of $1,500, which the church clerk noted would actually require only $1,125 from the church before the arrival of the time when the 1861 pew rent/auctions would become due. The clear hope of the clerk was that with the revenue from paid-in-advance 1861 pew rentals Skinner’s 1860 services could be extended through the final quarter of 1860 and beyond, but the clerk also dutifully noted that, as of December 30, 1859, there was a $250 balance still due on Skinner’s 1859 salary. Eight months later that balance had not been fully paid.

Finally, it is noticeable that when the new baptistry of the church was finally put into service—in June of 1860, nine months after the new building was first used for weekly service—only two were baptized. A congregation whose clerk had proudly noted that the church’s membership as it entered the new building in September, 1859, was 433 persons (228 white and 205 colored),47 had become atypically dormant in numerical growth.

Perhaps, therefore, it was with a general sigh of relief when, in August, 1860—one year after the first leave of absence was granted—the church “unanimously” approved a furlough of undesignated length for Skinner to become essentially the development officer for the desired girl’s school.48 It was understood that during his time of service to the

47 Minutes, September 8, 1859
48 Minutes, August 3, 1860. At this same meeting a ‘financial plan’ that would be less dependant upon pew rental/auctions was approved by a vote of 37 to 4, with the names recorded of all men [only men had suffrage at the time] voting affirmatively and negatively. It was most unusual for the clerk to record the actual tally and just as much so to record the names of those voting aye and nay.

The action releasing Skinner from his preaching and pastoral duties came in the form of a resolution submitted by A. M. Lewis. It read as follows:

“Whereas, This Church is fully of the opinion that the enterprise now on foot to establish in this City a denominational female School of high order, is of the highest practical importance; and whereas, it being determined by its friends and projectors to raise $25,000 for this object on the joint-stock principle—all the stock now taken being pledged on the condition that the said sum shall be raised by the 1st of January next; and whereas, as the present Agent, Elder G. M. L. Finch, has resigned his position; therefore, “Resolved, That such absence be granted to our Pastor as he may deem proper, in order to raise the necessary amount.”

The clerk then noted in brackets this addendum:

“[It is due Elder Skinner here to state that he very liberally proposed to take the above-named Agency without any remuneration from the stock-holders, and that his salary as Pastor of this church ceases during the time necessary for him to secure the remainder of the $25,000 for the school—thus involving a great pecuniary sacrifice on his
school Skinner would be self-supporting, and hence not a financial obligation of the church. Even better (for the balance sheet of the church, at least), the stated supply preacher, Rev. J. S. Walthall, agreed to serve for only $40 per month, about 30 percent of Skinner’s request. Skinner was, however, still to be considered the church’s pastor.

In the midst of all that jockeying about, however, one clearly memorable and most pleasant event graced the unsettling latter half of 1859. Thomas and his father journeyed to Healing Springs, Virginia, for a brief vacation. Seated across the dinner table from them one evening was a lady from Charleston, S. C., whose face held an unusual fascination for Skinner’s father—whose second wife, Anna Squires Skinner, had died four years earlier. His seventy-five year old father’s staring at the woman became so embarrassing to Thomas that he chided him, reminding him that that staring was not only rude but also irritating to the lady. His father, who was always quite circumspect about such matters, replied, “Why, Thomas, she is the image of your mother!” Thomas subsequently explained to the lady the source of his father’s fascination and was kindly told that, in light of the circumstance, she took no offense and would take none should he continue to admire her. Thomas then wrote:

That was the only photograph of my mother—what words!—that I ever had. After that, it was my enquiring look that interested this accomplished woman, whose image is now before me. I thought it was a remarkable providence, since I had often longed to know how my own dear mother looked. This was a prayer of desire answered to my longing heart. How good is the Lord, of our providential lives! 49

Apart from such slender tokens of grace, however, the days of 1859-60 were personally and professionally ominous for Thomas Skinner. But not for him alone; those were overcast days for most southerners.

49 Sermons, 332.
By the summer of 1860 the bitter cultural and economic divisions that had fueled the nation’s politics for decades had become incarnated in that year’s presidential candidates. Historian James McPherson interpreted the general mood of those in the South.

As the election neared, the increasing likelihood that a solid North would make Lincoln president brewed a volatile mixture of hysteria, despondency, and elation in the South. Whites feared the coming of new John Brown ... Unionists despaired of the future; secessionists relished the prospect of southern independence. Even the weather during that summer of 1860 became part of the political climate: a severe drought and prolonged heat wave withered southern crops and drove nerves beyond the point of endurance.50

Almost predictably, Lincoln’s November election brought a swift southern reaction. On December 20, 1860, a convention called by South Carolinians to consider secession from the Union voted 169 to 0 to do just that. Five months later, incensed by Lincoln’s request for North Carolina troops to suppress the rebellion, a called convention of North Carolinians followed suit. When news of that decision spread throughout the city “one hundred guns boomed and church bells rang in salute of secession.”51 The war that would claim the lives of more than 40,000 North Carolinians, devastate the state’s economy, and determine its political and cultural course for decades, had begun.

Thomas Skinner had just turned thirty-six. He was the pastor of one of the state’s most visible Baptist churches, the father of a ten and a

51 William C. Harris, *North Carolina and the Coming of the Civil War* (Raleigh: North Carolina Department of Archives and History), 51. William S. Powell, dean of historians of North Carolina, summarized the character of the state in 1860 as follows: “On the surface it had become more progressive, as demonstrated by its splendid system of public or common schools; its railroads ... its newspapers; its natives holding high national office, among others a president, a vice-president, a cabinet member, and an ambassador; and, most important, its many new business enterprises. Yet the people had changed hardly at all. They were still largely rural and dependent on agriculture, very independent, ultraconservative, often superstitious, clamish, seldom aware of events outside their immediate neighborhood, and above all satisfied with these characteristics.” Powell, *North Carolina*, 327.
two-year-old daughter (Sarah and Emily, respectively) and of an eight-year-old son (Thomas Halsey) and, according to the U.S. Federal Census from the previous year, he owned $8,000 in real estate and had a personal estate of $7,000. His account books would not look that good again for decades.
War Is Hell

The deprivations of war began immediately. For the Baptists of Raleigh it began with a redeployment of its new Sunday school facilities, located in the basement of the church. That area was promptly converted into a workspace for seamstresses whose productivity was most impressive: “1,500 mattresses, 400 shirts, 300 jackets, 200 pairs of pants, and 200 haversacks during the very first month of hostilities.”\(^{52}\) Desperate for iron, the Confederate War Department soon asked the churches of the South to donate their church bells so that they might be recast as cannon. The Raleigh church’s bell, only recently installed and even more recently rung in jubilation at the announcement of secession, was patriotically given to the Cause.\(^{53}\)

But such productivity and generosity was no match for spiraling inflation. “Between 1862 and 1865 in the local [Raleigh] market, the price of chickens rose from 20 cents to $4.50, a dozen eggs from 15 cents to $4.05, a pound of beef from 12.5 cents to $3.33, bacon from 33 cents per pound to $7.50, wheat from $3 per bushel to $50.”\(^{54}\)

As one expense-alleviating measure Skinner, whose return to churchly duties from his fund-raising endeavors is difficult to date, offered “in consequence of the trouble of the country, growing out of the war, and to the pecuniary pressure and embarrassment … [to] serve the church as Pastor, without the payment of his usual salary … [and] to give the services of his servants to act as sexton … .” The church quickly accepted the offer and “tendered unanimously a vote of thanks to Bro. Skinner for his liberal and generous course toward them.”\(^{55}\)

Such generous actions by Skinner and the productive output from the ladies seemed, at least in the beginning, to be gloriously rewarded

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53 Minutes, April 4, 1862.

54 Vickers, Raleigh, 49.

55 Minutes, June 7, 1861.
by the good fortune encountered by their uniformed sons and husbands. The Battle at Big Bethel, northwest of Newport News, Virginia, in which the Federals suffered seventy-six casualties versus only eight sustained by the Confederates, gloriously underlined the southern claim that one southern fighting man was worth ten Yankee hirelings. And the stunning Confederate victory at Bull Run (Manassas) in July, 1861, was a tonic to all southern hearts. But only a month later North Carolina’s civilians experienced in much nearer form the horrors of war. That bad news emanated from the state’s northeastern corner, the location of Thomas Skinner’s family and fortune.

Possessing neither an army nor a navy prior to secession, the South was ill prepared to wage the war it had declared. That foolishly ignored deficit was demonstrated painfully on August 29 when inadequate Confederate defenses at Hatteras Inlet were surrendered to Union forces, granting the Federals access into the Pamlico and Albemarle sounds. That debacle sent North Carolinians reeling in shock since those waters facilitated fully one-third of the state’s economic lifeblood. Equally troubling was the fact that control of those sounds meant the Federals would also have much easier access to the Wilmington-Weldon railway line, the crucial artery for the north-south flow of Confederate soldiers and materiel. The Raleigh Register lamented: “Why did not our force of seven or eight hundred men kill, drive into the sea, or capture the enemy’s force of 300 or 400 men who spent the night 600 yards of [sic] our troops?”56 But the bad news from down east continued. In quick succession the Oregon and Ocracoke inlets also fell into Union hands, assuring the Yankees of even easier domination of the entire region.

Accordingly, on September 10, 1861, the church received a letter of resignation from Thomas Skinner, stating that his “eastern possessions are exposed to the marauding enemy,” and that it was his “duty to give

Map of Albemarle Sound Region, published in Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War (New York, 1862), courtesy of University of North Carolina Historical Maps Collection
them more attention than would be consistent with his duties” as the church’s pastor.

As had often been the case in the past, A. M. Lewis was ready with a resolution one in which he noted “with deep regret” Skinner’s resignation but also resolved that “we cannot consent to receive his resignation and that we cheerfully grant him whatever time may be necessary to attend to his eastern interests.” The resolution ended with a call for a committee to “endeavor to get him to withdraw his resignation.”57 Lewis’ resolution was unanimously adopted.

The following month, responding to the committee’s entreaties for him to continue in the pastoral office, Skinner stood before the group and delivered a message as disturbing as the war news. He personally explained “in kind and very candid terms other and more weighty reasons why he had seen fit to offer his resignation ….” He said his truer reasons for resigning had to do with the “cold and lukewarm state the church was in … and its habitual neglect of its Christian duties, which was not only painful to him, but was really alarming.” The clerk’s report of the balance of the meeting merits full quotation:

The Pastor proceeded to point many omissions of palpable and plain duties on the part of the brethren, and warned them of the consequences of their present inactivity. He could and would not remain as Pastor under present circumstances and would only withdraw his resignation in case the brethren would be more faithful and punctual hereafter. Remarks of an affecting and touching character were then made by brethren Lewis, Vass, Jones and others, all acknowledging their guilt before heaven, and promised with God’s assistance, to do better for the future. Bro. Lewis moved that it is the sense of the church that Bro. Skinner withdraw his resignation, which was unanimously carried. Bro. S. then withdrew his resignation for the present. Conference adjourned with the benediction by the Moderator.58

57 Minutes, September 10, 1861.
58 Minutes, October 1, 1861
In such manner the church muddled its way into the painful days of war, struggling with one another as well as with Lincoln’s “aggression.”

Skinner’s personal assessment of the war itself is found in a “Report on the State of Our Country” which he and two others submitted to the Baptist State Convention only a month after his confronting the church with its lukewarm condition. The report presumably documented the feelings of most North Carolina Baptists as well. It read:

Whereas, Since the last session of this body a war has been waged by the United States, upon the Confederate States of America; and whereas, in the spirit of the barbarous ages, the United States have declared our citizens outlawed, and with an avowed determination to subjugate the whole country, even to the entire destruction of its citizens and their property; and whereas to this end they have imprisoned and murdered many of our citizens, stolen their property, pillaged their homes, burnt their houses, and driven the rightful owners thereof away from them, trampling under their wicked feet the written constitution, which for twenty years they have been toiling to undermine; therefore,

Resolved, That with gratitude to God we acknowledge His divine hand in the guidance and protection of our beloved country, and in giving us thus far the victory over our enemies; and pray for His grace that we may trust him for future blessings.

Resolved, That we recommend to the churches throughout the State, that they cease not to cry unto the Lord for His help in this our time of need.

Resolved, That we recommend 10 o’clock of each Sabbath morning as a convenient hour for a concert of prayer.59

59 Minutes, Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, 1861, 22. The tone of that Report mirrored a statement approved earlier in the year by the Southern Baptist Convention which blamed the war on “the fanatical spirit of the North” that had “long been seeking to deprive us of our rights and franchises guaranteed by the United States Constitution.” That statement also went on to excoriating the churches of the North because, rather than call their members to the ways of peace and tolerance, “with astonishment and grief, we find churches and pastors of the North breathing out slaughter and clamoring for sanguinary hostilities with a fierceness which we would have supposed impossible among the disciples of the Prince of Peace.” 1861 SBC Annual, 62, cited in Pamela R.
But pray—and fight—as passionately as North Carolinians might, the situation in Skinner’s homelands grew steadily worse. On February 5-6, 1862, Roanoke Island was captured—and with its loss the cities of New Bern, Elizabeth City, Edenton, and Hertford were inescapably brought under Union control.

Within hours of the Roanoke Island defeat the grim scenario delineated in Skinner’s “Report” was alarmingly demonstrated by a Union attack on the Chowan River town of Winton, some fifty miles farther inland than Skinner’s family plantations and fisheries.

In a frenzy of looting and burning the Union troops dragged beds and stuffed chairs into the streets, ripped them open with their bayonets and set them on fire. Pictures, books, velvet drapes, carpets—anything that would burn—were heaved into the fires. Pianos were carried outside and smashed to pieces with rifle butts. Every pig, cow, and chicken that could be found was bayonetted or shot. The Northerners staggered under the load of pots and pans, silverware, mounds of clothing and other possessions as they returned to their ships. Anything not consumed by fire, was carried off. Winton was totally destroyed.60

In the first quarter of 1862 Skinner was absent from all the church meetings; plausibly he was in Perquimans County much of the time, attempting as best he could to secrete or salvage the family’s assets. Meanwhile the church, attempting to honor its recent avowals to be more faithful and punctual in its duties, “borrowed” from the Charity Fund for some salary for him and approved a salary of $1,200 for 1862.61 But the disturbing financial report of October, 1862, revealed that the church by then owed Skinner $1,020 and an additional $200 in unpaid salary for that year. The $1,020 debt to Skinner likely indicates he was

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61 Minutes, February 28 and April 14, 1862.
personally paying much if not all of the operating, or as it was termed, the "incidental" expenses of the church. But, as a resolution approved in that October church meeting attests, Skinner's days of generosity and patience were coming to an end. That resolution stated:

Whereas the debt due the Pastor has been accumulating for the last three years until it has reached the sum of $1020; and as the Pastor has been deprived of his usual income by the ravages of war, it becomes highly important that the church should immediately discharge its liabilities to him, and thereby afford him some relief and to give evidence of its sincerity and to comply with all of its honorable engagements, which has been for some time too much neglected. And as several attempts have been made heretofore for the accomplishment of the same object and proved inefficient, it becomes necessary that the church should remind its members of their solemn covenant with each other. We have each agreed to contribute for the support of the ministry and the current expenses of God's house; and a failure of any member to comply with this solemn contract would be offensive to Christ and gross immorality in the eyes of the church. Now in view of the facts herein stated, further delay would be a disgrace to the church. Therefore, Resolved, That there be appointed a committee of three consisting of brethren Jno. G. Williams, W. C. Upchurch & J. H. Alford, whose duty it shall be to assess each and every member of this church their proportional part of the above named debt, according to their means of paying.62

Surprisingly, that assessment approach seems to have succeeded when so many others had not. When the appointed committee presented its proposed assessments at the next church meeting, thirty-six agreed to pay the named amount, nine were unwilling, while forty-four were absent. After a failed attempt by some of the "unwilling" to have another committee appointed to which they might show that they were unable to pay, the plan was adopted and three months later the $1,020 debt

62 Minutes, October 3, 1862.
was retired. However, $450 was then due on Skinner’s current salary, $160 of which was quickly paid when the additional deficit was reported. Skinner himself added good news by informing the meeting that Miss Susan Parrish, a recently deceased member of the church, had designated $1,000 of her estate to be deposited and its interest used solely for the pastor’s salary. Finally, Deacons Pescud and Jones reported that they had received pledges for an 1863 salary of $2,400 for Pastor Skinner “on condition that the pews should not be rented out.”

That was a salary doubling that of any previous year and the fact that it was linked to discontinuing pew rentals augured a new day in church budgeting. By approving that figure and its stipulation, the church inched forward. But it was too late. Within months the pastor they were rallying to support was gone.

The minutes say only that at a called meeting on October 15, 1863, “the Pastor announced his intention to leave the church for awhile for the purpose of visiting Europe on a private and denominational character.” Acceding to Skinner’s plans, the church named as its interim pastor the Reverend Thomas Henderson Pritchard—who had recently been driven from his Baltimore pulpit for his Confederate sympathies—and unanimously endorsed a commendatory statement:

Whereas, in the providence of God matters of private and personal character have rendered it necessary for our beloved pastor Elder Thos. E. Skinner to visit Europe and thus make a temporary severance of relations which he has sustained towards this church for the last eight years inevitable; therefore

Resolved, that while we are deeply grieved at having our pastor separated from us we appreciate the necessity which calls him away, recognize the hand of God in it, and bow to it with resignation looking and praying for his restoration at no distant day.

63 Minutes, April 3, 1863. The rental of church pews, although a common practice was a policy that brought dissension among many churches. Raleigh’s Good Shepherd Church for example, was established out of the desire for a ‘free pew’ church for Episcopalians.
Resolved, that we do still consider Elder Skinner our pastor and while we will endeavor to try and have his place supplied during his absence, we will expect him to resume his labors among us whenever in the Providence of God he may be permitted to return to his country.

Resolved, that we will cherish his memory in our heart and pray for the safety of himself and his family, for the success of his mission and his speedy restoration to us.

Resolved, that we recommend him to the confidence of our brethren wherever his lot may be cast as a Christian gentleman and minister.

Resolved that a copy of these resolutions be [included in?] the church book, that a copy be presented to Elder Thos. E. Skinner and a copy be sent to the Biblical Recorder for publication.

Multiple questions immediately arise. Obviously, the first question is: What was this “mission” of “private and personal character” (the words employed in the church’s resolution), or (as the church’s minutes say) “the necessity which calls him away” … to “visit Europe on a private and denominational character”? And, why at that time, in the heart of the war? What might have motivated him to embark on any such “mission” then? European “visits” were not possible apart from running the Union Navy’s blockade of North Carolina’s sole remaining port at Wilmington—and that was a dangerous enterprise, not a family vacation. And, finally, how could a man who was on record as being in financial straits afford to sail with his family to peaceful Europe—not knowing when he might return and with little assurance of sustaining funds reaching him until “he may be permitted to return to his country”?

There is an answer for only one of those questions, but credible suppositions are possible for others, while mystery continues to hover over all. The one definite answer pertains to the “mission” that called Skinner away from Raleigh. It was duty to God and country.
The spiritual needs of the Confederate troops were of as much concern to southern churchmen as was their physical well-being. To that end calls were ceaselessly made for chaplains or, barring that, for pastors to serve short terms as preachers to the soldiers. Younger men such as Thomas H. Pritchard, and John A. Broadus (who had preached a revival with Skinner in Raleigh before the war and would later become a nationally known preacher and president of Southern Seminary) were among the many who nobly answered that call for short-term service.

But another urgent need of the military forces was Bibles. The soldiers gained great comfort from reading the Bible, and copies of the New Testament were especially appreciated by them. Therefore great effort was made to raise money for the purchase of the scriptures. Each issue of the Biblical Recorder provided the names and amounts received for the purchase of Bibles, with the result that by the war’s end the treasurer of the North Carolina Baptist Convention had received nearly $75,000 for that purpose—a larger sum than the total given for all convention causes for the fifteen-year period, 1861-1875.64

However, most of America’s Bible publishers were located within Union territory. The one Bible society located within the Confederate States which had “stereotype plates” of the New Testament could not keep up with the demand, and after a fire at a Greensboro bindery destroyed its inventory of Bibles and of paper, the armies of North Carolina—not to speak of the Sunday school age children of the state—were destitute

64 Huggins, History of N.C. Baptists, 268.
of printed religious materials. The only remaining source for those materials and Scriptures was the Bible publishers of Great Britain—but accessing that resource required an agent in England to transact the purchases and oversee their clandestine shipment.

Thomas Skinner served as that agent. As the messengers to the North Carolina Baptist State Convention were told when they assembled in 1863:

Elder T.E. Skinner … has recently run the blockade in the Advance, [and] was entrusted with two one thousand dollar Confederate cotton bonds, to be used in the purchase of a set of stereotype plates of the New Testament, which he is to have forwarded to us by one of the government vessels engaged in running the blockade at Wilmington. He is also commissioned as agent to purchase Bibles and Testaments in England on the credit of the Board of Missions to be paid for when the war shall have ceased.65

That answers the question concerning the “mission” and “denominational” references within the church minutes. But those minutes also speak of Skinner having “personal” reasons for his trip to Europe. Perhaps that is simply a figure of speech signifying his “personal” patriotism or his sense of obligation to provide spiritual nurture for the soldiers. One other possibility suggests itself: Ann’s physical or emotional health. Her health had prompted their departure from Petersburg, Virginia, in 1855 after only eight months, and her health was to be the stated reason for their 1872 move from Columbus to Athens, Georgia. Also it must not be forgotten that Ann

was not a southerner and therefore her emotional health may have been at risk, either from suspicions of disloyalty coming from neighbors or from castigations coming from northern relatives—or from the loss of contact with that family. But all of that is simply conjectural and therefore Skinner’s personal reasons remain an unexplained aspect of the journey.

As to why he chose that particular time to “make his run,” the possibilities range all the way from the fact that the need for Bibles and religious materials had passed the critical stage to other factors such as means and emotional compulsion.

As to emotional compulsion it is helpful to note the despair that befell the Confederacy in the opening days of July, 1863, with the devastating losses of both Vicksburg and Gettysburg; and it is essential to note the death of James Johnston Pettigrew on July 14, 1863. Pettigrew, Skinner’s “most intimate classmate” from Bingham Academy and Chapel Hill days, had risen to the rank of brigadier general in the Confederate Army and had gallantly distinguished himself during Gettysburg’s famous Pickett’s Charge. But on July 14, in a tragic-comic skirmish at Falling Waters, Maryland, he was mortally wounded. His body was returned to Raleigh where it lay in state in the Capitol rotunda, just across the street from Skinner’s church. At noon on the twenty-fourth, the businesses of the city closed and hundreds flocked to the Episcopal funeral service on the Capitol grounds. Few among them could have been more shaken by the scene or the death than the city’s Baptist pastor. It would be foolish to discount the emotional toll of Pettigrew’s death upon Skinner.

As to means, one must take note of the availability of the blockade-runner named in the convention report, the Advance. The state’s wartime governor Zebulon Vance, distressed by the state’s loss of maritime income and goods—and also disgusted with the Confederate War Department’s provisions for North Carolina’s troops—purchased a British iron-hulled sidewheeler steamboat, the Lord Clyde, for the state’s use; upon its arrival in Wilmington it was renamed the Advance, and by July, 1863, it was
in full operation. It is likely that Skinner obtained personal permission from the governor for himself and his family to depart on one of the first voyages of the *Advance*. In fact, the Skinner family’s actual sailing date can be named with some precision. Confederate Navy scholar Stephen Wise determined that the *Advance’s* third departure from the port of Wilmington was on October 24, 1863,\(^66\) a date that coincides very well with the church’s October 15 blessing of Skinner’s trip and the November announcement of his departure to the Baptist convention.

Another factor that may address the question of means is Charles Worth Skinner’s sale of a large portion of his Harvey’s Neck land in September, 1863, for $60,000.\(^67\) It is not known what portion of that sales price was encumbered or what portion of it may have been available for Thomas’ use, but the proximity of the sales date and the sailing date create the possibility that funds from his father’s sale of family lands may have

\(^{66}\) Stephen R. Wise, *Lifeline of the Confederacy: Blockade Running During the Civil War*, (Columbia, S. C.:University of South Carolina Press, 1988), 244, hereinafter cited as Wise, *Lifeline of the Confederacy*. Wise also notes that although a “romantic atmosphere” developed about the blockade-runners “as daredevils who sought life-and-death adventures while taking their frail vessels through a gauntlet of Union warships,” the fact is that “for the year 1863, out of nearly 170 attempts only 11 ships were lost trying to clear Wilmington and Charleston,” Wise, *Lifeline of the Confederacy*, 110, but those post-war-computations were not available as survival-odds at the time for persons like the Skinners.

\(^{67}\) Perquimans County Book of Deeds HH, 291
underwritten at least a portion of Skinner’s transatlantic mission. Some have asserted that the purchase of the “stereotype plates” themselves was a gift from Skinner’s purse but that statement, while impressive in its portrayal of Skinner’s magnanimity, is unverifiable. 68

Even with such reconstructions and guesses as can be made regarding Skinner’s finances at that time, the issue remains extremely puzzling. And it is made more so by the only extant report we have of Skinner’s days in Great Britain, written by Skinner himself some thirty years later in a tribute to his friend Matthew Yates. In that tribute he said that when he sailed for England he was unaware that Yates was no longer in Shanghai but was in Geneva, Switzerland, taking refuge there from the ravages of the Taiping Rebellion in China. But prior to Yates’ flight from China, he had accrued a tidy sum as a translator for government officials as they attempted to negotiate a more peaceful settlement of the rebellion. By some means the Switzerland-located Yates learned of Skinner’s presence in England and wrote to him, suggesting that the two rendezvous in Paris, which they did with great personal satisfaction in July, 1864. But during their days in Paris, Skinner said:

I was surprised to learn that Mr. Yates expected me to go with him to Geneva; he said that he had promised Mrs. Yates and Annie to bring me back with him. When I announced my decision to return to England, with candor and love he asked me if it was the expense that decided me. Then he added: “It shall not cost you anything if you will accept it from me as a brother beloved; and remember, Skinner, I have never had an opportunity before of expressing my gratitude for the many favors you rendered me when friends were few.”

The two weeks that I spent with him among the mountains

68 That is asserted—unfortunately without documentation—by Mary Lynch Johnson, A History of Meredith College (Raleigh: Meredith College, 2nd ed., 1972), 30, hereinafter cited as Johnson, Meredith College, “In 1863 he made a trip to England, and bought at his own expense stereotype plates for the New Testament for the Board of Missions to use especially for the soldiers.” Carroll, They Lived in Raleigh: Some Leading Personalities from 1792 to 1892 (no publication data UNC-CH Wilson Library Archives), vol. 2, 192 repeated Johnson’s statement. But Baptist historian George W. Paschal said nothing of this in any of his writings about Skinner nor did Skinner’s close friend J. D. Hufham include such a claim in his tribute to Skinner at the state convention following Skinner’s death.
of Switzerland and in Geneva were among the happiest of my long and eventful life. We worshipped together in Calvin’s old church and stood together at his (supposed) grave. …

He returned with me to England. There we spent another delightful fortnight together, visiting Warwick Castle, Kenilworth, Stratford on Avon, and other interesting places in the neighborhood of Leamington, where my family were residing at the time.69

Matthew Yates with wife, Eliza, and daughter, Annie

PHOTO: BIBLICAL RECORDER, OCT 25, 1980
ORIGINAL SOURCE UNKNOWN.

That remarkable account establishes both that Skinner was obviously less well to do than Yates had ever known him to be and also that Skinner was far from being destitute—Leamington was a resort city that had been visited by no less than Queen Victoria; it was not a low-rent neighborhood. It was also very near Ludlow, a city whose name his wife shared and that was possibly her family’s ancestral home. But Skinner’s report of Yates’ desire to pay his expenses is plausible only if a great reversal had actually taken place in their financial capabilities.

However Skinner’s wartime journey to Europe may be judged today, his contemporaries clearly considered it an act of patriotism and counted his service to God and country commendable. Confirming that

conclusion is the fact that in 1866 Furman University conferred upon him the Doctor of Divinity degree; such honors were not, in that hypersensitive day, bestowed on any whose loyalty to the Lost Cause was less than laudable. And when, in 1865, he returned to Raleigh ("the last of April or first of June,"\(^{70}\) is the imprecise way the church book recorded the date) he returned to a grateful people and open arms.

\(^{70}\) Undated Minute, entered between the entries of April 13, 1865 (the date of General Sherman's entry into Raleigh) and August 7, 1865, when the Church Book resumed regular entries of church action.
Wrapping Up and Moving On

The Raleigh to which the Skinners returned was both different and the same. The differences were painfully visible. Although the city had been spared the destruction of homes and buildings suffered by so many other southern cities, the austerity occasioned by the war was evident everywhere. Equally evident was the disillusionment stemming from defeat and the pillaging done by southern bullies. A tale retold into the twenty-first century bemoaned the fact that the only chicken left in Raleigh was the rooster on the Christ Church (Episcopal) steeple—but, in a most disappointing manner, that rapacious looting came not from the Yankees but from the rag-tag camp followers of General Wheeler’s Confederate troops as they evacuated Raleigh on the eve of Sherman’s arrival!

One good difference in the city to which the Skinners returned was the presence in it of Thomas’ father, Charles Worth Skinner, who during the course of the war had relocated to Raleigh, joined his son’s church—and had promptly been made a deacon of it.71

The first thing Skinner did upon his return was to offer the church his resignation, thoughtfully giving members the opportunity to respond to post-war desires, but it “was not entertained by the church”,72 and the Rev. T. H. Pritchard, Raleigh’s “interim-pastor” relocated to Petersburg, Virginia. So Skinner resumed his role as pastor and with that act the sameness of his pre-war Raleigh experience returned.

For instance, in the August church meeting an offering was taken for “cleansing and whitewashing the basement of the church,” apparently because the room had been used as a hospital in the final, desperate days of the war. But by December the work had become so problem-laden that a motion to close the church doors for four weeks was hotly debated. In the interim the treasurer reported 1) that $100 was still owed Rev. T.

71 Minutes, April 29, 1864.
72 Undated Minutes, April 13 and August 7, 1865.
H. Pritchard, 2) the incidental expenses of the church were barely being met and, 3) nothing was being done to pay Skinner's salary. And at the last church meeting of 1865 a stalemate developed regarding a proposed 1866 salary of $1,700 for Skinner.

Meanwhile, the recently returned pastor was attempting to understand and respond to the new status of the church's then emancipated black members. Skinner had been in the still federally occupied city less than three months when the Rev. Martin H. Tupper, a white former Union soldier and zealous Massachusetts Baptist minister bearing letters of recommendation from the Baptists of the North, arrived in town and immediately sought out Skinner. He had come to establish a school for biblical-theological instruction of the area's freedmen. According to Tupper's October 12, 1865, correspondence to Dr. J. S. Backus, corresponding secretary of the American Baptist Home Mission Society, Skinner gave him "a warm welcome" and explained to him that he had "a mixed congregation and church, but the colored people worship in the basement and furnish their own preacher." Tupper also noted that the estimated 350 colored members of the church were "divided" and that although "Dr. Skinner is planning and desirous that I should preach to them," it was unclear "how I shall succeed in obtaining their place of worship to hold meetings in, and to a certain extent act as their pastor." That Skinner did not have the ultimate vote in that matter, and that the issue was complex, was underscored in Tupper's next sentence: "Another thing is the opposition I shall receive from the white people."73

Tupper did not receive the use of the church basement for his labors but that may have been due to numerous factors other than "opposition from the white people." It could have been because of the "cleansing and whitewashing" problems earlier mentioned or to the stated "divided" nature of the church's colored members—or to their desire for more self-determination. The December 8, 1865, church minutes noted a request from them "to have as their pastor a Colored man sent out by a Society of Colored Brethren in the North." But an undeterred Tupper soon launched his work elsewhere in the city and guided it into the institution that eventually became a premiere educational venue for African-Americans: Shaw University. Moreover, the relationship between Skinner and Tupper remained a healthy one. In subsequent years Skinner would become a lecturer at Shaw and, when Tupper died in 1893, Skinner was one of the seven invited to pay tribute to the educational pioneer at the memorial service.  

The best news of Skinner's re-entry months came in November when "the greatest meeting [Skinner] ever witnessed" transpired in the church. The pent-up emotions and spiritual hunger of a war-shattered people showed itself in an unscheduled eight-week revival in which more than 220 professions of faith were registered. Skinner did most of the preaching for that meeting but soon Wake Forest president William M. Wingate began assisting him in the pulpit.

William M. Wingate

Memorial Baptist Church Collection," Raleigh, N. C: Wilmoth A Carter, Shaw University: A Monument to Educational Innovation (Raleigh, N. C: Shaw University, 1973) recorded a blunter version of the meeting of the two, saying only that Skinner "refused" Tupper's request. Tupper's own report of their meeting was more nuanced.

74 The text of Skinner's words at Tupper's funeral may be found in Sermons, 180-185.
75 Ibid., 354.
responsibilities on the weekends. Regardless of the preacher, each altar call saw not only the professions of faith but also grown men, women, and children kneeling, weeping, and seeking the comfort of the forgiveness and hope of the Savior.

But by year’s end the chaos and financial stress of ministry in a war-vitiating society brought Skinner to the breaking point. That became clear at the church meeting of January 5, 1866. Matters of church membership were customarily tended to as a first item of business at those meetings and those in attendance must have been disturbed when at that moment Mr. and Mrs. A. M. Lewis as well as Skinner and his wife requested “letters of dismissal” from the church. But the meeting proceeded until “there being no further business Bro. Skinner stated that he would like to make a statement to the church.” He then offered his resignation, giving as his reason that “he was embarrassed financially and he thought it was his duty to leave the ministry and try by all the means in his power to relieve himself from this embarrassment.” Some were opposed to accepting his resignation, but it finally was received “with deep regret” and with the request that he continue to fill the pulpit at his convenience until a successor could be found.76

The following month the deacons, who had been authorized to begin the search for a new pastor, reported that the American Baptist Home Missionary Society of New York had offered to give assistance to the church, but after much discussion, in which Skinner played a

76 The actual acceptance of Skinner’s resignation came in the form of a resolution: “Whereas this church has received with deep regret the resignation of our beloved Pastor Rev. Thomas E. Skinner

Resolved, that we reluctantly accept his resignation believing that his interests demand the course he has pursued. Resolved, that Bro. Skinner’s zeal and devotion in promoting the interests of the Cause [the Confederacy] and of this church are highly appreciated by us and our heartfelt thanks are hereby tendered him for the very acceptable manner in which for so long a time he has discharged his duties. Resolved, that though we sadly sunder the ties which have for years bound us together, our hearts will ever yearn in affection towards Bro. Skinner, and the welfare of himself and his family as an object in which the church will ever feel a lively interest, Resolved that Bro. Skinner be requested to fill our pulpit at his convenience until the selection of his successor.”

The depth of Skinner’s financial embarrassment may be revealed in a statement published nine years later. It reported that “during the war he had invested $200,000 in Confederate Bonds, which proved a total loss.” Christian Index, May 13, 1875.
significant role, the offer was declined. Regional pride almost certainly had something to do with that rejection; but when the group proceeded to conduct a nonbinding straw poll concerning their preferences for a new pastor, Skinner was their choice. He, however, declined to make a response that evening and, in puzzling fashion, there is no record of his ever officially accepting that call although he remained as the acting pastor of the church until his departure from the city almost two years later. The oddness of that arrangement only underscores the surreal atmosphere of life in the maelstrom of “the Lost Cause.” As the Biblical Recorder expressed it in February, 1866: “Confusion and uncertainty reign now ... the future holds out no promise of improvement, [and] no incentive of effort.”

In such dire circumstances it is often children who prove to be a rescuing power. And Skinner’s children did play a more than significant role during that grim 1866 season. On the joyous side of the ledger, his fourteen-year-old son, Thomas Halsey, professed his faith in Christ and was baptized in April of that year as one of a great number who responded during another well-received evangelistic meeting led by Skinner himself.

But during Thanksgiving week whatever joy the family knew was crushed by the death of Thomas and Annie’s ten-year-old daughter Emmie. For Annie, Emmie’s death meant that all of the five children she had birthed were then dead. Only her stepchildren, Sarah and Thomas Halsey, were still within her keeping. For Thomas, this was the sixth child lost in infancy or childhood.

How he himself as a pastor-theologian attempted to make sense of such losses can be intuited from his notes for a sermon entitled “Death of Infants.” He wrote that death’s inevitability was assured for all people because of sin, but as a comfort to bereaved parents he argued

77 Cited in Durso and Durso, The Story of Baptists, 118.
78 Sermons, 407.
for "the salvation of all little children." He contended that God's justice demanded it, God's mercy shown in the death of Christ demonstrated it, and Christ's gracious treatment of children endorsed it. Therefore, he bade grieving parents to 1) guard against excess of sorrow and 2) anticipate reunion and 3) let the death of a little child admonish everyone of his or her own death. However, surely more beneficial than any of Skinner's theologizing about the "death of infants" was the softened heart he must have developed from his too frequent pilgrimages to the graves of his own children.

One other death occurred that year for Skinner. In December he and his father sold their remaining lands on Harvey's Neck.79 The proceeds of the sale, $20,000, were paltry compared to their value just scant years before. But with the severing of those real-estate ties to Perquimans County the death of one way of life was complete and father and son were then even more closely bound to one another in memories of a verdant home that was forever past.

As 1866 dragged to its conclusion, T. H. Pritchard, then serving as pastor in Petersburg, Virginia, sent a pathos-filled letter to the church, requesting the still unpaid $100 for his 1863-64 services as interim pastor. The penniless church dutifully appointed a committee to secure the moneys, but the committee never reported. The only business transacted before a hurried adjournment of a February, 1867, church meeting was a collection to purchase enough coal to heat the frigid building. And in July the deacons issued a fresh plea to the congregation to respond to Skinner's financial plight. "He is now dependant [sic] upon his salary for the support of his family and is greatly embarrassed for want of money"

79 Perquimans County Book of Deeds HH, 292. Although that sale was transacted in 1867, its value may be seen in comparison to the real estate valuations of the 1860 census versus the census of 1870: "Improved farm acreage in Perquimans declined to 47,806 acres, an 8 percent drop from 1860. The cash value of farms dropped 48 percent, from $1,537,770 in 1860 to $796,648 in 1870. ... Lands fell in value from a range of $74.00 to $100 per acre to one tenth that amount" Alan D. Watson, Perquimans County: A Brief History (Raleigh: Division of Archives and History, 1987), 89.
they said, and urged the members “to give unmistakable evidence of their sympathy for him in his adversity, and a hearty cooperation in his efforts to establish true and vital Godliness in our community.” But, as of the church meeting of August 30, the committee charged to obtain cash responses to that appeal had no report to bring.

In such circumstances it cannot be wondered at that Skinner was more open than ever to relocate to a church less destitute than Raleigh. And his openess coincided with the search of a prestigious church far to the west, Nashville, Tennessee’s First Baptist Church. On September 26, 1867, a letter from Skinner was read to the church informing members that he had accepted the call of the Nashville church to be its pastor.

Apparently his resignation was accepted without discussion, but a motion was quickly made “not to get another pastor until the amt. due Bro. Skinner ($520.78) should be paid.” The motion passed, and in angry reaction to the loss of their pastor the deacons were also instructed to “cite the members who were indebted to the Pastor to appear at the next meeting and render reasons for their delinquency.” That “appearance” did not come to pass, but at the next meeting the deacons did report that they had collected nearly $260 and had promises for most of the remainder due Skinner. But they were ordered not to relent and were assured that their authorization to cite non-paying members was extended for as long as they saw fit.

80 Minutes, July 5, 1867.
81 Minutes, October 4, 1867. A resolution approved at that same church meeting declared the following: "Whereas, the resignation of the Pastor, Rev. T. E. Skinner having been accepted at a called meeting of the Church on Thursday evening, Sep. 26th, to take effect the 12th of Oct. 1867, the undersigned in the discharge of the duty assigned them, herewith submit the following as an expression of the feelings of the Brethren, in relation to the severing of that tie which has bound us very closely together as Pastor and People, for so many years, embracing perhaps, one of the most marked and important periods in the history of the Church since its formation more than a half century ago; and during which time our present house of worship was erected, many persons added to the membership upon a profession of faith, and by letter, and more than all the whole counsel of God has been faithfully delivered unto us; yes, under the ministry of our retiring Pastor, our heavenly Father hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad. Therefore,

Resolved, that we feel that Bro. Skinner has been the honored instrument in effecting much for the kingdom of Christ in this State; and we shall ever cherish the holiest recollection of that enlarged liberality, and earnest devotion to the services of our blessed Redeemer, which have characterized his pastorate of a duration of nearly twelve years.
Sadly, and significantly, the week after Skinner’s departure a sweeping revision of the church’s financial policies was initiated with a resolution that admitted the church’s “historic difficulty” in raising money for its expenses did “not arise so much from want of ability as from the necessity of a uniform and practicable system of collection. ...”

Resolved, that while we have been deprived of a wise Christian counselor and teacher whose labors have been so signally blessed to our upbuilding, we regret that our denomination also, in its various plans of operation in the State, has lost a most zealous and ardent supporter; the cause of Education and that of Missions, and also of Sabbath Schools always commended themselves to his heart and received his generous aid; and we feel assured that the Baptist brotherhood at large in North Carolina will join us in deploring the necessity that occasions the removal of our beloved Pastor from the State.

Resolved, that although nature cannot refuse emotions of sorrow, as we reflect that in the relation of Pastor, his loved voice will call us no more to duty, we still have cause for consolation, in the memory of his sterling virtues, of his kindness of heart, and of his deep love for the Brethren, and we bow in thankfulness to the great Head of the Church, for the bright example that He has enabled our Bro. to leave us in works of benevolence, and in the zeal which he has so constantly manifested for the promotion of the cause of Christ; and that we will pray that a wise and covenant-keeping God will have our Bro. and family in His tender care and keeping; and also that He will give him many souls to his ministry, in his new field of labor.

Resolved, that these resolutions be spread upon the Church book, and published in the Biblical Recorder, and that the Clerk be instructed to furnish a copy of the same to Bro. Skinner. Signed: P. F. Pescud, Jordan Womble, Jr., J. G. Williams, W. J. Palmer, J. N. Alford.”

82 Minutes, October 16, 1867; italics added for emphasis.
To Nashville and Beyond

If Skinner had hoped that his 1867 relocation to Nashville, Tennessee, would be an escape from the grimness of post-war realities, he was sadly mistaken. Nashville was even more financially prostrate than Raleigh, regardless of the church’s promised annual salary of $3,000. In addition to the decimated economy, the church in Nashville was also still reeling from a fifteen-year-long theological and ecclesiastical battle between its venerated longtime pastor, R. B. C. Howell (1801-68) and J. R. Graves, who at one time had been Howell’s close associate.

Howell’s ministry in Nashville had begun in 1835 when he had been deputized by the American Baptist Home Missionary Society to reestablish a Baptist witness in that western outpost that had been overtaken by the widespread anti-missions movement of that time and by Campbellism.\(^8^3\) Across the following fifteen years Howell admirably succeeded with both tasks, by leading a small congregation with no

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\(^8^3\) Campbellism, so named for its founders Thomas and Alexander Campbell (father and son respectively), was a biblicist reform movement which professed no creed but the New Testament and hence was most seductive to Baptists. See R. Paul Caudill, “Campbellism,” in *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists,* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1958), vol. 1, 228.
building and no community standing into a 322-member spiritual force that was “honored and respected by all of Nashville,” and by establishing the Baptist, a monthly multistate circulated journal which thoughtfully reimaged Baptists internally as well as with regional neighbors. In 1846 Howell employed J. R. Graves as an associate editor for that publication and two years later turned over its management to him. Feeling his work was done, Howell accepted the pastorate of the Second Baptist Church of Richmond, Virginia, in 1850.

Unfortunately, Graves proved to be a false friend who, after Howell’s departure, quickly turned the Baptist into a national trumpet for a theological and ecclesiastical aberration known as Landmarkism and launched a zealous campaign to overtake the fledgling Southern Baptist Convention with his Landmark teachings. That was a double blow to Howell, since Graves’ Landmark doctrines rejected the interchurch connectionalism Howell had championed, and because Howell was a prominent leader of the targeted, new convention, serving as its vice-president from 1846 to 1851 and then as its president from 1851 to 1859.

Fearing his life’s work was in jeopardy, R. B. C. Howell accepted the Nashville church’s urgent 1858 request to return as their pastor and, convinced that Graves’ megalomaniac schemes would soon demolish the Southern Baptist Convention, he also resigned its presidency in order to protect the convention and to devote his best energies to defeating Graves’ vicious personal and doctrinal attacks. The ensuing Baptist-


85 Graves’ Landmarkism taught the historical error of a succession of Baptists from New Testament times to the present and upon that false premise Graves contended that only assemblies of immersed believers (read Baptists) were valid churches and that all other religious groups were just societies, not true churches. Hence, the baptisms and ministers of others were not to be recognized nor were any but local church members to participate in a church’s communion observance. See W. Morgan Patterson, “Landmarkism,” in Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1958), vol. 1, 757, and for a much more thorough treatment see “J. R. Graves—Champion of Baptist High Churchism” in James E. Tull, Shapers of Baptist Thought (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1984), 129-152.
brawl—much of it conducted while the agonies of Civil War wracked the nation—including a much publicized church trial and expulsion of Graves (who was a member of Howell’s church!) and, as evidence of the popularity of Graves and his teachings, the expulsion of Howell’s church from the Nashville association and even from the Tennessee Baptist Convention.

Those were the stormy waters into which Thomas Skinner sailed when he accepted R. B. C. Howell’s personal selection of him to be his successor as the pastor of Nashville’s First Baptist Church in 1867. By that date Graves’ errors, in behavior as well as in doctrine, had been generally exposed but his following was still large in the area, in the city, and to some extent within the church itself. But Skinner, then a forty-two-year old, well-educated veteran pastor of a ‘city church,’ seemed admirably matched to the challenge.

However, if Skinner had anticipated the assistance of Howell’s counsel and support as he stepped into the legendary pastor’s shoes, he was rudely disappointed; only ten months after Skinner arrived in Nashville, R. B. C. Howell died. Skinner conducted the funeral, an occasion that powerfully documented the stature and continuing influence of Howell. Three other local pastors (of the city’s Methodist, Episcopal, and Presbyterian churches) as well as a Methodist bishop had roles in the service and the Nashville Banner noted the impressive multichurch mass choir that sang for the service and also reported that the procession to the cemetery was one of the longest ever witnessed in that city.

The war-and-strife-scarred Nashville church of 1867 had a membership of 230 all-white members, a number actually considerably smaller than the Raleigh church (Raleigh’s membership of 470 was reduced to 270 when its African-American members withdrew in

86 The sermon Skinner preached at Howell’s funeral is in Sermons, 186-192
87 May estimated that at his death Howell “was probably the best-loved and the most highly honored citizen of Nashville and Middle Tennessee.” May, The First Baptist Church of Nashville, 114, 115.
mid-1868). Skinner set about increasing that number with his usual evangelistic fervor, baptizing twenty-two persons and receiving forty-seven others into its membership in his first year. Forty-one more united in the following two years. But the same financial woes that had plagued the Raleigh church were also present in Nashville; the economics of a war-devastated city and region played havoc with the church’s finances. A debt of $4,700 owed for remodeling the church hovered ominously over the church and at the conclusion of Skinner’s first year with the church, more than $500 was owed to its treasurer for expenses he had personally paid on the church’s behalf.

However, as wearisome as those financial burdens were, the greater challenge for Skinner came when attacks on his character began to be heard in the summer of 1869. The nature of those slurs has not been preserved although it is not improbable that they were spawned by Graves or his forces. By September Skinner could no longer bear the attacks, and on the twenty-ninth of that month he submitted his resignation to the church. Lynn E. May, historian of the church, offered this synopsis of subsequent events:

Nine days later the committee appointed to consider the matter expressed to the church “in strong terms their entire confidence in the Christian character of Dr. Skinner and their cordial appreciation of his labors.” They agreed, however, “that under existing circumstances it was advisable that the resignation be accepted.” When it became apparent from the discussion following the report that many persons disagreed with their recommendation, the committee asked and received permission to study the matter further and report to the church.

On October 13 the committee reversed its original decision and recommended that “under the circumstances it is not expedient that the resignation be accepted” and that Skinner be asked to withdraw his resignation. The church unanimously adopted the report but Morton B. Howell [the son of R. B. C. Howell and the church’s clerk] then presented to the church a second letter of
resignation submitted by the pastor. Therein Skinner expressed appreciation for all the expressions of love and confidence in him as a person and as pastor of the church. "But," wrote he, "after careful consideration of the circumstances—most of which concern me personally to such a degree that they need, and indeed are not proper to be mentioned here—I have to request again that my resignation as pastor of the church be now accepted."

The congregation bowed to the wishes of the pastor by accepting his resignation effective November 1, 1869. The members also adopted resolutions commending his work as pastor and testifying to his Christian character both in and out of the pulpit. The church unanimously adopted additional resolutions offered by Morton B. Howell in an effort to exonerate further the pastor's name before the public:

Whereas, various discreditable rumors have been circulated in this community in regard to Rev. Dr. Skinner, the pastor of this church, and

Whereas, a close examination has shown that they were entirely without foundation, therefore

Resolved, That we here in this public and solemn manner, assert the falsity of these slanderous rumors, and in our belief in the entire innocence of our pastor.

Resolved, That we endorse the Christian character and uprightness of Dr. Skinner and here express our unabated confidence in him as a man, as a citizen, and as a Christian minister.

Available records do not clarify the specific charges against Skinner. Apparently he felt that even though they were false, the situation they had created called for his resignation in the best interest of the church. At the request of the deacons, however, Skinner continued to serve the church "as a temporary supply."

On January 12, 1870, three months after accepting his resignation, the church unanimously voted to recall him as pastor. A week later he accepted the call and thus became pastor a second time, serving ten more months.

On September 15 the church accepted his third and final resignation effective November 1, 1870, when he moved
to Georgia to become pastor of the First Baptist Church of Columbus.\(^{88}\)

The bright spots of Skinner’s tumultuous Nashville years likely were his selection to preach the annual sermon at the Southern Baptist Convention’s 1868 meeting in Baltimore, Maryland, and his election as a trustee of the new Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, whose birth he had long encouraged and financially underwritten.

Also during the Nashville years other births were celebrated—and a wedding! The wedding was that of Thomas’ daughter Sarah, born to him and his first wife, Ann Eliza, just prior to their departure to New York City; Sarah married Samuel Snow during the week of Christmas, 1869. Her wedding was conveniently sandwiched between the birth of Eliza Mary in the summer of 1868 and John Ludlow born in the fall of 1870.

At some unknown date during the Nashville years, Thomas’ father returned to North Carolina and to the home of his other son, Charles Worth Skinner, Jr. John Moore wrote that Skinner “was at the house of his elder son, who bore his name, when the summons came for his soul to take its flight. Down there close by the fair waters of the Albemarle Sound ... he ... breathed his last”\(^{89}\) on May 15, 1871. He was buried in the cemetery of the Bethel Church where his faith had found its first home. The scriptural and fitting inscription on his tombstone reads: “He was a good man and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith.”

Thus, in a very real sense Thomas and Annie were beginning again as they moved from Nashville to Columbus, Georgia. Thomas’ father was no...
longer living with them, Sarah had married, and fifteen-year-old Thomas Halsey had begun his studies at Wake Forest. So, with their two preschoolers, Thomas and Annie headed south into Georgia and a new life.

Unfortunately, Columbus, Georgia, was not a place agreeable to Annie. Although Thomas quickly set about to increase the church’s membership—and by September, 1871, he had made good progress—Annie’s health declined in quality so markedly that when he was offered the pulpit of the First Baptist Church of Athens, Georgia, in July, 1872, he quickly accepted the invitation. But before departing he led the church to take a progressive step in financial stewardship. In March, 1872, the Columbus church began to receive an offering each Sunday during the eleven o’clock worship service. Giving became an act of weekly worship rather than the collection of monthly dues.

Athens, the new home for the Skinners, was the home of the University of Georgia, making it a most congenial fit for a man of Thomas’ tastes and abilities. A writer of the day described it as being a “refined and highly cultivated and healthy city.” The local Baptists’ appreciation for education may even be evidenced by the fact that their frame meetinghouse stood on the university campus from the church’s organization in 1830 until 1860 when, as the Raleigh Baptists had done in 1859, they built a new (off-campus) building. Again like the Raleigh church, members had installed state-of-the-art gas lighting. Thomas was not to be denied the privilege of ministry in a “new” church—even if it was not the one he had built! Or so it seemed.

90 In an author-less volume “compiled for Christian Index,” it is said: “His [Skinner’s] connection with that church [Columbus] continued two years, only, for the climate proving unhealthy for his wife, he accepted the call to Athens . . . ” History of the Baptist Denomination in Georgia: with Biographical Compendium and Portrait Gallery of Baptist Ministers and Other Georgia Baptists (Atlanta, Georgia: Jas. P. Harrison & Co., 1881), 482, hereinafter cited as History of the Baptist Denomination in Georgia. Curiously, in a Christian Index article published five years earlier Annie’s health was cited as the reason for their departure from Nashville, not Columbus, but that was surely a conflation of the two moves since other reasons for the Skinners’ removal from Nashville are of historical record. Christian Index, May 13, 1875.
91 130th Anniversary (1829-1959) Booklet, First Baptist Church of Columbus, Georgia, 1959, 15.
92 Christian Index, May 13, 1875.
Upon arrival he discovered the new building had not been built as well as it should have been and therefore a good deal of his labors were spent in tending to facility dilemmas and even to serious talk about erecting a completely new building.\textsuperscript{93} Reconstruction-era economics delayed that project for another twenty-five years, however.

Personally, the Skinners were delighted when another child was born to them in Athens. In memory of Thomas' father who had died the previous year, they proudly named the little boy Charles Worth Skinner. All too soon, however, it became obvious the child had difficulties. The precise nature of his maladies is not a matter of record but eventually he was committed to the care of North Carolina's Dix Hill Hospital in Raleigh, where he died of epileptic convulsions in 1918.\textsuperscript{94}

The full extent of Charles' eventual challenges was happily unknown at that stage, however. Life continued in the Skinner household with three small children—and a very busy father. For, in addition to his Southern Seminary trustee duties, Thomas accepted a similar responsibility at Mercer College in Macon, Georgia, and a term as the president of Georgia Baptists' State Board of Missions.

The latter involvement was as natural as breath for him and as personal as his friendship with Matthew Yates. Indeed, when Yates had returned to America for a second furlough in 1870 the two men had again scheduled time together, two weeks in Columbus, Georgia. Yates had by then completed twenty-five plus years of service in China

\textsuperscript{93} "Rev. T.E. Skinner, D.D., of Athens, Georgia, is about to set on foot the enterprise of building a fine Baptist house of worship in that city." \textit{Christian Index}, March 5, 1874.

\textsuperscript{94} The facts of Charles Worth's life are difficult to establish. Even the date for his birth inscribed on his tombstone (1868) is almost certainly an error, failing as it does to concur with census records and genealogical searches. His death certificate showed no birth date but declared his age at death to be forty-six years. That age comports with census data and genealogical research; it also offers a fitting explanation for the honorific name given him the year after his grandfather's death. The 1868 tombstone birth date remains an obvious contradiction but it may be explained by the fact that by 1918 there were no family members living in the Raleigh area to supervise the monument's inscription.

The Federal Census of 1880 indicated that Charles was still living with his family in Raleigh, and he may have continued in the home until his mother's health began to fail. But at some point previous to her death in 1903 he became a "non-indigent" patient (meaning he was not a ward of the state; his family paid for his care) at Dix Hill State Hospital in Raleigh.


and his reputation as both a linguist and an expert on Chinese affairs had grown so impressively that he was actually on his way to confer with President U. S. Grant about Chinese matters when he visited with Skinner. Although there is no knowledge of the assuredly wide-ranging nature of their conversations, the host did leave a record of how the two men parted. Skinner took his guest to the Columbus train station, saw him safely on board, and bade him farewell. But as the train pulled away from the station, “I walked along by the moving [train] car, clasping his hand, unwilling to let go, unable to hold on....”95 It was the last time the two men saw each other.

Something of the pathos and depth of that friendship can be felt by reading a sermon Skinner preached five years later at the Baptist Missionary Convention in Atlanta and that was subsequently published in its entirety by Georgia’s Christian Index. He used as his text Acts 28:28: “Be it known therefore to you that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it.” From that text he developed only two points (a great improvement over the five points of his introductory sermon in Raleigh): first, that the Origin of Missions is Divine (“the salvation of God is sent”) and second, that the End of Missions is Complete Success (“they will hear it”). The flavor of the whole can be savored in its epigrammatic opening paragraph:

The spread of the Gospel is no little part of the Gospel itself. If this be true then the neglect of the spread of the Gospel is the neglect of the Gospel itself. And to oppose in theory and in practice the spread of the Gospel is to oppose the Gospel itself. Then the matter is a very serious one.96

A reputation for such trenchant sermonic words prompted one Georgian observer to declare that “Rev. T. E. Skinner ... possesses one of the most superior and highly cultivated minds among Southern

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95 Taylor, Story of Yates, 163, 172.
96 Christian Index, November 18, 1875.
Baptists.”\textsuperscript{97} That likely also explains why in 1875 the Baptists of Macon, Georgia, the location of Georgia Baptist’s Mercer College, sought him as their pastor. Persuaded that their desire for his ministry was evidence of God’s call, Skinner moved once again, to Macon, in December, 1875.

One of the serendipitous aspects of the Macon years came in the person of the church’s twenty-three-year-old treasurer, a schoolteacher named Robert J. Willingham. Educator though he was, young Willingham’s gifts for ministry were abundant and obvious; accordingly, the church licensed and ordained him to the ministry during Skinner’s pastorate. When Willingham was elected corresponding secretary of the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention thirteen years later, no one was happier for or prouder of the young missionary statesman than Thomas Skinner.

In Macon, as in his previous pastorates, Skinner gave high priority to evangelism and in the forty-five months he served the Macon church, 250 new members were added to its rolls, justifying one writer’s assessment that “his pastorate at Macon was eminently a successful one.”\textsuperscript{98} To achieve those remarkable results Skinner placed great emphasis upon evangelistic meetings and also used the Sunday school to great effect; by the time he left Macon the church boasted the largest Baptist Sunday school enrollment (350) within the state of Georgia.

But once again the post-war economic factors in Macon were as harsh as for other southern cities, and that was reflected in the church’s receipts. Skinner had been employed at an annual salary of $3,000 in

\textsuperscript{97} Christian Index, May 13, 1875.

\textsuperscript{98} History of the Baptist Denomination in Georgia, 482.
1875 but by December, 1877, that figure had been reduced to $2,100, and in August, 1878, notice was given that even that sum would be reduced another $300 in 1879. Finally, in June, 1879, the moderator was instructed to “notify Dr. Skinner that we cannot offer him $1,800 per annum after the present year, nor can we guarantee him any definite amount.” On July 30, 1879, Skinner resigned the Macon church.

Home Again, Home Again

It was surely known to Skinner that the trustees of Wake Forest College had just elected the Rev. T. H. Pritchard as the new president of the school. Pritchard had not only served as the ‘interim’ pastor of the Raleigh Church during Skinner’s Civil War absence but also as its pastor during the twelve years of Skinner’s Tennessee-Georgia sojourn. Pritchard’s resignation from the Raleigh pastorate was submitted on July 20, 1879. Skinner’s Macon resignation followed ten days later and on August 4 the Raleigh church voted to (re)call Thomas E. Skinner as its pastor for an annual salary of $2,000, a sum $500 less than that paid Pritchard.100 Skinner immediately accepted and by September 1 he and his family were residents once again of Raleigh, moving into a residence across the street to the north of the church, a parsonage that had been secured during Pritchard’s pastorate.

The church, although no longer having its previous numerous African-American members, had nearly doubled in size after the Skinner’s departure. By then there were 502 members, 323 of female and 179 male. The Sunday school, which Skinner had started during his first pastorate, had grown so impressively that a separate building, called the Infant Class Room, had been built to house it. And many of the same lay leaders with whom he worked well in days past were still active—men like Pescud, Lewis, and Briggs. But there was also a new albeit well-known face among the church’s leadership: W. W. Holden. He was a member of the committee that informed Skinner of the church’s call; but more significantly, he was one of the most controversial personalities within the entire state of North Carolina.

Since the mid 1840s William Woods Holden had been an influential Raleigh newspaper publisher and, as a strong Unionist, had opposed

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100 Minutes, August 4, 1879. Six candidates were nominated; Skinner received 109 of the total 150 votes cast, the second-highest candidate receiving only twenty-six votes. His salary, though not specified in the minutes of that meeting, was revealed in the Minutes of January 2, 1880.
secession until it became inevitable. Once the war had begun he was critical of the manner in which Jefferson Davis prosecuted it and, presciently, when he foresaw the impending calamities certain to befall a defeated South, his was one of the first public voices to advocate a negotiated truce with the Union. At the war’s end President Andrew Johnson appointed him to be the state’s Reconstruction governor and in a subsequent election Holden won the job via the ballot. But his actions—not least of all his opposition to the Ku Klux Klan—had been so unpopular the legislature had impeached and then thrown him out of office.\textsuperscript{101}

As his impeachment trial neared, Holden sought membership in Raleigh’s Baptist Church, although he had earlier been a Methodist and later a renter of a pew at Christ Church, Episcopal. When he stood before the Baptists seeking admission to the Raleigh church, newspaper accounts said he confessed: “I have done a great deal of wrong in my life but I will, with Heaven’s help, endeavor to do better hereafter.” The press made much of that confession and of Holden’s ‘dying-thief’ conversion. The \textit{New York Herald} said “Governor Holden goes to impeachment as if he were going to be hanged,” and the \textit{Nation} cynically commented that “no record of any similar preparation for impeachment is, we believe, to be found in the books.” Nonetheless, Holden was baptized into the Baptist fold in

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\caption{William Woods Holden}
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\textsuperscript{101} Holden’s career is summarized and its study assisted in the article and helpful bibliography prepared about Holden by Horace W. Raper, “Holden, William Woods” in Powell, \textit{Dictionary}, vol. 3, 169-171. The minutes of the church give the impression Holden was consistently a “Skinner man,” often being the one who initiated vacations for Skinner and other actions that appear to be pastor-friendly. He was also the one who moved, on November 5, 1880, that the church trustees be “requested to wait on his Excellency the governor and respectfully urge him not to rebuild the State Privies in that part of Union Square fronting this Church.” His motion was approved; the governor chose not to rebuild any privies on Union Square.
although there were those “who wished the water to be boiling when he was baptized,” or for him to be baptized “in concentrated lye rather than water.” But by 1874 he had earned the members’ confidence enough to serve on the church’s finance committee; and during Skinner’s pastorate, he often served as a trustee and as moderator of the church’s meetings, led in public prayer, and chaired several significant committees. In 1881 he was even elected as one of the church’s seven deacons.

In that very year, however the man who lived next door to the church, and who was one of Holden’s greatest embarrassments, also joined the church—George W. Swepson. Swepson’s name was as (in)famous as was Holden’s; North Carolinians had even coined the word ‘Swepsonize’ to indicate engaging in shady political/business shenanigans. In his reminiscences Skinner devoted several pages to the story of the man’s conversion—a story that’s interesting “born-again” literature for today’s reader, but not nearly as electrifying as it would have been to those who knew him only as a man whose great entrepreneurial skills and success had given him grandiose dreams of becoming another Cornelius Vanderbilt. That eventually led to his collusion with a carpetbagger lobbyist, as well as with legislators who looked the other way, in bilking North Carolina’s coffers for millions

102 William C. Harris, William Woods Holden: Firebrand of North Carolina Politics (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987) 303, provides the press’ response to Holden’s entrance into the church; Harris is also the source for the “lye” request; but S. A. Ashe in his article about Holden in his Biographical History of North Carolina, vol. 3, 205, credits the same source, “Aunt Abby,” for the “boiling water” request. Ashe goes on to say that Aunt Abby later changed her mind about Holden, his personal kindnesses to her and others erasing her earlier dislike.

to build railroads which were never constructed. He was never indicted for that offense; too many persons of power were implicated in his dealings for the prosecution to go forward. It was widely rumored that he had also gunned down one of his political enemies, although he was never tried for that offense. Many assumed that because he and Holden were political allies, Holden was privy to and had profited from Swepson’s unsavory dealings. Although that was shown to be untrue, Holden’s already smeared reputation was certainly not helped by George Swepson’s nefarious schemes and deeds.

By 1881 Swepson was already in failing health, but in that year he was baptized by Skinner. The two had known each other for years; the Swepson’s residence was located immediately south of the church’s building and Swepson’s saintly wife, Virginia, was among the four women selected by the church to become its first deaconesses in 1874. Moreover, Swepson (along with two other investors) was the one who, in 1866, had purchased the 1,300-acre Skinner plantation in Perquimans County. Hence, his conversion was the fruit of decades of acquaintance and conversations with Skinner and of the ardent prayers of his wife. George Swepson lived for only two years after his entrance into the church, but his presence with Holden in the same church was evidence not only of the complexity that was First Baptist Church but also of the diplomatic skills of Thomas Skinner who (unlike Republicans Holden and Swepson) was known to be “a Democrat of ‘the most straitest sect,’ devoted to its principles and zealous for its success.” But to Skinner’s credit in that situation as in others “he never permitted his partisanship to invade his church or affect his regard for men of all parties.”

Thankfully, not every baptism in these days was politically charged. Some were loaded with far-reaching implications in other areas. One such baptism came as the result of a profession of faith made without fanfare at

104 “The Late Dr. Skinner,” News & Observer, April 7, 1905.
a Thursday night prayer meeting in November, 1880. Colonel J. M. Heck’s eighteen-year-old daughter, Fannie, made her profession of faith that night and, on December 5, Thomas Skinner baptized Fannie Exile Scudder Heck. Heck’s name would become immortalized among North Carolina Baptists as the leader of a new venture in women’s missionary advocacy called the North Carolina Central Committee on Missions, the predecessor of the state’s Woman’s Missionary Union. Fannie Heck was its first and longtime president; she also eventually served for several years as the president of the WMU of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Another baptism of far-reaching missionary effect came as part of the same 1881 revival in which George Swepson professed his faith in Christ. Sallie Bailey, a thirteen-year-old playmate of Thomas’ daughter Eliza professed her faith at that time. Sallie, like Eliza, was also a preacher’s kid; her father was C. T. Bailey, the editor of the *Biblical Recorder*. Four years after her baptism she was enlisted by Fannie Heck, who lived just down the street from her, to serve as the corresponding secretary of the new North Carolina Central Committee on Missions. In doing so Heck also asked
the bright seventeen-year-old to suggest a motto (which was accepted) for the group; Sallie chose “For ye serve the Lord Christ.” After Sallie’s marriage to local attorney Wesley N. Jones she became known in North Carolina Baptist circles as Mrs. W. N. (Sallie Bailey) Jones, the stalwart junior ally of Fannie Heck in developing the Central Committee into the present North Carolina Woman’s Missionary Union. Upon Fannie Heck’s death in 1915, Sallie Bailey Jones carried that work forward until 1936. And encouraging those two in each step as that work was begun was Annie Skinner, Thomas’ wife, who was among the twelve members of that original 1886 Central Committee and remained an ardent advocate of its work until her death in 1903.105

But as always the less than thrilling bricks and mortar dimension of church life also claimed the returned pastor’s attention. When he had moved from Raleigh in 1867 the “grand old edifice,” was already in need of repairs but the financial destitution brought on by the war and its aftermath meant that those repairs and subsequent maintenance needs had usually been done piecemeal, inadequately, or not at all. By 1881, they had reached crisis proportion and their urgency was further exacerbated by the nearly uninhabitable condition of the “Infant Class” room [its replacement accommodated up to 300 children seated in tiers]106 that had been hastily built less than a decade earlier on the church’s south lawn (and—with their permission—in part on a portion of the Swepson property). Attempting to address that backlog of deferred maintenance, in 1881 the church sought a structural evaluation of the building by its original builder, Thomas Coates, and was told $3,100 would be necessary to correct the problems. That sum, in addition to the cost of replacing the Infant Class building, precipitated a good deal of anxiety and frustration

105 Annie Skinner’s membership on the original committee was noted by Jones in her report to the centennial Baptist State Convention, “In Woman’s Work,” *The Growth of One Hundred Years*, 134. See also Foy Johnson Farmer, *Sallie Bailey Jones* (Raleigh: Woman’s Missionary Union of North Carolina, 1949).

within the church. To resolve the matter the brethren chose to do an unheard of—and nearly scandalous—thing: invite the ladies to attend the church conference! But even the ladies couldn’t perform the miraculous. Progress eked on at a discouraging pace.

One evidence of that was that the church meeting minutes of that period were filled with a great number of church discipline matters. Even in a day when overheard profanity, or the mere suggestion of drunkenness, or being absent from three consecutive church meetings, would require one’s public repentance lest the church’s fellowship be withdrawn, the volume of such disciplinary actions was notable.

Also, there was contention about the church’s name. Previous to the war there had been but one Baptist church in the city and hence it had typically been identified simply as Raleigh Baptist Church. But the establishment of a separate church for the Negroes in 1868 meant that the city then had the Raleigh (Colored) Baptist Church; and in 1874 the Swain Street (later to be called Tabernacle Baptist) Church had been established as a mission of the Raleigh Baptist Church—and strong interest was being shown in establishing still another mission church on the western edge of the city. As a result, the church had begun referring often to itself as the Salisbury Street Baptist Church. When one brother understandably moved that the church’s name be officially changed to the Salisbury Street Baptist Church, a discussion ensued that was so spirited the deacons were asked to resolve the matter. In February, 1883, they recommended that the name be regularized as The (First) Raleigh Baptist Church—and that was agreed to—but at the next month’s meeting the order of the words was changed and the parentheses removed. “The First Baptist Church of Raleigh” thus became the approved and enduring name. Such discussions and their attendant haggling were typical of that

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107 For a brief period in the 1830s following the church’s division and reconstitution, it was known as The New Raleigh Baptist Church, but that designation was sloughed off when the “other” Baptist congregation expired. See Briggs, The Struggles and Fruits of Faith, 36.
period when real progress appeared to be so dishearteningly slow.

In fact, according to North Carolina historian William Powell, "The decade of the 1880s was one of disappointment for most North Carolinians. Recovery from the losses of the war and Reconstruction was not as quick or as complete as they had anticipated. Political leadership was not as vigorous or as forward-looking as it should have been." And there were those within the First Baptist flock who apparently began to think the same concerning their pastoral leadership.

108 Powell, 421.
The Funeral of the Whole Concern

There were several indicators of church unrest during those days. For one thing, there was unhappiness about the condition of the parsonage and with wearying frequency the feasibility of selling it came before the church. There was also unrest about the aging lay leadership of the church, which Skinner attempted to address by persuading the deacons to recommend both the addition of younger men to the diaconate and a more lively "social" life for the membership. However, neither of those rejuvenating proposals garnered membership support. But two other issues won disproportionate disapproval, and both at least marginally involved Skinner's beloved Wake Forest.

In 1880 Skinner accepted a place on Wake Forest's board of trustees, a responsibility he had previously filled from 1858 to 1868. As the school's spring commencement and trustee meeting approached, Skinner invited Elder F. M. Jordan, a fellow trustee from the southwestern area of the state, to preach in his pulpit on the Sunday following the board meeting. The morning sermon went well enough but during the afternoon Elder Jordan learned "that some of the members had been drinking, card-playing, dancing and cutting up generally, and also that the pastor had been sending his daughter to a dancing school." That scandalized the visiting divine, so during the evening service he "preached the funeral of the whole concern and exposed the amusements of the day." He even "said that it would not do me any good to hear a man preach who would send his daughter to a dancing school." Skinner was seated only inches behind him on the rostrum. Nothing was recorded as to his reaction to that
denunciation, but Jordan recorded that as he was preaching he saw *Biblical Recorder* editor C. T. Bailey “nearly splitting his sides laughing.” He also said that “the brethren complimented me highly on the sermon,” and he claimed, with apparent satisfaction, that the next morning Editor Bailey smilingly told him: “Well, I’ll give you your diploma; you’ll not preach here any more in ten years.”

What the invited pulpit guest may have lacked in good manners was obviously considered to be of less importance to some members than a statement printed in the church’s *Manual* as Standing Resolution Number Six:

Resolved, That the members of this church are earnestly requested not to provide for, take part in, or by any means encourage dancing or card-playing, as such practices are harmful to godliness in their associations and tendencies, and an offense to many good brethren, whom we would not willingly grieve.

Having no evidence to verify Jordan’s charge that Skinner was actually sending Eliza to a dancing school and thereby acting contrary to the church rules, Elder Johnson’s gossipy report of the response he received may best be understood only as one indication of some dissatisfaction with Skinner by some members in June, 1884.

In fairness to Skinner, however, it is essential to record that only a month earlier the church’s beloved senior deacon and Skinner’s close friend, Peter F. Pescud, had died, leaving the pastor and the congregation at low ebb. And just as sorrowfully, at some date in that same year

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109 F. M. Jordan, *Life and Labors of Elder F. M. Jordan: for fifty years a preacher of the Gospel among North Carolina Baptists* (Raleigh: Edwards & Broughton, 1899), 244. It may well be that Jordan’s report should be taken as the bragadocio of a small-fry who took a cheap shot and that Bailey’s reported laughter and comment were actually more directed at Jordan’s poor taste than as an approval of his actions. Skinner’s relationship with Bailey does not seem to have been a strained one. But, unless Jordan was a liar, the high compliments he received from the brethren must still be reckoned with.

110 *Manual of the First Baptist Church*, 21. That resolution remained a volatile subject within the church, occasioning a formal review of it (and of those transgressing it) in the church meetings of May-June of 1889. The resolution remained in force.
Skinner's oldest son, thirty-two-year-old Thomas Halsey Skinner, died. He was the child born while Skinner was in seminary in New York City. After receiving degrees from Wake Forest and the University of Maryland Thomas Halsey had married and had begun a medical practice in New York state. It is impossible to imagine the pride Skinner had taken in that young man or the grief that his early death brought to the heart of his fifty-nine-year-old father. Actually, in light of the loss of yet another child, it is conceivable that Thomas Skinner might have vowed that his fifteen-year-old daughter’s life was going to be more carefree. Therefore it is not unimaginable that Skinner did flout a resolution that had been entered into the church’s governing documents only ten years before. No less a local icon than W. W. Vass had earlier flouted another church resolution against attending the circus and had essentially killed that rule by exposing its inanity through his humorous self-defense before the church.\footnote{Sermons, 368-70.}

But there was another event in the mid-1880s that gives more serious evidence of coolness toward Skinner. It stemmed—at least in part—from an Endowment Fund pledge of $1,000 he made in the church’s name to Wake Forest President Charles Taylor in November, 1883 during the Baptist State Convention. When he reported his action to the church meeting of January 4, 1884, there was no recorded negative reaction; it was unanimously approved. But as events unfolded that commitment seems to have opened a Pandora’s box of ill will.

Outwardly and according to the minutes, 1884 passed amicably (the
run-in with Elder Jordan doesn’t appear in those records) and the church actually birthed another new church that year (Fayetteville Street Baptist Church, the eventual progenitor of Pullen Memorial) with local banker and church clerk John T. Pullen at the helm. There was, however, little evidence of anything else moving forward, and in 1885 the signs of a troubled church arose in dangerous number.

The annual spring revival meeting closed after only ten days with no visible results. In May’s church meeting one brother explained, in revealing candor, that the intent of a motion he had proposed was “to be a request to all who may have had any differences in the church to forgive all the wrong of the past and that we all live in harmony and peace.” In July’s meeting contention arose over the unauthorized ordering of $35-worth of church offering envelopes, and a committee was appointed to discern who the culprit was. That meeting’s minutes concluded with the terse sentence: “A leave of absence was granted the pastor indefinitely.” In the meeting of October 2, there was concern about how far behind the church was falling on Skinner’s salary, and on October 30 Jordan Womble, Jr., read a letter from the still-absent pastor, although its contents were not recorded. Finally, when the body convened on December 4, they were given the resignations of W. W. Holden as Deacon, J. C. Marcom as purchasing committee member and, by means of another letter, the resignation of Thomas Skinner as pastor.

Interestingly, the group chose to postpone action on the resignations of Holden and Marcom, but promptly accepted the pastor’s resignation by a vote of thirty-nine to thirty-four, a margin that was as slim as the total number of those voting was alarming. Predictably, a called meeting was convened one week later and that meeting was filled with all manner of motions, substitute motions, and circuitous maneuverings. The result was that rather than rescind the seventy-three members’ action at the previous meeting, a ballot was taken regarding the church’s next pastor and Skinner received 116 of the 163 ballots that were cast.
Immediately following that re-calling of Skinner, T. H. Briggs stood to read a letter from Skinner asking the brethren what he was to do concerning the $1,000 pledge he had made in the church’s name to Wake Forest. Candidly acknowledging that he made it “without the consultation of or even the knowledge of the church,” he went on to say that he had promptly informed the church of the pledge and assured them he would honor it personally if the church chose not to approve his action. The pledge, he reminded them, was accepted by a unanimous vote as a church obligation, but in the ensuing twenty-three months the church had paid barely a tithe of the pledge, forcing Skinner to retire it with funds borrowed by him at 8 percent interest, an expense which he embarrassingly admitted he could no longer bear. After the letter was read, Brother E. G. Harrell gave to the body a receipt from Skinner for moneys given to Skinner to retire the Wake Forest obligation.

The minutes are maddeningly unclear, but it appeared that in some manner Skinner’s pledge of $1,000 lay near the root of the entire year’s difficulties and that some individual(s) or group had, on the church’s behalf, finally “paid off” the trouble-causing obligation.

It is impossible to discern the true root of contention, and surely there were roots not discernible from the minutes. But it is difficult to believe the problem was simply financial support for Wake Forest, since J. M. Heck and John Williams, members of the church, had recently given handsome sums for the construction of a library building (dubbed Heck-Williams Library) on the campus and W. W. Vass had made a personal pledge of $500 toward that same endowment effort. The generosity of these men typified the widespread support among Baptists for Wake Forest’s advancement.

It was more likely that Skinner’s unauthorized commitment of the church was the sore point. Perhaps the incident was an indicator that

112 Minutes, December 11, 1885.
he had become too autocratic in his leadership and that newer church members, who had no memories of his longtime service, were especially displeased by his unilateral actions. But it is also plausible that his inbred impulse to give—even when he had no money and it was other persons’ money he was “giving”—was finally misfiring. Naively assuming that persons of good faith would support a good man devoted to a good cause, Skinner dangerously depleted his reservoir of goodwill. But a vote to recall Skinner plus repayment of moneys to retire the obligation were enough to reinstate him in the office of pastor; thus when the January, 1886, church meeting convened, he was present and acted as moderator. But the fellowship of the church had received a mortal blow.

Running as a subtext to all of that unrest was almost certainly the regrettable but not unusual factor of interchurch rivalry. Swain Street Baptist Church (briefly also known as Second Baptist and ultimately as Tabernacle Baptist Church) was “a shining star” on a meteoric rise during that period. The church had been organized with the assistance of First Baptist in 1872 during the pastorate of Pritchard. A modest building was soon built and then the church’s founding pastor, J. D. Hufham, enlisted none other than Elder F. M. Jordan to lead a revival for the new church in 1875—five years previous to Skinner’s unfortunate invitation to Jordan to speak from the First Baptist pulpit. The meeting went on for nine weeks and yielded hundreds of new converts, but it left Johnson paralyzed by exhaustion, and Hufham soon suffered from typhoid fever. However, the meeting itself was indicative of the explosive growth that characterized the new church. By the turn of the century it was the largest church in Wake County with 1,000 plus members and over 1,600 enrolled in its Sunday school.

Thomas Skinner returned to Raleigh just as the church’s amazing growth was capturing the admiration of all. Given the competitive nature of Baptists, it is difficult not to believe that there were those at First Baptist who were displeased that the upstart Swain Street Church
was proving to be more attractive than First Church—indeed, the Swain Street church soon had to build a larger sanctuary and in 1887 a partition was removed to expand that new sanctuary to accommodate 1,200. Additionally, many within First Church unquestionably felt the indicting weight of J. D. Hufham’s conjecture that much of the phenomenal growth of the new church was because “rich carpets, fine dresses, and staring congregations” had discouraged “the poor from attending other city churches.”

Perhaps in response to those church-growth pressures, in February, 1876, Skinner arranged for the well-known Irish evangelist George Needham to conduct a revival meeting but it appeared that the evangelist—and his “trained musician” (an exciting novelty for the Raleigh church)—was, if anything, too successful. A glowing eight-page review of the meeting authored by church clerk Jordan Womble, Jr., was entered into the minutes as an indication of the degree of excitement the Irishman and his evangelistic singer brought to the church and city. The report’s length and euphoria were completely unprecedented. Eight years later, when Skinner wrote the preface to his memoirs, he completed only four paragraphs before he wrote – in what may be taken as a sadder-but-wiser admonition – these words: “Here is a hint to pastors to … do without any kind of an evangelist (professional), working with your own people.” He then offered for review the twenty-nine sermons from the “most solemn and quiet” revival of 1883 which he himself had led—without any professional evangelist or “trained singer.”

113 K. Todd Johnson and Elizabeth Reid Murray, *Wake, Capital County of North Carolina: Reconstruction to 1920* (Raleigh, N.C.: Wake County, 2008), vol. 2, 83. Johnson and Murray use the term “shining star” to describe the Swain Street church and convincingly support it from associational minutes and newspaper reports of the time. Their assessment was also corroborated by an 1887 Raleigh newspaper listing of the membership in Raleigh’s churches (as reported by the respective pastors). Separating the membership figures according to “white” and “colored” churches, the item placed the seventy-five-year-old First Baptist Church at the top of the “white” list with the most members (550), but the fifteen-year-old upstart Second (Swain Street) Baptist Church was close behind with 475. First Methodist had 530, but no other “white” church in the city exceeded 275 members. *State Chronicle*, May 26, 1887.

114 *Sermons*, 3. Long before the beginning of the series of meetings Skinner selected each night’s sermon text and subject and had developed a brief outline, but in the course of the meeting he waited until each night’s service
The final scenes in Skinner’s long pastoral relationship with the church came only weeks after the evangelist and his singer left town. In the meeting of April 2 the church’s indebtedness was revealed to be $3,946, of which $120 was unpaid 1883 pastor’s salary, $335 was unpaid 1885 pastor’s salary, and $500 was past due 1886 pastor’s salary. The pastor himself, however, was not present due to an illness that befell him during the revival meeting, and he had sent a letter saying he “must have early recreation” [meaning “vacation”?] and that he would arrange for and pay those who would preach in his absence “as he’d usually done.”115 But his request was laid on the table, a parliamentary maneuver that effectively killed his request! Understandably, Skinner asked for a special meeting of the church for the following Thursday, April 8, 1886.

Illustrative of how wonderfully bittersweet a pastor’s life can be, on the afternoon of April 8, Skinner walked three blocks south from the church to 220 South Dawson Street, to the home of Deacon E. G. Harrell, to join “the large party of pretty, bright, and well-dressed little children” who had been invited to celebrate the sixth birthday of Harrell’s son, John. The newspaper account reported, “After Rev. Dr. Skinner had invoked a blessing, Master Harrell, standing at the head of the table, said:

“My little friends, one and all,
I’m very glad to have you call;
And now with friendship true and hearty,
I bid you welcome to my party.”116

From the charm of that scene Skinner then walked back up to the church and into the lower floor room that was then called “The Lecture Room,” and spoke his own, very different and more solemn recitation was over before he returned to his study to write the next evening’s sermon. The sermons all had sturdy, plain titles such as “You May be Saved,” “Mockers at Sin,” “Faith, As Trust in Christ,” and “The work of the Spirit,” but such unpretentious works produced what he described as a most solemn and quiet meeting, in which the believers were greatly blessed and sinners saved.” The text of one of those sermons, “God’s Delight in Mercy,” is reprinted within the appendixes of this work.

115 Minutes, April 2, 1886.
116 News & Observer, April 9, 1886.
to those assembled for the called meeting. It was a letter terminating his
career as a pastor.

Dear Brethren:

When I was re-called to the pastorate of this church, last
December, I accepted the same because a great many of the
members urged me to do so, on the ground that if I did not the
church would be so divided and disturbed as to seriously injure
the cause of Christ.

I then hoped to prevent further dissension and restore peace
and harmony; I am now satisfied that this cannot be done, and
therefore I can no longer hope to accomplish the work that I so
much desired, and which I have so long felt was needed.

I therefore resign the pastorate of this church.

This is irrevocable and I shall expect the same to go into
effect immediately.

Offering the hand of fellowship to you all, I pray God’s
blessings upon you.

Thos. E. Skinner

He then also asked for letters of dismissal from the church’s
membership rolls for himself and his family. The body deferred action
on the resignation and the letters of dismissal, but according to the
_Biblical Recorder_, several offered “speeches of a highly complimentary
kind” prior to adjournment.  

The following Monday night, April 12, the resignation was accepted
without any recorded protest, the requested letters were granted, and a
delicately worded resolution of appreciation was adopted and ordered to
be sent to the _Biblical Recorder_. But more than a year later the efforts
to retire the church’s financial obligations to him were still ongoing.  

117 _Biblical Recorder_, April 14, 1886.

118 The text of that resolution appears as Appendix B. It may possibly be a further indication of Skinner’s loss
of favor that the church clerk did not copy the resolution into the church book; had it not been inserted into the
book years later by J. C. Marcom—as part of the church’s first attempt to provide a chronological history of
the church—the resolution would not even be a part of the church records. The clerk did send it to the _Biblical
Recorder_, and it was printed there April 28, 1886.

119 The moneys due Skinner were eventually rolled into other obligations of the church and a special collections
committee was charged to raise the money to retire all the debts. On November 4, 1887, the “Special Collections
Committee reported that the note in bank due Dr. Skinner had been paid.”
Skinner’s days as pastor of First Baptist Church of Raleigh were then ended—and it appeared that everyone understood he was retiring, not just resigning, and retiring not with celebrative joy but with a whispered thank you from some and the door held open by many others. Being as human as anyone, during those days he probably pondered the meaning of the Psalmist (37:25) who declared that he had once been young and now was old, “yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken.” In a true sense Skinner had been forsaken and there was a natural temptation to bitterness. But it was refused and he miraculously turned that disappointing conclusion into an occasion for personal growth and an opportunity for ministry in other avenues. As confirmation of that, some twenty years later one eulogized: “It may seem to the uninformed a great pity that he retired so long before his days were spent. But those who have known him will say that his last years were not less worthy, not less effective than his earlier and more active years.”

That assessment would have been impossible had Skinner chosen to nurse the sting of his encouraged retirement or to have spurned the church. Thankfully, he did neither, although his better response to the event was worked out over several years. First, although the church membership letters which he requested and received were apparently quietly returned to the church soon thereafter, there is no record of his ever joining another church or of re-joining First Baptist. Then, as an indication of his return to the church’s worship and meetings, his name reappears in the records in November, 1888 when he was granted the privilege of not attending all of the church’s business meetings. Thereafter he was frequently called upon to lead in prayer or to serve as a messenger to various associational or state Baptist meetings. By 1892 he was occasionally supplying the First Baptist pulpit for the vacationing pastor,

Notably, after assisting for three months in the effort to pay Skinner, Governor Holden served notice that he was leaving the church to join one that would allow “open communion.” He soon joined Edenton Street Methodist Church, from whence he was buried on March 3, 1892.

120 “His Pilgrimage Ended,” Biblical Recorder, April 12, 1905.
Dr. J. W. Carter. And when he wrote his memoirs in 1894, he had naught but affirmation for the church, referring to it as “my old first love, the First Baptist Church of Raleigh,” which remained “the pride of my life, and the object of my solicitude and prayers.” His spirit had proven to be too big for pettiness.

But freed from the pressures of pastoral ministry and from living in the much-discussed parsonage, Skinner finally built, in 1889, a home of his own on an empty lot at the corner of Wilmington and Edenton streets in downtown Raleigh. It stood directly across the street, to the north, from Christ Episcopal Church, and admirably fulfilled the local newspaper’s report that it would be “a beautiful residence.”

121 Sermons, 372.
122 Ibid., 370.
123 The complete news item said: “Dr. Thomas E. Skinner will shortly erect a beautiful residence on the vacant lot on the corner of Wilmington and Edenton streets. The Chronicle believes that this is the best lot in Raleigh.
In those years he also likely began assembling materials for a projected biography of his friend, Matthew Yates. In the volume about Yates that was eventually authored by Charles Taylor, Wake Forest president, he said that "a citizen of Raleigh, NC, well competent for the task, had undertaken to prepare a memoir of the honored missionary ... but his professional engagements became so engrossing that he had to relinquish the effort." There can be little doubt that Skinner was the unnamed Raleigh resident for he is quoted extensively throughout the volume, and few others would have been so "well competent for the task." But, it is also likely that the "engagements" Taylor referred to included Skinner's preparation of his own reminiscences, which form the basis for this present study.

Best of all Skinner's freedom meant that he was then able to offer his considerable talents to the needs of Wake Forest College. And according to the college historian he became "one of the greatest and ablest of the friends of Wake Forest," serving as a trustee for the last twenty-four years of his life, 1880-1904. From 1880 until 1886 he served as president of the board, and according to one source he served in that capacity again in the years 1895-1903.

His contributions to the school were numerous and valuable. When he had returned to Raleigh in 1879 he had not been in the city two full days before he traveled with 150 other city leaders by special train to T. H. Pritchard's presidential inauguration and even delivered a primary address on that occasion. Three years later Skinner was president of the board that sought a new president upon Pritchard's resignation. Though Skinner's preference for the presidency was the school's Latin professor, and we are glad that it is to be adorned with a nice residence." State Chronicle, March 22, 1889. Court records following Skinner's death indicated that at some point after Skinner's retirement significant sums of money were bequeathed to the Skinner family from the estate of Annie Ludlow Skinner's father. Presumably these funds paid for the Edenton Street residence.

124 Taylor, Story of Yates the Missionary, 6.
125 Paschal, History of Wake Forest, vol. 1, 630. Wake Forest records reviewed by C. Edward Morris verify only Skinner's membership on the board and not his presidency for the 1895-1903 period. Regardless, over thirty-four cumulative years of service were given by him to the school.
Charles E. Taylor, it not until two years later that Taylor was given that presidential assignment, which he faithfully executed until 1905. His was the vision for the college to have professional schools of law and medicine, but it was able professors like young William Louis Potet and trustee leaders like Thomas Skinner who nurtured the early growth of that vision. Taylor and Skinner were, however, more than co-laborers; they were dear friends. Others recalled how the two would often be seen in the afternoons on the president's porch: "together they would sit and watch the boys at their athletic sports, telling many a delightful anecdote and laughing heartily."126 In a final gesture of generosity Skinner gave his library, a collection of nearly 2,000 volumes—many of them rare and valuable—to the college.

He also became increasingly involved in the long-overdue establishment of the Baptist Female University (Meredith College)—a project whose worthiness he had championed for more than thirty years. At the institution's initial convocation he was appropriately designated as the one to recount the many past attempts to accomplish what the new school then embodied. When the school's first trustees meeting was held in February, 1890 (in the rebuilt "Infant Class" room he had seen completed just before his Raleigh resignation), one of the first items of business was to elect Thomas Skinner as the school's financial agent. Over his protests, they insisted upon paying him for his services ($1,500 annually), and charged him "to solicit and collect funds for building,

endowment and other purposes.”

Skinner took up the task with the same zeal displayed thirty-five years earlier when he had raised funds for the construction of the Raleigh church building, but soon realized that the physical demands of the assignment were too great for him. In November he resigned, giving the school a gift of $1,000, which was far in excess of the salary he had received during his eight-months employment.

In truth, his greatest contribution to the school may actually have come through the encouragement he gave to others in their giving. Mrs. George W. Swepson, for example, upon her death in May, 1901, bequeathed $25,000 to the college—the school’s second and at that time largest estate gift.

The young preachers at Shaw University were also the recipients of Skinner’s wisdom and wit. During his retirement years he taught there for a while, although it is unclear whether he was a guest lecturer, as some sources indicate, or as Paschal claims, “he occupied the chair of Biblical Interpretation.”

Two other known benefactors of his personal mentoring were Josiah Bailey and John E. White. A bright young Baptist leader during the 1890s, White served as the North Carolina Baptist Convention’s corresponding secretary for five years before accepting the pastorate of Atlanta’s Second Baptist Church in 1901. In a tribute at the time of Skinner’s death, he thanked God “that it was my lot to be in Raleigh from 1895 to 1901, when [Dr. Skinner] had time to give to two such young fellows as the editor of the Recorder and myself were.” After White’s relocation to Atlanta, he invited Skinner to visit and “give his old friends in Georgia a chance to see him again.” A seventy-seven-year-old

127 Johnson, Meredith College, 30.
128 Ibid., 98-99.
129 Paschal, “Thomas Edward Skinner,” Wake Forest Student, vol. 46, no. 4, 199. “His Pilgrimage Ended,” Biblical Recorder, April 12, 1905, 8, hereinafter cited as “His Pilgrimage Ended”, said: “For a time he conducted the Chair of Biblical Theology in Shaw University.” Unfortunately, only one Shaw lecture, “The Bible,” was preserved from that academic venture; it was included in Skinner’s memoirs.
Skinner accepted the invitation and attended the Georgia Baptist Convention with White but endeared himself as much to White’s children as to anyone else. “There was grief about the table yesterday,” White wrote in response to Skinner’s death, “when I told the children in my home that he was gone and would not come to see us anymore.”

The young Recorder editor referred to by White was Josiah W. Bailey (son of C. T. Bailey and brother of Sallie Bailey Jones) who would eventually become the state’s U. S. senator from 1931 to 1946. Bailey echoed White’s sentiments, writing that Skinner had “demonstrated how genial, how devoted, how full of grace, helpfulness and sunshine, how firm in faith and full of fellowship with a new generation an old man may be.”

Surely the fact that young persons were still a part of Skinner’s immediate family played some part in that investment in youth. When Skinner retired he was the grandfather of two—Edward (fourteen years old) and Sarah (eleven), who lived with their parents Sarah and Samuel Snow in Asheville—and he also had two children of his own still living in his home—Eliza (seventeen) and Ludlow (sixteen).

Six years later, in February, 1892, Eliza wed George Badger McGehee, a young man whose family was highly respected in the state’s governmental and legal circles. Three children were born to that union, and because the McGehees continued to live in Raleigh, Thomas and Annie Skinner enjoyed frequent contact with those grandchildren.

130 Biblical Recorder, April 19, 1905.
131 “His Pilgrimage Ended.”
Eleven months after Eliza’s wedding, Skinner’s youngest son Ludlow married Octavia Winder in Raleigh’s Christ Church, Episcopal. The Winder family was prominent in Raleigh’s social and cultural life and Ludlow fit easily within their circle, having established a promising career as a cotton buyer/broker with offices on Raleigh’s main commercial thoroughfare, Fayetteville Street. Ludlow and Octavia soon settled in a home on North Person Street, and on Valentine’s Day of 1897 welcomed their firstborn, John Cox Winder Skinner. For Annie and Thomas Skinner, living only blocks away in the house they had built at 103 E. Edenton Street, the enchantment of a grand old age had arrived.

Never one to overlook an opportunity to enjoy life, Thomas celebrated his seventy-fourth birthday, April 29, 1899, by throwing for himself a party. He invited such a distinguished group of guests to a “sumptuous dinner” in his home that even the News & Observer published a report, written by Josiah W. Bailey, about the event. “Seeing him on the streets yesterday, briskly walking, a fine light in his eye, stalwart of frame and jovial of heart,” the article expressed surprise that “the beloved preacher and honored citizen” of the city was actually seventy-four years of age. But the invited guests, four clergy (Dr. Carter, Dr. Simms, Rev. Mr. Cade, Rev. Mr. Leavitt) and four laymen (T. H. Briggs, John T. Pullen, W. W. Vass, J. W. Bailey) presented testimonials about his life and times that humorously underlined that in fact he had “as far as deeds go, lived longer than Methuselah!” Bailey’s account concluded with the following encomium:

Dr. Skinner is still a young man. Not even his frame is old; and surely his mind is as fresh as in his prime and his soul is in the morning of God’s love. As a minister his life has been a signal blessing, not only to our city, but to his denomination throughout the South. He is well-known at the North also. His face is still toward the sun-rise. His delight in doing good knows no waning. He loves a young man and his joy is in standing by young men wherever he finds them. In his heart there are the impulses of ever-
renewing life. The readers of the News and Observer will join us in congratulating him upon this happy birthday; and throughout our city, in the homes where his presence has so often been a benediction, many will be the hearty wishes for his health and happiness. God bless the grand old man.  

But life’s golden hours could not be forever extended and as the nineteenth century gave way to the twentieth, Mrs. Skinner’s health began to decline precipitously. Her infirmities became so pronounced that eventually she could not leave the home and finally, at dawn on Thursday, February 19, 1903, Ann Stuart Ludlow Skinner died.

The following day at noon her casket was preceded down the center aisle of a crowded First Baptist Church by the church’s new pastor, Dr. W. C. Tyree. Awaiting him on the platform were seven other clergymen who led the worshipers in remembering Annie’s “brave, beautiful and unselfish life” and in recalling the assurances of God from Psalm 90 and portions of 1 Corinthians 15. At the Oakwood Cemetery gravesite the rector of Christ Church read the committal service and family and friends drew consolation “as the grave was filled to the sound of sweet songs.”

Annie and Thomas Skinner had been married forty-eight years, ten months, and eleven days. But barely twenty-four hours after her interment, the enormity of her loss would be swallowed up in an even greater sadness—a sadness that was the sorest of the many soul-trying trials faced by the irrepressible Thomas Skinner.

132 News & Observer, April 30.
Murder on Main Street

At some time in the afternoon of the Saturday following his mother’s Friday funeral, Ludlow Skinner made his way to Raleigh’s new post office building on Fayetteville Street. On the front steps of the building he encountered another well-known young man, a lawyer named Ernest Haywood, whose family roots in Raleigh reached to its founding soil. The two talked—argued, actually—and then engaged in what amounted to a pushing contest before Ludlow turned and walked down the steps away from Haywood. But as he reached the street and turned around for a possible final word, Ernest Haywood pulled a pistol and shot him. Ludlow Skinner staggered forward a step or two and fell dead in the middle of Fayetteville Street.

Saturday afternoon pedestrians on Raleigh’s main street were incredulous, confused by what they had just seen—or did they actually see what they thought they saw? A deputy sheriff ran to the scene, called Haywood’s name, and the young lawyer promptly surrendered his gun, saying, “Of course.” As the lawman led him away, others scooped up Ludlow’s body and carried it into Johnson’s Drug Store, summoning his wife Octavia. She arrived in moments and upon seeing her husband’s bloody, dead body she added to the pathos of the already tragic scene by uttering “one awful, mild, shriek.”

The next morning’s (Sunday) headlines of Raleigh’s News & Observer announced in boldest type: “LUDLOW SKINNER KILLED BY ERNEST HAYWOOD: Shot to Death on Fayetteville Street in Broad Daylight: He Died Immediately—Haywood Refuses to Make Any Statement Whatever.” The article provided such details as the reporter could ascertain by press time—although several of them were later challenged in court by Haywood’s attorneys. On page sixteen of that Sunday edition a brief editorial appeared with the title, “A Terrible Tragedy.” It said:
The city of Raleigh was shocked and stunned yesterday by the terrible tragedy that occurred on its principal street, in which one of the first lawyers of the city shot and killed one of its first young business men. Both belong to leading and influential families, both had a host of friends, and both had common friendships and common interests and common associations.

It is a dark tragedy that has carried gloom into many homes and will carry trouble and pain into more homes when the secret of the tragedy is unfolded in the courts. Of the causes that led up to the death of a popular young man at the hands of a man standing among the most successful lawyers in the city, it is not for us to speak. The tragedy is too awful almost for realization, much less for analyzing the cause that produced it.134

The prediction that additional homes would experience “trouble and pain” when “the secret of the tragedy is unfolded” was as close as Raleigh’s News & Observer managed to get to the story behind the story. But a reporter from the Charlotte Observer did not face the political or monetary restraints of those in Raleigh, and he told the story no one else would.135 His was the stuff of twenty-first century tabloids—and because its details unquestionably played some motivating role in the deadly altercation, “inquiring minds” deserve to learn the story he told.

Ludlow Skinner’s wife, Octavia, had a sister, Gertrude, who was said by many to be the most beautiful woman in North Carolina. She had married the only son of Rufus Tucker, one of Raleigh’s wealthiest citizens. Gertrude and William became the parents of two daughters but when the girls were still quite young William died, making Gertrude a very young and very wealthy widow, a wealth she promptly began to squander during an extended two-year tour of Europe. Upon her return to Raleigh, Ernest Haywood became the manager of her estate. However, the relationship between the two quickly became more personal than professional, and their

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134 News & Observer, February 22, 1903.
135 The following account summarizes the Charlotte Observer story and was based upon Nell Styron, Fall of the House of Hinsdale (Raleigh: Privately published, 1986), 8-11. Although Ernest Haywood filed legal documents denying the story’s allegations, few gave credence to Haywood’s denials.
travels together became common knowledge. When an unaccounted-for infant son appeared in Gertrude’s home, she explained that she and Ernest Haywood had been secretly wed—on occasion she even signed her name as Mrs. Ernest Haywood. Haywood himself, however, denied any such thing and refused to acknowledge the boy as his own.

Matters came to a head shortly after Gertrude’s daughters approached Haywood on the street one day and asked him to buy some shoes for them. He gave them $5 and sent them away. When Octavia Skinner heard how her sister’s daughters had been so dismissively treated by Haywood she sent a furious letter of rebuke—and his $5—back to him. A return letter from Haywood to Octavia apparently became the last straw for thirty-two-year-old Ludlow Skinner—whose fiery frame of mind was not difficult to imagine if the Charlotte newspaper’s reconstruction was correct. The questionable activities of his sister-in-law with a prominent lawyer had become a family embarrassment and a cause for angry correspondence involving his own wife. So, on the day after his mother’s funeral, Ludlow Skinner put a revolver in his hip pocket and went downtown to see Ernest Haywood—and was killed while his gun was still in his pocket, by a lawyer who was also carrying a pistol and who was an excellent marksman—Ludlow Skinner’s death certificate indicated that Haywood’s single bullet penetrated Ludlow’s aorta and both lungs.

Ten defense attorneys were employed by Ernest Haywood for the two-week trial which finally convened eight months later. This blue-ribbon legal team was able to exclude the racy Charlotte Observer allegations and to highlight the fact that Skinner had a gun in his possession. They also provided witnesses that portrayed Ludlow as the provocateur of the violence and constructed a scenario in which Haywood fired his gun only after it became clear Ludlow was reaching for his. Haywood was, they contended, acting only in self-defense. Their defense was effective; the
jury took only fifteen minutes to return a "Not Guilty" verdict.\textsuperscript{136}

Ludlow Skinner was buried, at age thirty-two, on February 23, 1903, in a grave next to his mother's. Ernest Haywood lived until 1946, his eighty-fourth year of life, practicing real estate law and living as a bachelor in what is now known as Raleigh’s historic Haywood Hall. He is buried in Raleigh’s Oakwood Cemetery, a stone’s throw from the grave of Ludlow Skinner.

As for Ludlow’s father, he had observed his seventy-eighth birthday waiting for the trial of his son’s murderer. There is no record of any birthday party that year. Nor is there any record of any word spoken by him during those months. There was an April 13, 1903 request, written in his own hand, to the clerk of the superior court, requesting that his son-in-law, George Badger McGehee, be appointed the administrator of Annie’s estate: “I do not think I am physically able to undertake the duties of administration,”\textsuperscript{137} he wrote.

Shortly after the trial’s stunning conclusion, Skinner contracted pneumonia and journeyed to Southern Pines, N. C., to recuperate; from there he sought seclusion in the mountainous, western North Carolina town of Fletcher, in the home of his eldest daughter, Sarah.\textsuperscript{138}

He did not return to Raleigh until mid-March of 1905 when the \textit{Biblical Recorder} marveled that he walked the city’s streets and returned the greetings of his hundreds of friends “with the enthusiasm of a young man,” giving indication “in neither his carriage nor his conversations” of his age or sorrows. Even though “the shock of a fearful bereavement prostrated him for a time,” it was clear he had returned to the city “with a heart of grace for all the world,” and as “the stoutest, heartiest, and happiest man at eighty that we have known.” Young Josiah Bailey

\textsuperscript{136} The judge for the trial, who was considered by some to favor the defendant, commended the jury immediately after its verdict was read, saying: “The court thinks that you have discharged your duty and found exactly the verdict which the court would have found if it had been in your place.” \textit{News & Observer}, October 15, 1903.


\textsuperscript{138} “Dr. Skinner Dead,” \textit{News & Observer}, April 7, 1905.
lavished his praise on him, certain that Skinner, by his spirit and in appearance had “taught us all how to grow old.”

His widowed daughter-in-law, Octavia, was still living in the city with her eight-year-old son, John. Eliza and her husband George and their children had also continued to live in Raleigh, but the city Thomas and Annie Skinner had called home for fifty years was different in many ways. It was not the same town. Its population had quadrupled; its limits greatly enlarged since the days when log cabins were in evidence around Union Square. So much had changed—and thankfully, much was better. If self-deprecation did not afflict Skinner, he surely noted with some satisfaction that some of the city’s best improvements bore his own firm signature. Not least of all there was the thriving Baptist Female University one block to the east of his home and just two blocks to the west there was the still impressive “grand old edifice.”

On Sunday, April 2, 1905, he arose, dressed, and walked those two blocks down Edenton Street to attend worship at his old First Church. It was Communion Sunday, and Dr. Tyree was wise and kind enough to invite “the grand old man” to speak to a congregation then composed of many new faces. He made his way to the front of the sanctuary and standing before the communion table, he spoke his last words to them, concluding appropriately with a benediction: “God bless you, God bless you all.”

That afternoon a chill fell upon him; Monday he was taken to Rex Hospital suffering from pneumonia. Eliza recognized the gravity of the situation and summoned her out-of-town husband and half-sister Sarah to hurry to Raleigh. But her father’s condition continued to worsen by the hour; deep in the night hours of Wednesday he rallied enough to ask that “How Firm a Foundation” be sung to him. Shortly thereafter, at 1:45 a.m. on Thursday, April 6, he died, his eightieth birthday denied him by just 23 days.

139 “His Pilgrimage Ended.”
His body was prepared for burial and taken to First Baptist Church where it lay in state until the funeral services the following day. A steady stream of local citizens went to the church to pay their respects, and a profusion of floral sprays began to fill the front of the sanctuary. Black bunting was draped about the filled sanctuary when the service began at eleven o’clock.\textsuperscript{140}

Following an opening hymn the Reverend M. M. Marshall, rector of Christ Church, Episcopal, and Rev. J. C. Massee, each read selected scriptures and Dr. Tyree “led in fervent prayer, couched in beautiful language.” After the choir sang “How Firm a Foundation,” Dr. R. T. Vann,\textsuperscript{141} president of the Baptist Female University, offered the eulogy and sermon. He reviewed Skinner’s eventful life and ministry and recounted the story of his conversion and call to the ministry, noting the crucial roles played in them by an illiterate wheelwright and humble Negroes. Then he spoke of Skinner’s remarkable character: “people loved him,” he said, [for] “he was free from suspicion, envy and malice, and when struggling under a great blow, he held no enmity or malice.” Vann concluded with a comforting image: “I saw a tree blooming in his garden as I passed it today, and knowing that he had loved it, I was sorry the old soldier could not see, but I was comforted as I thought that now he is gazing on the Tree of Life.”\textsuperscript{142}

\textsuperscript{140} “Dr. T.E. Skinner’s Funeral,” News & Observer, April 5, 1905.

\textsuperscript{141} Richard Tillman Vann, twenty-six years younger than Skinner and the school’s second president (1900-1915), was highly regarded as both a scholar and preacher. In his eleventh year of life he lost both arms—the right just below the shoulder, the left just below the elbow—in a cane-mill accident. In his adulthood, “grown people seeing him for the first time stared like children as, with only the aid of a leather strap around his left arm, he opened the pulpit Bible to the right chapter and verse; wrote, sealed, and stamped a letter, stirred his coffee, opened a door, or sent a croquet ball through a difficult wicket.” Johnson, Meredith College, 91).

\textsuperscript{142} “He Rests in Peace,” News & Observer.
Thomas Skinner’s body was then taken to Oakwood, and laid to rest in the family plot. It remains a puzzlement that within that plot there is not one biblical symbol or citation graven on any of the headstones or upon its impressive obelisk. Nor is there any title or accomplishment registered there for the passerby to know who Thomas E. Skinner was other than some man whose life span was 1825-1905. It is as though he believed the record of his life had been written above and no words chiseled in stone would alter the record best known to God alone.
The Skinner Family Burial Plot, Oakwood Cemetery, Raleigh, N.C.

The five headstones on the left of the obelisk are of the infants and minor children of the Skinners. The four headstones at the bottom of the photo are (left to right) son Charles, mother-in-law Ludlow, Mrs. (Annie) Skinner, son Ludlow. Dr. Skinner’s headstone stands to the right of the monument, flanked by that of his son-in-law George McGehee.

PHOTOS: DON KLINE
Conclusion and Evaluation

Who was Thomas Skinner? One described him as being “in person ... fine looking and handsome, exceedingly neat in his dress, elegant in his manners and social in his disposition.” The original description from which that was undoubtedly excerpted was much less reserved. Written in Skinner’s fiftieth year and published by the Charleston, S. C., News and Courier, there is this:

He is ... handsome in person, neat in his dress, elegant in his manners and eminently social in his disposition. Possessed of an unusual flow of animal spirits and pleasantness of humor, mingled with originality of conception and a frequent brilliancy of expression, he is a very agreeable companion. He is a good preacher, a capital pastor, a detester of hypocrisy and affectation, and a manly, frank, and generous-hearted man. He has energy enough for half a dozen men. ... With him Faith and Hope predominate, and he considers difficulties as things only to be overcome.

Extant photos, and even Skinner’s own words, reveal the fact that he wore a toupee for much of his adult life, dispensing with it only in his senior years. In the pulpit he was fluent, clear, and formal in manner. His description of the preaching of his soul-friend Matthew T. Yates may be best understood as a description of the goal toward which he himself strove in his own pulpit appearances.

His deportment in the pulpit was grave, self-possessed and devout, as became the man of God. ... None but the Chinese can ever tell how he preached; but we who know him can imagine how, as the sermon expanded in its delivery, the predominant qualities of the preacher became very marked; the clear ringing voice, which never faltered for the fitting word, filled every part

143 History of the Baptist Denomination in Georgia, 482.
144 Christian Index, May 13, 1875.
145 Sermons, 360.
of the sanctuary; the ardor of the preacher rose higher and his action became more animated as the well worded sentences rolled forth; at last came the climax, an overwhelming burst of oratory, flashing with the colors of a gorgeous imagination, in which the truth rushed like a flaming thunderbolt into the sinner’s conscience, or fell with thrilling power upon the hearts of believers.146

Such descriptions help picture the man and perhaps something of his pulpit style but offer too little help in evaluating the man himself. Fortunately, Skinner himself provided a helpful window into that question by means of the story he told of the $600 he lost in his 1844 wager on the election of Henry Clay. He introduced that college-day anecdote by saying: “Impetuous and fearless—the bane of my life—I ... posted a challenge ... .”147 Those two words, impetuous and fearless, coming from Skinner’s own pen, offer helpful metaphors to understand the man. Although he termed those two traits as the bane of his life, they can also be assessed as blessings.

As to his being impetuous, Vann was even more blunt when, at Skinner’s funeral, he declared that “by nature he was hot-headed and impulsive.”148 That would certainly explain the behavior of a youngster who would destroy Wake Forest’s cornstalks rather than “hill” them and who would toss an overseer into an icy stream. It sheds light on his bold initiative in the purchase of Dr. Cook’s lot and on his decision to disregard the Wake Forest request that he desist in his plans to raise $20,000 on the same day the Baptist State Convention obtained $44,000 in pledges. It might also give understanding to the many times the grown man submitted his resignation to churches only to reconsider and extend his tenure. If more were known, it might even shed light on his abrupt departure from North Carolina to Europe in the heart of the Civil War.

147 Sermons, 336.
148 News & Observer, April 8, 1905. Vann went on to add, however, that Skinner “kept himself under control.”
And sadly, it may be wondered if Ludlow’s deadly confrontation with Ernest Haywood was not a tragic display of Thomas’ impetuosity—minus the father’s discipline and good fortune.

The positive aspect of that personality trait was that there was no boredom within the man’s company. The testimonies to his “liveliness” are many. Mary Lynch Johnson wrote of his “irrepressible sense of humor,” and “the merry twinkle in his eye, the lively wit of his tongue.” “More than once,” she recalled, “a tense situation in the Convention was eased by an apt remark from Dr. Skinner.”

Another instance of it was on the occasion of Wake Forest’s fiftieth anniversary in 1884. Skinner was asked to lead the invocation and to be one of the many speakers reviewing various aspects of the school’s progress. The event went on until 2:30 in the morning, but Thomas Skinner was far and away the humorous highlight of the long night. His assigned subject was “Manual Labor Days at Wake Forest,” and during that presentation he regaled those present with tales such as those earlier reported in this study. T. H. Pritchard was scheduled to follow Skinner with a remembrance of previous leaders of the college but Pritchard, then pastor in Wilmington, was unable to make travel connections so Skinner was asked to cover Pritchard’s topic. He did so, but his tribute to the college’s worthies—Wait, White, and Owen—was so laced with humor that the Biblical Recorder did not even attempt to retell it, admitting only that “The speech of the Doctor could not be reported.”

George W. Paschal, who knew Skinner well, believed his “chief gift was his big, healthy soul. ... He was entirely natural, free from cant, free from bigotry, ... [and he] had big human sympathies, greatly admired young people of both sexes, and never held that they were on the way to perdition because of their youthful pleasures.”

149 Johnson, History of Meredith, 30.
151 Paschal, Wake Forest Student, vol. 46, no. 4, 198.
of men, one admirer wrote, "who get close to you because of sheer good nature." Any reader of his reminiscences will quickly sense the consonance between those comments and the impression gained from his writing. Even a century after publication, one gets the sense in reading them that Thomas Skinner was a man who thoroughly enjoyed telling those tales and who would enjoy hearing others' tales – except that others' would be pale compared to his!

So impetuosity, both in its negative and its positive dress, fitted the man. But so did fearlessness. After all, he did strike out into New England with his wife and newborn child to seek a seminary education, and he did accept the pastorate of the struggling but strategic Raleigh church when Savannah's established gentility was available. And his relocations, whether to England or to Tennessee or to Georgia and once again to Raleigh, all suggest he was a man who was not afraid to make decisions or to risk unfavorable outcomes.

His courage was revealed in other ways as well. He was, for example, not afraid to change his mind, to grow and mature, and to develop his views as life and learning broadened. An example was his view of non-Baptists. Admittedly, his early exposure to the piety and learning of "New School" Presbyterians during his seminary days was foundational to that, but one can see during his career a move toward a Christian ecumenism that is noteworthy. Observing the damage done by the ecclesiastical arrogance of Graves' Landmarkism surely had its effect. However, in an 1875 sermon before Georgia's Baptist Missionary Convention, his Baptist banners were on display when he listed fifteen reasons why "infant baptism is an evil" which had to be countered by the scriptural (read Baptist) doctrine of immersion of believers. But, as Baptist as he remained in his personal convictions, twenty-eight years

152 "Dr. Skinner Dead," News & Observer, April 7, 1905.
later he included an infant-baptizing Episcopalian rector among those who participated in the burial of his wife; and on the occasion of his own funeral his daughters were quick to include one as a co-officiant. Others noted that growing ecumenism in him and commented upon it. The Raleigh News & Observer noted that people of "every creed" enjoyed his friendship and that though "he loved his church and believed in its tenets ... his love for mankind and his breadth [were] so marked that he was popular with all denominations." The same editorial, however, went on to admit candidly "that spirit of catholicity and love ... grew upon him as the lengthening shadows warned him that his long and useful pilgrimage was nearing its end ...." 153

Another facet of his fearlessness was his willingness to deal with the wrath of others. A prime example of this was in his lifelong opposition to the powerful liquor trade. That, of course, was a cause that was dear to Baptists of the time, but Skinner's bully pulpit across the street from the state's capitol gave him an enviable perch from which to herald the Baptist opposition. 154 But the greater expression of courage in that matter was the way in which he dealt with "the hypercritical temperance reformers", who, in Skinner's opinion, "somehow manage to render the cause ridiculous in the eyes of all save in those who will not drink communion wine if it has any alcohol in it." 155 He spared no words in skewering those who made the absurd claim that the wine Jesus made from water was actually unfermented grape juice. If the steward of the wedding feast pronounced Jesus' wine "good," Skinner asks, "Do you think he meant such slops as are handed around on communion days in some of our churches, and all this in order to gratify some religious cranks.” 156 Even though those

153 "The Late Dr. Skinner," News & Observer, April 7, 1905.
154 Sermons, 260-284 provides the text of an address, "Prohibitory Liquor Law," which he gave before the North Carolina General Assembly in January, 1881.
155 Sermons, 355.
156 Ibid., 356. Skinner's words were almost certainly directed at some within First Baptist Church who had been appalled when they learned of the counsel he had given a liquor dealer who, upon receiving Christ, determined to destroy his 3,000 gallon inventory of "fire water." Skinner told him that if his desire was to make a big show, then
words were written several years after Skinner's departure from the pastorate, it is difficult to believe that the fire within them was not also displayed when he dealt with "religious cranks" in his pews. There was a fearlessness about him.

Finally, Thomas Skinner was fearless regarding money. Recurrent within this study has been the wearying issue of his salary, whether being negotiated, raised, in arrears, increased or reduced. All of that disturbs today's reader, disgusted as they are with money-seeking religious hucksters, or disappointed to learn that churches did not "pay the preacher." It is disheartening to encounter an entire career plagued by such concerns.

Several things might be said about the nineteenth-century milieu that might clarify the matter. First, Skinner was not unique in his experience. Ministers were shamefully underpaid and economically abused in that era. The consciences of church members were sometimes assuaged by donations of farm or garden produce as compensation for cash, but there was a pervasive assumption that God's preachers were as free as God's grace.

Second, the majority of the years in which Skinner served churches were years of desperate poverty in the South. Today's readers have as much difficulty comprehending the economic devastation brought on by the Civil War as they do with the fanatical defense of slavery which birthed it. Obviously, some within the South quickly recovered and actually profited from the prostration of their fellows, but for the majority of citizens cash was nearly nonexistent. Unquestionably, the fact that Skinner was known to have wealth—at least at some periods of his life—was a deterrent to members' felt responsibility to "pay the preacher," but the fact remains that money was short throughout much of his pastoral career.157

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157 It exceeds this writer's research abilities to document Skinner's personal wealth at many points in his life. An
Finally, the underlying ethos of that day was one of annual calls for pastors. That dictated that whatever compensation the pastor was to receive had to be negotiated and raised annually, and it was precariously related to his popularity at the time of the negotiations. A tragically limiting short-term vision therefore doomed those churches to be forever raising money for “this year’s” pastor. Although the minutes of First Baptist, Raleigh, do not record an official annual “call” for Skinner, he always ministered in that thought-world. In fact, his immediate successor was called with that formal understanding but resigned within two years citing as his reason, along with the poor pay, his disagreement with the practice of an annual call.158

Men such as Thomas Skinner endured the birthing days of American institutional church life. They built churches, oftentimes almost single handedly, and grew them—at great personal cost—into maturity. Practical measures of budgets and proportional giving and tithing would soon come, but they were not present in the age of infancy. And it is a measure of Thomas Skinner’s fearlessness that in the days of small things he persisted in the ministry and in demanding respectful financial consideration from the church. Even if his concern regarding money opened him to being perceived as a money-lover, it is just as true that his fearless pressure advanced the day of better financial management and fairer compensation for pastors.

The final appearance of Thomas Skinner’s name in the minutes of First Baptist Church of Raleigh is found the week of his death. In broad, bold penmanship, carefully separated from the preceding paragraph, the church book records this succinct entry: “April 6th Dr. Thos E. Skinner died.” And then onto the facing page the clerk glued the typewriter-

attempt has been made to report what is documentable even when the numbers are confusing. That is probably exactly as Skinner would have had it, the left hand unaware of the right’s doings.

158 Minutes, March 2, 1888.
written minutes of the church conference held on the evening of April 7, 1905, only hours after Skinner’s funeral. The last two sentences of those minutes provide a grand, even if unwitting, closing for the story of this “gentleman of the old school.”

[The conference gives approval for the pastor] to attend the World Congress of Baptists which meets in London, July 12th, expenses of the trip not exceeding $280 to be paid by the church.

Conference approves the action of the Deacons in purchasing a floral design to be used at the funeral of our late brother Dr. Skinner.

The contrast between the handwritten notice found on the left-hand page, typical of Skinner’s lifetime, and the typewritten minutes on the facing right-hand page, vividly illustrates the great difference between the world “Tommie” Skinner entered and the world Dr. Thomas E. Skinner left. A great transformation had occurred, a transformation he himself had labored for, but it was infinitely more than the technological advance of typewriting. No, it was a transformation that is apparent only when one carefully ponderers the actual substance of those final two sentences.

The World Congress of Baptists referred to was in fact the first meeting of the Baptist World Alliance. That initial London meeting marked a coming-of-age event for Baptist identity and witness, establishing the denomination for the first time before the eyes of the world as a global body of Christian believers. A new era of Baptist ministry was being born. And the church Thomas Skinner loved most of all was to be present for the birth—and was paying the expenses for its pastor to participate in the nativity!

Contrast this World Congress of Baptists with the unimpressive gathering seventy-five years earlier when five-year-old Thomas Skinner’s father had traveled to Greenville, N. C., to establish with
thirteen others a State Baptist Convention. The difference between the homeliness of that Greenville meeting and the prestige of the London World Congress is remarkable! Yet the growth and maturity of Baptists from their hardscrabble, disdained origins to being a recognized global force for good is essentially Thomas E. Skinner's story, writ large.

It is not exaggeration to claim that he had "seen it from afar" and had spent his life pursuing that vision. To that end he became an educated leader, to that end he bought land, built churches, led others to Christ, preached missions, encouraged young people, gave generously, established schools, endured misunderstanding, befriended high and low, organized, walked lonesome valleys, and mastered poverty and wealth—investing his fourscore years in constructing durable bridges so that Baptists might walk across them into ever greater and global usefulness.

And that immense contribution was recognized, even if unwittingly, the last time his name appears in his church's minutes. Thomas Edward Skinner had done his work, and done it well—even if, for the moment, too few fully understood or applauded.

Impetuous he was, often to his own detriment. But he was also fearless, and the current generation is the benefactor of it. "Our late brother Dr. Skinner" more than deserved the floral display the deacons purchased for his funeral. The "gentleman of the old school" still deserves admiration and thanks.
APPENDIXES
APPENDIX A: RESOLUTION OF STATE CONVENTION IN 1867

At the Baptist State Convention meeting held shortly after Skinner’s 1867 resignation a statement of appreciation for Skinner and his father was approved by North Carolina Baptists:

"WHEREAS, Elder T. E. Skinner, of Raleigh, has resigned the pastorate of the church in that city with the view of removing to a neighboring State, and WHEREAS, He has been for many years an earnest, liberal and punctual member of this body, and a faithful supporter of all it objects, therefore, Resolved, That while we acknowledge the force of the considerations which have induced him to leave us, it is with sincere sorrow that we give him up. Resolved, That we will implore the Divine blessings upon him, so that he may be abundantly happy and useful in his new field of labor. Resolved, That we take pleasure in commending him to the brethren wherever his lot may be cast, as an able minister of the New Testament, a faithful pastor and an enlightened and zealous laborer in the Master’s cause. WHEREAS, It is understood that our esteemed and venerated brother Charles W. Skinner will accompany his son, and

WHEREAS, He has been a munificent friend of the Baptist denomination, and for a long time a devoted follower of Christ, therefore, Resolved, That we deeply regret the circumstances which induce his removal, and part from him with feelings of profound sorrow. Resolved, That we pray God’s benediction and grace may rest upon our aged friend and brother, and cause his lines to be cast in pleasant places in the evening of his days.

APPENDIX B: RESOLUTION UPON THOMAS SKINNER’S 1886 RESIGNATION

The *Biblical Recorder* of April 28, 1886, published the following as the “Report on the Committee on Dr. Skinner’s Resignation.” It varies from the handwritten version pasted (apparently by J. C. Marcom) onto page 230 of First Baptist Minutes Book (1888-1906) in two particulars. First, the church copy does not include the final resolution concerning the inclusion of the document within the records of the church. Second, the introductions of the two are different. The Minutes Book has only an introductory sentence: “Resolutions, expressive of the sense of the church of valuable service of Dr. Skinner as pastor were passed, and ordered spread upon the minutes.” However, the more complete copy, as published by the *Recorder*, includes a full paragraph introduction and the names of the committee. The complete text, with introduction and final resolution, as it appeared in the *Recorder* is as follows:

“Raleigh, N.C., First Baptist Church, April 12th, 1886—

“We, the committee appointed by the church to consider the resignation of Dr. Thos. E. Skinner, beg leave to report that, they recommend the acceptance of the same; for the reasons stated in his letter of resignation; and respectfully offer the following resolutions concerning Dr. Skinner, his pastorate and resignation, as suitable to be accepted and spread upon the records of the church. W. W. Vass, Chm’n, Alfred Williams, Jordan Womble, Leonard H. Adams, James C. Marcom, Eugene G. Harrell, Benj. B. Lewis, Jr.

*Whereas,* In the providence of God, the Rev. Dr. Thos. E. Skinner, having served as pastor of this church for three separate periods of time did, on the 8th inst tendered his resignation of the pastorate thereof, it is due alike to him and to ourselves that we should record our estimate of his long and valuable services to the cause of Christ in the position thus occupied by him. Therefore,

*Resolved,* That we point with gratitude to the progress of the church spiritually, to its increasing members, and to the widening sphere of influence and usefulness from December, 1855, the time at which Dr. Skinner commenced his first tenure as pastor and during the succeeding administration of Dr. Thos Pritchard, up to the close of the second and third pastorates of Dr. Skinner. While we do not attribute these results to any one man or body of men, who have been members of the church during this long period; yet under the love, care, and guidance of our adorable Redeemer we regard Dr. Skinner, as having been a very effective instrument in accomplishing the results referred to, and more especially in procuring the site on which the church edifice stands, and in the erection of the edifice.

*Resolved,* That as, in this retiring from the pastorate, we believe we have his prayers and best wishes for our continued prosperity as a church; so in turn, we can assure him that he will have our prayers for his future wellbeing and happiness.

*Resolved,* That knowing him long and well, we deem it proper to add, that Dr. Skinner has, during these years, adorned the doctrine of our Savior by a godly walk and pious
conversation; that he has been liberal in purse and wise and energetic in effort to advance the Redeemer’s Kingdom; that he has been thoughtful of the poor, and given largely to relieve their necessities, and that, as a minister of the Gospel, he has been able, eloquent, and instructive, thoroughly furnished as a theologian and firm and consistent in his attachment to our advocacy of Baptist principles and usages.

“Resolved, That these resolutions be entered upon the records of the church, and a copy thereof be sent Dr. Skinner.”
APPENDIX C: “GOD’S DELIGHT IN MERCY” (A SERMON FROM 1883)

“Who is a God like unto Thee, that pardoneth iniquity and passeth by transgression? He retaineth not His anger forever, because He delighteth in mercy.”—Micah vii: 18.

There is nothing more wonderful than God’s forbearance with sinners. Their foul deeds are all done in His sight, their vile utterances are all spoken in His hearing, and God sees that every imagination of the thoughts of man’s heart is only evil continually. All these things fill God with disgust, and loathing, and anger; and yet, though He has all power and could crush them as the moth in a moment, He spares them Nay! He does them good; causes His mercies to descend upon them every day, and when at last He does proceed to punish them for their transgressions, He does so with reluctance and regret, and it is with tears He pronounces the sentence of their doom.

How can you explain this? What is the cause of this wonderful forbearance and strange compassion?

1. It is God’s reluctance to inflict pain. He is called the blessed or happy God, whose delight is to diffuse happiness around Him. In His presence there is fullness of joy, at His right hand there are pleasures forever more. His tender mercies are over all His works. How reluctantly He lifts that hand which feeds us all, to smite us and cause us pain. He doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men.

2. Another reason why God is so reluctant to punish transgressors, is because of their relation to Him. Sinners though they are, they are His children. Show me the wickedest of all the men in the world and you will have found one of God’s children, whom He loves with infinite tenderness, for whom He has profound compassion, and whom He is slow to exclude from His mercies. He is a prodigal; he has tried His patience grievously and often provoked Him to anger, but yet he is His child. There is no greater grief, no more terrible calamity, no more unendurable shame than a wicked, profligate son. But what father is there who would not rather shelter than surrender to the officer his prodigal boy who came fleeing to his door for refuge. If we, being evil, would thus treat our wicked son, how much more would God!

This is the explanation of God’s wonderful forbearance: “It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not.”

The Scriptures make the very motive that prevails with God to pardon sinners, “Because he delighteth in mercy.” Did you ever think of that before—that the reason why God stands so long waiting on sinners—months and years preaching to them—is that He may be gracious to them in pardoning them, and, in that act, delight Himself? Not because you became penitent and alarmed, nor because you besought Him to pity you, nor because you trusted Him as your Saviour, while all these you ought and must do or you cannot be saved; still they are not the reasons why Christ will pardon and save you. The lost in hell thus cry out, but Christ does not hear them, because it would not delight Him to save them. Governors pardon criminals sometimes to please others more than themselves, but God does it chiefly to delight and gladden His own most merciful heart. Hence, the business of Christ (which is the pardoning and saving of
sinned) is called “the pleasure of the Lord.” Isa. liii: 10.

Now do not flatter and deceive yourself by the idle talk of other men being greater sinners than you are. He drowns as surely with his head one inch under water as he who, with a millstone around his neck, has sunk a hundred fathoms down. By one man sin entered into the world, and that man’s ruin was the work of one moment and of one sin. The terrible sentence of the Law reaches us all alike: “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them.” It is well to know this, and to face it, and not, like the foolish ostrich, hide your head in the bush when the hunters are at your heels.

But God’s mercy is offered to all—great and small sinners, if you please. A man, conscious of wickedness and not being a Christian, cannot see why he should ask divine favor? They are bound by evil, and have not strength to break away from it. If they were only Christians, and in the church, God would help them; but they are sinners, and out of the church, and they dare not go to God. He keeps no account at the Bank of Divine Mercy, and has no reason to think that his check will be honored if he presents it. What a mistake! There is not one human being, in or out of the church, who is not an object of Divine compassion and love—not the love of complacency, sinner, in which God is delighted because you are drawn to Him and made like Him. That is what you, by your disobedience and rebellion, refuse God. Nevertheless, He is doing all He can to bring that about also, that He may be filled with delight in saving your soul. God is love, and He will not wait for your turning before He loves you. God gave His Son to die for the world while it was yet in sin and at enmity to Him. God’s love precedes all reformation; and there is no man—not a drunkard, not a gambler, not a thief, nor a person filled full of all passions and lusts and appetites—who has not a right, this moment, here, in his heart, to look up and say, “God help me!” Your sinfulness is not a reason why you should keep away from God; and so the consciousness of your sin, and of the hatefulness of it, is the very reason you should go to God. God’s mercy exceeds your sin. Our faults are like a grain of sand beside the mountain of the mercies of God. Thy sins are like a spark of fire that falls into the ocean; it is quenched instantly. So are thy sins in the ocean of God’s mercy, abundant goodness and truth. There is not more water in the sea than there is mercy in God. Who can read the roll of pardoned sinners—Manasseh, Saul, Magdalene, Adam, etc—and fear that there is not mercy for him? It is the exaltation of His mercy that God has in His eye when He promises pardon to poor sinners. Which exalts God’s mercy most, the pardon of little or great sinners? Whose voice ought to be, and will be, highest and shrillest in the song of praise? Surely his to whom most has been forgiven. Why, sinner, do you not believe in God’s mercy? Is it that your sins discourage you? God’s mercy can pardon great sins, because they are great. David prayed (Psa.. xxv: 11): “For thy name’s sake, O Lord, pardon mine iniquity, for it is great.” The sea covers great rocks as well as lesser sands.

Dear hearers, you cannot too much believe in God’s mercy. You cannot expect too much at His hands. He is “able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or
think." No sin is so great but that, coming straight from it, a repentant sinner may hope and believe that all God's love will be lavished upon him and the richest of God's gifts granted to his desires. God will pardon a repentant sinner more quickly than a mother would snatch her child out of the fire. Even if our transgressions be aggravated by a previous life of godliness, and have given the enemies great occasion to blaspheme, as David did, yet David's penitence may in our souls lead on to David's hope, and the answer will not fail us. Let no sin, however dark, however repeated, drive us to despair of ourselves, because like a cloud it hides from us our loving Saviour. Though beaten back again and again by the surge of your passions and sins, like some poor shipwrecked sailor sucked back with every retreating wave and tossed about in the angry surf, yet, my good man, my brave fellow! keep your face towards the beach, where there is safety, and you will struggle through it all; and though it were on some floating boards and broken pieces of the ship, you will come safe to land. He will uphold you with His spirit and take away the weight of sin that would sink you, by His forgiving mercy, and bring you out of all the weltering waste of waters to the solid shore.

Now this mercy must be personally sought. It is a rope thrown out to you; take hold on it with the grip of faith, and you will be saved. "He is the God of my mercy," said David (Psalms lxi: 17). A drowning man saw a rainbow and he said, "What am I the better, though God will not drown the world, if I drown." So, what are you the better, though God is merciful, if you perish? 0, labor to know and believe that God's special mercy is for you. This mercy is limited to this life. Take heed; for mercy is like a rainbow which God set in the clouds to remind mankind. It shines here as long as it is not hindered; but we must never look for it after it is night, and it shines not in the other world. If we refuse mercy here, we shall have justice there.

Take heed of abusing this mercy of God. Suck not poison out of the sweet flowers of God's mercy. Do not think that because God is merciful you may go on in sin; this is to make mercy become your enemy. To sin because mercy abounds is the Devil's logic. He that sins because of God's mercy shall have judgment without mercy. Mercy abused turns to fury. Deut. xxix :20: "If he bless himself, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk after the imaginations of my heart, to add drunkenness to thirst, the Lord will not spare him, but the anger of the Lord and His jealousy shall smoke-against that man."

Nothing sweeter than mercy, when it is improved; nothing fiercer when it is abused; nothing colder than lead, when it is taken out of the mine; nothing more scalding than lead, when it is heated; nothing blunter than iron, nothing sharper when it is whetted. "The mercy of the Lord is upon them that fear him."

Mercy is not for them that sin and fear not, but for them that fear and sin not God's mercy is an holy mercy; where it pardons it heals. The wicked are like Absalom, who as soon as David his father kissed him plotted treason against him. The wicked make a dart of God's mercies and shoot at Him. He gives them wit and they serve the Devil with it. He gives them strength and they waste it among harlots. He gives them
bread to eat and they lift up the heel against Him. "Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked." Those who sin against their giver, the mercies of God will come in as witnesses against them.

God's forbearance toward sinners is like a father who bangs over some unworthy son, and while his heart is torn by contending emotions hesitates what to do, whether once and forever to dismiss him or to give him another trial. It is most touching to see God bending over sinners, and this flood of melting pathos bursting from His heart: "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim! How shall I deliver thee, Israel! How shall I make thee as Admah, how shall I set thee as Zeboim! Mine heart is turned within Me, my repentings are kindled together. I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger. I will not return to destroy Ephraim, for I am God and not man."

It was under the figure of burying in the sea his people's sins that Micah, enraptured with the thought, exclaimed, "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He retaineth not His anger forever, because He delighteth in mercy. He will turn again, He will have compassion upon us and will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea."
APPENDIX D

Six days after Skinner's death the Biblical Recorder gave its front page to Skinner's "Some Comforting Words to Troubled Souls" and the last known photo of Skinner.

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RALEIGH, N. C., WEDNESDAY, APRIL 12, 1885.

SOME COMFORTING WORDS TO TROUBLED SOULS

T. H. SKINNER.

Patiently endure our trials, and everything which has an end is short.

"Next to sin, the greatest evil is to lose faith," said Paul the Apostle.

"Troubles are signs that God does not intend to leave us."

Try to be a little feather, blown by His breath wherever He wills.

Even the heaviest seemed a person in affliction as a consolator to us.

If every trouble awakens, will it all are of God.

"Regret is giving yourself up to God."

"Only now do I begin to be a Christian," said Jesus, in mourning.

Speak little of your troubles, and much to God.

In times of great suffering, pray and wait.

"Show me the way to heaven," asked one.

"Turn to the right and go straight forward," answered the other.

Our trials bind us to the Cross, where we are not to struggle.

Some events are glad to suffer, excluding: "Let me suffer as I like," therefore do not grow frightened at suffering.

Learn how to converse by one's self familiarly and intimately with your Lord.

In every trial complain as little as possible; it is only a little cross.

Offer up to God your daily sufferings before they come.

Let me pray: Thy kingdom (rule) come, in our heart, our will, our intellect, our imagination.

Best your own trial well, this is the way of your salvation.

The way out of trial leads by the cross.

Some means of salvation: Control yourself, calm your soul, and be patient, remain tied to the cross. He was united to it. Do not try to escape, for you will only think about the cross, but train yourself to face it. Do it calmly, quietly.

I would not speak of my salvation here, brother, I should write to your sister who

Has shown these things for us, because we are not competent.

The remembrance of data and sufferings ought to BXU to us in death, for after that there will be no more troubles.

Trouble has brought more souls in penitence to Christ than all the enticements Peter's at Ponto-

THOMAS H. SKINNER, D. D.

cost. This is a world of troubles. God made it a world of trouble. Why did He thus make it? To break men's hearts and thus lead them to Christ, to be saved.

Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints. He sees us when dying. This accounts for the happy deaths of His saints who see Him also.

THIS CATEGORY OF THE PRODIGAL SON: DOES IT APPLY TO SAVED OR UNSAVED?

T. H. SKINNER.

Perhaps no other parable has produced so much literature as the parable of the "Prodigal Son." It has a peculiar fascination for the Christian reader. In addition to its general attractiveness as a teaching and powerful story, a great deal of controversy concerning its literal meaning and implications has appeared, and it continues to be a point of contention among Christians.

Not all seem to believe all aspects of every thing that is implicit in the story, and the great number of interpretations is a reason for its continued interest. It is now recognized that some of the older interpretations are inadequate, and a more refined and practical approach is necessary.

All that is attempted in this paragraph is right side up.

1. The Common view three times in the first is a repetition of the same thing, or is explained by repetition of the same thing. This can be seen in the parable of the prodigal son.

2. The idea of God's dealing is in Heaven, and the idea of God's dealing is in the next chapter, and the idea of God's dealing is in the next chapter, and the idea of God's dealing is in the next chapter, and the idea of God's dealing is in the next chapter.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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