

JAMES H. DEVOTIE, LEADING THE TRANSFORMATION AND EXPANSION
OF BAPTISTS IN ALABAMA AND GEORGIA:
1830-1890

by

CHRISTOPHER MORGAN PETERS

JOHN M. GIGGIE, COMMITTEE CHAIR

ANDREW J. HUEBNER
CHARLES A. ISRAEL
GEORGE C. RABLE
JOSHUA P. ROTHMAN

A DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the Department of History
in the Graduate School of
The University of Alabama

TUSCALOOSA, ALABAMA

2014

Copyright Christopher Morgan Peters 2014
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

ABSTRACT

Southern Baptist pastor, James H. DeVotie, led Baptists to establish, expand, and entrench in Alabama and Georgia from the 1830s to the 1890s. He directed Baptists to become one of the most numerous and influential religious bodies in these states. DeVotie did so by orchestrating the development of Baptist denominational institutions, overcoming resistance from “Hardshell” Baptists, promoting the professional pastorate, providing wartime ministry for the battlefield and home-front, shepherding the suffering South amidst his own suffering, and overseeing dozens of domestic missionaries who launched numerous new churches. He pastored large, prominent congregations in Montgomery, Tuscaloosa, and Marion, Alabama, as well as Columbus and Griffin, Georgia. Moreover, DeVotie poured himself into strengthening regional Baptist associations, propelling state conventions, serving as president of the Southern Baptist Domestic Mission Board, establishing Howard College, overseeing Judson College and Mercer University, launching the *Alabama Baptist* newspaper, developing the Alabama Baptist Bible Society, leading the Georgia Baptist Mission Board, supporting Sabbath schools, and starting a string of public schools. For the first three decades of his ministry he undertook these initiatives as a local pastor of interracial congregations, navigating between his proslavery perspective and his committed ministry to slaves. After the Civil War, he did not make any noticeable attempt to give newly freed slaves equal status among the white-controlled interracial Baptist churches. Yet as black Baptists rapidly left to form their own churches, he continued seeking financial and educational support for black church leaders even when other white Baptists withdrew.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am pleased to have this opportunity to thank the many colleagues, friends, and faculty members who have helped me with this dissertation. I am most grateful to John Giggie, who chaired my dissertation committee. He gave me space to work at my own pace, but also offered specific and thoughtful feedback through several substantial revisions. I also want to thank all of my committee members, Andrew Huebner, Charles Israel, George Rable, and Joshua Rothman. This project would not even have commenced without the direction of Elizabeth Wells, who until recently served as Archivist in the Special Collection at Samford University Library. Elizabeth not only introduced me to the writings of James H. DeVotie, she also patiently assisted me along my many years of research, frequently helping me identify additional material for my project and encouraging me by her own interest in DeVotie.

I also owe a debt of thanks to the leaders of both Covenant Presbyterian Church and Cross Creek Church. They graciously allowed me to adjust my weekly schedule for classes and supported me in the pursuit of my history studies. Kristen Fielder, a dear friend and church member, took time out to help with final editing while caring for her two new foster children.

My parents, Steve and Letty Peters, are some of the hardest workers I know, modeling a virtue I needed in order to pursue this project on top of my other responsibilities. They have shown me love and spoken words of encouragement in all my academic endeavors.

Above all else, I thank my wife, Patience, who had to live up to her name while I was out many evenings and studying many nights while home. My graduate history work began around the time my oldest son was born and now finishes as my fourth son reaches elementary school. Perhaps my sons will be benefitted by one day reading this dissertation, just as I have been through writing it.

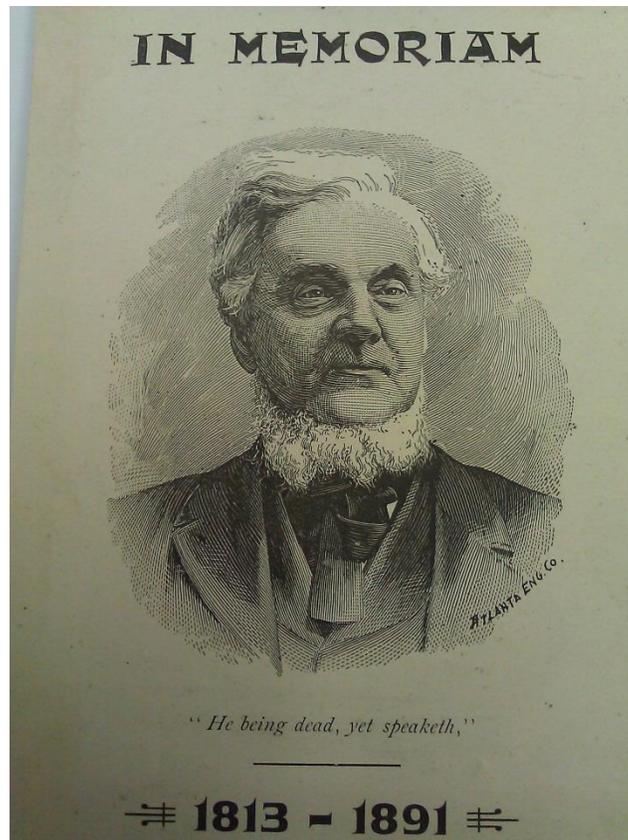
CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iii
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.....	vi
1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. DETERMINING HIS DIVINELY MANDATED DUTY	21
3. INSTRUMENT FOR INSTITUTION BUILDING.....	38
4. Footholds in the Faith and Face-off with His Foes	66
5. PROMOTING A PROFESSIONAL PASTORATE	90
6. WARTIME MINISTRY ON THE GEORGIA HOME-FRONT AND BATTLEFRONT	115
7. DYNAMICS OF INTERRACIAL MINISTRY	138
8. SUFFERING SHEPHERD TO THE SUFFERING SOUTH.....	162
9. MOBILIZING AND MULTIPLYING THROUGH MISSIONS	188
CONCLUSION.....	216
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	226

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

1. James H. DeVotie, 1891	1
2. The DeVotie Children, c. 1859	9
3. Basil Manly	52
4. Julia Tarrant Barron	54
5. Howard College Building	57
6. Milo P. Jewett	61
7. Samuel S. Sherman	61
8. Siloam Baptist Church, 1861	107
9. First Baptist Church of Columbus, Georgia	108
10. DeVotie Baptist Church	110
11. Noble L. DeVotie, c. 1860	166
12. Mrs. Margaret Noble DeVotie	175
13. Emanuel King Love	210

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION



While James H. DeVotie still had two decades of ministry and life remaining, an 1872 article in the *Christian Index* lauded his achievements: “No Baptist minister who has ever lived in Alabama has accomplished more for the denomination than brother DeVotie. His very name is identified with every noble enterprise of our state Convention for the last thirty-five years. May his life long be spared to the church that now rejoices in his labors.”¹ At his death, another

¹ James H. DeVotie Memoirs, Special Collection, Samford University Library, Birmingham, Alabama, Volume 1, 229. DeVotie began recording his memoirs at around age sixty in the early 1870s as letters to his

newspaper declared that the Baptists had lost “a bright and shining light” and that all in the state of Georgia mourned the loss of “one of its most worthy and exemplary citizens.”² DeVotie received this praise because of all he achieved: orchestrating the development of Baptist denominational institutions, overcoming resistance from “Hardshell”³ Baptists, promoting the professional pastorate, providing wartime ministry for the battlefield and home-front, shepherding the suffering South amidst his own suffering, and overseeing dozens of domestic missionaries who planted numerous new churches. For the first three decades of his ministry he undertook these initiatives as a local pastor of interracial congregations, navigating between his proslavery perspective and his committed ministry to slaves. After the Civil War, he did not make any noticeable attempt to give newly freed slaves equal status among the white-controlled interracial Baptist churches. Yet as black Baptists rapidly left to form their own churches, he continued seeking financial and educational support for black church leaders even when other white Baptists withdrew. In this manner, through the period of massive southern transformation from 1830 to 1890, DeVotie enabled Alabama and Georgia Baptists to become one of the most numerous and influential religious bodies in these states, a position that they still enjoy today.⁴

daughter, Lizzie. He regularly used “+” instead of the word “and” which I substitute throughout the paper. Article pasted from *Christian Index*, Thurs, Oct 24, 1872, written by “Henderson.”

² *Southern Cultivator*, Apr 1891; 49, 4.

³ “Hardshell” or “Anti-mission” or “Footwashing” Baptists, as they were interchangeably called, were originally a contingent mixed among the Baptist churches of the South. Many of these Christians eventually formed the Primitive Baptist churches, in distinction from the Southern Baptist Convention. They were Calvinist, like other Baptists at the time, but they emphasized God’s sovereignty and de-emphasized human responsibility to such an extreme that they failed to initiate evangelistically. This also led them to reject organized human ministry efforts like mission agencies. Along with these beliefs they held to the practice of footwashing, taken from John 13, as virtually a church sacrament.

⁴ Wayne Flynt, *Alabama Baptists: Southern Baptists in the Heart of Dixie* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1998), ix. Flynt stated that at the start of the twenty-first century, “One in four Alabamians and nearly two of three church members belong to churches of the Alabama Baptist State Convention (ABSC), the highest percentage of Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) dominance of any state. Every aspect of the state’s life – its politics, commerce, and education – is interwoven with the ABSC.”; Robert G. Gardner, “Baptists in Georgia: 1733-2010,” <http://libraries.mercer.edu/tarver/archives/media/History.pdf>, Jun 29, 2010. Regarding those aligned with Southern Baptists he wrote, “Membership in 2009 included 92 associations, 3,604 churches, and 1,385,234 members.” He listed the Georgia population in 2008 at over 9.6 million. Adding the approximately 800,000 Baptists of other denominations makes the total 22% of the Georgia population. In 1800 an estimated 3% of Georgians were

In 1873, during the latter years of his tumultuous but remarkably influential life and ministry, DeVotie reminisced in his memoirs concerning God's purpose for him. DeVotie believed the Divine One revealed a special message to him in the form of a beautiful flower he once observed along the road: "It grew upon the top of a large heap of barren rocks which had been thrown together at the highway side....There in the freshness of its beauty it was an instructor that we can accomplish a blessed destiny by meeting to the best of our ability our duty, and improving our opportunities, in whatever humble sphere he may assign us our lot." DeVotie continued, expressing the encouragement he received from this botanical messenger for his lifelong pursuit to improve and expand Southern Baptist influence: "That child of spring said, shall an immortal man...called of God to preach the gospel, with the promise of God's presence, and assistance....despond, and despair, when a speechless, blushing little flower, can...succeed in writing ineffaceable truths concerning God, and his government upon human hearts?" He concluded by sharing a motto he sought to live by and hoped all those to come after him would embrace, "Let us ever aim to be beautiful, and beautify the place which God assigns us."⁵ If

Baptist; Arthur B. Rutledge, *Mission to American: A Century and a Quarter of Southern Baptist Home Missions* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1969), 8. "Between 1780 and 1860 Methodists became by far the largest Protestant Christian group in the United States, with almost twenty thousand churches and approximately two million members. Baptists, in the meantime, increased impressively to over twelve thousand churches and a total membership of approximately one million."

⁵ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 1-2 and 199-203. "That lone flower made an impression upon my mind more lasting and blessed than any one sermon, which I have ever heard from the most eloquent lips. It had not grown there by accident, the divine hand had planted it. He had chosen that spot, had ordained that it should be in its...full bloom at that moment. The same precious hand had formed me, had conducted me to the place, and had prepared the photographic filate, of my soul to receive the impression of its beautiful message. No other eye perhaps noticed that eloquent preacher to me, but it had not existed in vain. It taught a lesson of God's love to me. It was by my pathway for me, in the program of my history from the beginning. He thought of me when he perfected its design, and unfolded its crimson leaves....I had been despondent fearing that one so humble could not presume to hope for usefulness." He began his memoirs with the same theme, in less metaphorical form, "Try to surpass the example of any excellence which may herein be placed before you. If any thing in these papers shall incite you to make increased efforts for usefulness, in any way promote your happiness, the ends ardently desired will have been attained. You will see the grace of God, wonderfully magnified in arresting and leading on to final salvation, one of the chief of sinners. In this connection the acknowledgement must conspicuously appear without abatement, that, 'By the grace of God I am what I am.' Praised be his holy name, whose goodness and mercy have followed me all my days. He influenced me to attempt to do some good and I trust in a small measure the world is better for my abode in it."

occasionally poetic in his personal writing, DeVotie was decidedly pragmatic in his numerous and expansive endeavors to “spiritually beautify” the Baptist denomination he transformed. Despite a hard-charging personality that sometimes won as many enemies as friends and a desire for applause, he propelled Baptists to become one of the most influential Christian denominations in the postbellum South.⁶

Born in 1813 in Oneida County, New York, DeVotie’s origins in the region known as the “Burned-Over District” proved no small formative influence on him. Revivalist Charles Finney coined this phrase for the region because he eventually believed so many had been evangelized in this area that the “fuel” of potential souls needing salvation had been almost completely “burned.”⁷ Growing up at this epicenter for the northern explosion of the Second Great Awakening,⁸ DeVotie learned the ways of evangelical revivalism from his earliest years. In fact, shortly after Finney’s “new measures”⁹ for revival first gained significant following in the Oneida region, DeVotie made his own profession of faith. He was a teenager at the time but the models of revivalism he observed would shape his adult ministry methods. In particular, he not only observed revival methods but also how they could successfully be combined with religious

⁶ Gregory A. Wills, *Democratic Religion: Freedom, Authority, and Church Discipline in the Baptist South, 1785-1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 7-8. He noted that there were 60 Baptist congregations in America in 1740. By 1790 there were 67,000 Baptists in the United States, 41,000 in South, and half of those in Virginia. Georgia in 1827 had around 20,000 Baptists and 17,000 Methodists. By 1906, just fifteen years after DeVotie’s passing, 41 percent of Georgia’s approximately 2.45 million residents claimed membership in a Protestant church. Methodists also expanded rapidly in the South during the nineteenth century.

⁷ Charles G. Finney, *Charles G. Finney: An Autobiography* (Westwood: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1876), 77-78.

⁸ The First Great Awakening was a spiritual revitalization movement that took place in the 1730s and 1740s, beginning in England and spreading to New England and then down the eastern coast of the United States. The Second Great Awakening occurred at the very end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century. Some also identify a Third Great Awakening from around 1850-1900. The awakenings generally involved increased activity by church members and conversion of those outside the church, usually leading to some social and moral transformation in the affected communities.

⁹ Finney’s “new measures” emphasized the need to press the unconverted very directly to make a decision of conversion. He believed strongly in the use of emotional appeals to bring about this decision. Because he also struggled to embrace the historic Presbyterian view of the perseverance of the saints, his teaching stressed the importance of holiness as a demonstration of belief, more than assurance in Christ because of the Holy Spirit’s power to sanctify the believer.

societies and institutions. These organizations paralleling the local church not only helped fund ongoing outreach efforts but also extended and deepened the sometimes short-lived spiritual boost of occasional revival events.

DeVotie moved from New York to Savannah, Georgia, in 1830 to work with his uncle's mercantile business. Although reared in his mother's Presbyterian heritage and retaining her Calvinist belief throughout his days, DeVotie was influenced by his uncle to join the Baptist faith. He sensed a call to pastoral ministry and promptly enrolled in Furman Seminary in South Carolina. After briefly serving a Baptist church in Camden, South Carolina, he relocated to Alabama in 1834. From that point until mid-century, his ministry covered the heart of Alabama's population in Montgomery, Tuscaloosa, and Marion. Then, just before the Civil War he relocated to Georgia, serving for fourteen years in Columbus, seven in Griffin, and finally for fourteen more years in a statewide role as the Corresponding Secretary for the Georgia Baptist Mission Board.

From the beginning of his ministerial labors in the early 1830s until his death in 1891, DeVotie "beautified" Baptists in Alabama and Georgia by piloting them from a loosely-structured frontier revival movement on the fringe of southern society to an organized spiritual establishment whose structures spanned the South and wielded considerable political power among the faithful. He did so as much by his strategic denominational organizing as by his pastoral communication skills. Few ministers were as busy or successful. DeVotie worked tirelessly to build institutions that paralleled the work of the local church congregations and extended their influence. He poured himself into strengthening regional Baptist associations,¹⁰ propelling state conventions, serving as president of the Southern Baptist Domestic Mission

¹⁰ Baptist associations comprised the gathering of pastors, sometimes several times a year, generally from a nearby local region, to coordinate collaborative ministry activities and encourage the mutual welfare of the churches in that area. A given state might have numerous associations.

Board, establishing Howard College, overseeing Judson College and Mercer University, launching the *Alabama Baptist* newspaper, developing the Alabama Baptist Bible Society, leading the Georgia Baptist Mission Board, supporting Sabbath schools, and starting a string of public schools.¹¹

DeVotie also spearheaded the social elevation of Baptists in Alabama and Georgia by professionalizing the pastoral role. The previous generation of Baptists in the South feared that academic seminary training caused more harm than good and instead promoted a bi-vocational pastoral model where ministers gained their primary income through work outside of the ministry. DeVotie saw that this approach left the growing southern middle and upper class - and its wealth and power - unreached by the Baptist faith. He embodied and encouraged this transformation by insisting on serving in fulltime pastoral ministry, receiving commensurate compensation, and preaching in large, expensive church facilities. DeVotie envisioned a growing number of professional pastors who would give Baptists the opportunity to not only reach a larger portion of the southern population but also benefit from affluent supporters for important Baptist initiatives. Spearheading this dramatic change threatened to make DeVotie a martyr rather than a leader, but he retained a broad base of Baptist support by continuing to maintain crucial footholds in the southern frontier faith: professing orthodox theology, seeking conversions, organizing revival meetings, and practicing church discipline.

Even as DeVotie stayed in the good graces of many Baptists by keeping a foothold in these beliefs and practices, he faced off against powerful elements within the Baptist fold who fought his methods for expanding the footprint of Baptists. In Alabama and Georgia Hardshell

¹¹ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 105. He wrote, "For many years I was Cor (or Gen) Secy of the Convention, President of the Ala Bap Bible Society, Pres of the Board of Trustees of the Athenaeum of Tuscaloosa three years, President of Board of Trustees of Howard College two first years of its existence, and trustee 15 years, Moderator of Cahaba Association two years, President of Domestic Mission Board Southern Bap Convention many years. The brethren made me do something."

or “Anti-mission” Baptists recognized little connection between entering the kingdom of God in the next life and building up denominations on earth. Out of concern over pursuing any manmade form of spirituality, they even eschewed many organized efforts at social reform and evangelism.¹² In addition, they feared both the power of their own denominational agencies and any collaboration with other denominations. Expanding church institutions frightened these Baptists because they believed the Bible prescribed decentralized authority and they attributed periods of decline in the history of the Christian church to the corruption that sometimes accompanied expanding ecclesiastical power structures. Collaboration with other denominations concerned Hardshells because it threatened theological purity and potentially created multi-denominational authority structures. As a result, they rejected most of DeVotie’s efforts to transform Baptists in the South. In so doing, they not only refused to evolve from frontier revivalism, but also lost the evangelistic energy of that movement. In similar fashion but because they saw the Baptist faith as the only legitimate expression of Christianity, Landmark Baptists also opposed the vision of men like DeVotie. Had the Hardshells’ regressive vision or the Landmarkers’ exclusivism prevailed, the Baptist churches in Alabama and Georgia might have declined with ingrown spiritual stagnation. Instead, DeVotie organized Baptists to build numerous denominational institutions and collaborated in revival meetings with Methodists and Presbyterian evangelicals, yielding the remarkable expansion of Baptist influence in Alabama and Georgia.

DeVotie also serves as a lens unto the temporary reconfiguration of evangelical ministry during the Civil War. He pastored the First Baptist Church in Columbus, Georgia, in the war

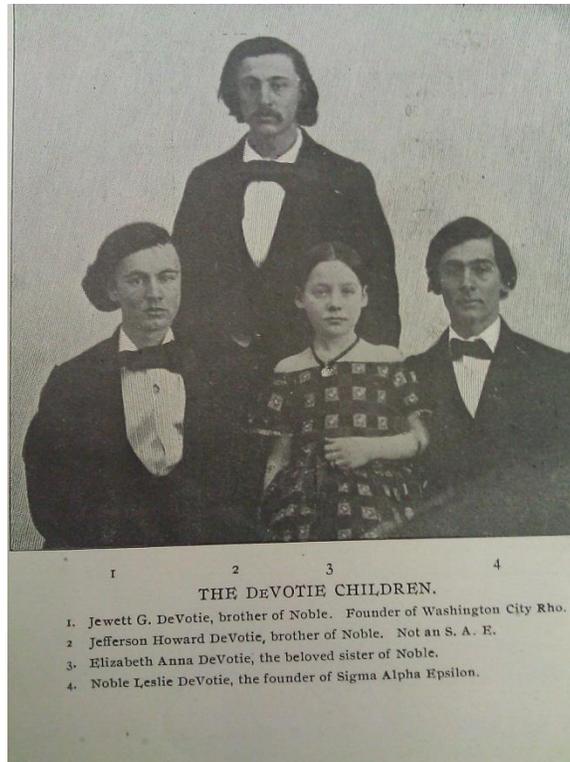
¹² Rutledge, 9. “The remarkable progress of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was realized in the face of difficulties...Parallel with mounting concern for missions was a rising tide of anti-mission sentiment. The Baptist especially faced this, and from some of the men who had served nobly as frontier preachers. These men, largely untrained and unpaid, were suspicious of the centralization required by a missionary society or board...”

years and seized what ministry opportunities he could, both on the home-front and near the battlefield. He served intermittently as a chaplain to troops stationed in the Georgia vicinity and soldiers recalled the special impact of his ministry among them. As a pastor in a town well-behind the lines but which was a manufacturing center for the Confederacy, DeVotie also provides a helpful perspective on wartime life for evangelical ministers and their flocks. DeVotie shepherded his church through the wartime years, speaking messages of encouragement about God's plan, facilitating community-wide prayer meetings, and supporting the efforts of the women in the community to contribute to the war effort.

All of this is even more remarkable since DeVotie accomplished it in the midst of bitter personal suffering that included losing all seven of his children from his first marriage as well as his first wife to disease or accident. He then outlived all but one of the four children from his second marriage.¹³ Three sons died in infancy during the 1830s and two daughters in the same manner during the 1880s. He did not see any of his children live past 30. Particularly painful was the loss of Noble, his oldest son to survive infancy and the heir apparent to follow in his ministry footsteps. In April 1861, while just beginning to serve as a chaplain to the Confederate troops from Selma, Noble drowned in the ocean outside Fort Morgan, near Mobile, Alabama. While bidding farewell to some of the soldiers leaving on a transport boat he fell off of a wharf and became the first official casualty of the war from Alabama. DeVotie's life of suffering and the public nature of his losses intensified his faith, deepening his belief in a loving sovereign God, even while they took an emotional toll. His suffering gave him an unusual ability to minister to the suffering people of the South in the decades after the Civil War. Because of a

¹³ 1880 U.S. Census , Griffin, Spalding, Georgia, Enumeration District 118, sheet 375, dwelling 347, family 399, James H. DeVotie household, National Archives, T9; *Christian Index*, Dec 12, 1872. Obituary for C. M. Noble DeVotie; *Georgia Weekly Telegraph and Georgia Journal & Messenger*, Dec 23, 1873. This wedding announcement was published on the day of DeVotie's marriage to Georgia Amos.

mutual bond in tragedy, Baptists in Alabama and Georgia not only admired DeVotie's perseverance through trials, but also found it very difficult to resist his overall vision and programs for Baptist expansion, even where they might have initially disagreed with some of his tactics. The successive losses to his biological family legacy also drove DeVotie's relentless labors to leave behind a legacy by building the Baptist denominational family.



DeVotie also provides a lens into the dynamics of ministry in the interracial congregations of Alabama and Georgia through the end of the Civil War. He spent all of his antebellum and wartime ministry years as a local pastor leading congregations with substantial black membership. He led many slaves to embrace faith in Christ, baptized them into the church, helped them grow to greater Biblical knowledge, encouraged their obedience to God, and in general sought to show them a model of the Christian life. Yet, DeVotie certainly was no abolitionist. In fact he owned slaves and supported the Confederacy to its end. Thus, he provides perspective on how white southern pastors who supported slavery balanced their racial

convictions with their often vigorous efforts to see the Gospel extended to slaves and to see slaves formed in the faith.

By the end of DeVotie's life, black Baptists in the South had formed their own churches and thoroughly severed denominational ties with what became the predominantly white Southern Baptist Convention. DeVotie's ministry to the interracial congregations he led reveals potential ways he and other white pastors like him influenced the development of the black Baptist churches when those churches became independent from white leadership. Clearly black pastors and church members served as the chief actors in the rapid advancement of the Christian faith in the black community during the latter years of the nineteenth century. However, they also implemented many of the ministry institutions they would have observed during their years in the interracial churches of the South. In a manner that mirrored many institutions which DeVotie championed, black Baptists launched religious newspapers, established associations, organized mission agencies, and spearheaded educational efforts. Black pastors also sought to build church buildings and receive professional compensation while at the same time holding on to historic Baptist beliefs and preaching with zeal.

After the Civil War, DeVotie failed to make any earnest attempt to grant newly freed slaves equal standing in the Baptist churches. However, even before the Civil War ended he led the efforts of The First Baptist Church of Columbus to transition the black members of the congregation over to the care of their own black pastor and into their own building paid for partly by black members. In the decades following the war, he resourced and trained black Baptist leaders, including organizing and conducting "theological institutes." He also served among the trustees who established the Atlanta Theological Institute, which would become Morehouse College. Especially during his tenure directing the Georgia Baptist Mission Board,

DeVotie helped mobilize black Baptist missionaries and multiply the black Baptist churches which would become pillars of the American black community. In the postwar years, many white evangelicals welcomed the complete separation of black from white Christians and desired little continued connection. DeVotie was clearly no civil rights advocate. Yet he refused to wash his hands of efforts to nurture the separated black Baptist churches. Right up to his death in 1891, he endeavored to equip the black church and challenge his fellow white Baptists not to relent in their support of black Baptists.

In Georgia, during the final fourteen years of his life, DeVotie pursued his enduring goal of expanding the Baptist presence not only by encouraging separate black Baptist congregations but also by directing the establishment of numerous white congregations. This was his primary task as the Corresponding Secretary for the Georgia Baptist Mission Board. In this capacity he helped support and oversee 20 to 30 church planting missionaries, a handful of whom were black, who launched new congregations across the state every year. Just as he had proven himself effective in fundraising for Baptist institutions, church buildings, and ministry programs, he now traveled annually to nearly every association and numerous churches, raising funds to support the missionary pastors of these new churches.

Thus, DeVotie not only led the transformation and expansion of Baptist faith in Alabama and Georgia, but his life and ministry also serve as a large and clear lens through which to view many of the dramatic changes in Baptist life in the South in the nineteenth century. Studying him extends the existing historiography concerning the influence of southern evangelicalism reignited several decades ago by John Boles, Donald Mathews, and Anne Loveland. As they described, during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the religious movement known as the Second Great Awakening spread rapidly across the expanding American frontier.

Large religious revival meetings often led by pastors from Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches in a multi-denominational format helped spark many conversions. Individual conversions occurred when a person recognized his or her sinfulness and through faith and repentance received the atoning work of Jesus for salvation. Waves of new and recommitted Christians expanded the membership of frontier churches and shaped their early development. Boles aimed to identify not only the nature of southern evangelical revivalism, but also what brought it about and why it emerged when it did. My study of DeVotie extends this work forward by showing how revivalism continued within an increasingly structured system of Southern Baptist life after the fires of the Second Great Awakening began to cool.¹⁴

Mathews and Loveland considered the ways in which evangelicalism shaped the foundations of southern culture. My study of DeVotie expands upon their work by looking at the postbellum South as well as the Old South. Although their studies gave attention to southern society as a whole, examining the life of one leader, DeVotie, highlights the specific decisions and initiatives which shaped one of the two most prominent southern evangelical denominations. In this way DeVotie provides an additional vantage point on strategic ministerial choices which drove the development of the southern evangelical church and therefore contributed to the broader social impact which Mathews and Loveland evaluated.¹⁵

More recently, Nathan Hatch detailed the process by which evangelicalism came to dominate the southern spiritual landscape in its antebellum, “democratized,” and anti-abolitionist

¹⁴ John B. Boles, *The Great Revival: Beginnings of the Bible Belt*, (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1996), xiii.

¹⁵ Donald G. Mathews, *Religion in the Old South* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), xii-xiv. Mathews wrote prior to the expansion of American religious history in recent decades. However he issued a call in his defining work for further study of evangelical religious expression and noted the deficit of biographical works. “This book is not the last word on southern religion, but a first word, and invitation to further discussion of the character, functions, and significance of religion in shaping and defining the South as a distinct part of the new American nation.”; Anne Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order: 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), ix-x.

form. Hatch noted how during the religious awakenings, the democratic spirit of the newly established American nation combined powerfully with the zealous evangelistic exertions of once marginalized evangelical groups like the Baptists and Methodists. This movement transformed the spiritual landscape of the frontier. According to Hatch, frontier Baptists and Methodists shunned the staid institutionalism they saw as typical of Episcopal, Congregational, and Presbyterian churches in the northeast and along the southern seaboard, prizing simplicity of doctrine and organization. Beginning as small, dispersed communities, Baptists and Methodists sometimes met only several times a year, usually in the homes of members or in meager wooden structures. They saw their pure doctrine and fervent faith arising from their rejection of a formally educated, professional clergy. Evangelistic zeal propelled these early evangelicals forward and they sought spiritual success in their resistance to nearly all forms of ecclesiastical structure.¹⁶

Hatch also observed that although the Second Great Awakening influenced many segments of frontier society, the majority of early participants were people of little means. Of those converted, most were frontier women. Black Americans, many of whom were slaves, and white men, also responded in significant numbers to the Gospel message. At least initially, even in the South black believers mixed in with whites in the churches which formed. Neither Baptists nor Methodists allowed black church members status entirely equal to white members, but in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century both of these denominations generally opposed slavery and allowed for a level of racial spiritual equality not seen in earlier generations.

¹⁶Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 3-16; Wills, 6. "Baptists touted their allegiance to freedom and republicanism, for they alone, they said, truly advocated civil and religious liberty. They organized autonomous local churches free from tyrannical hierarchies and they practiced a church government by democracy rather than by priests, bishops, or elders. However, they combined their populist democracy with ecclesiastical authority, and this was true nowhere more than in the South."; Bertram Wyatt-Brown, "The Antimission Movement in the Jacksonian South: A Study in Regional Folk Culture," *The Journal of Southern History* 36.4 (Nov 1970): 519. "Rural Methodists, no less than the antimission Baptists, disapproved of overly educated ministers."; Flynt, 9-12, 14-15.

My study of DeVotie demonstrates how this religious “democratization” receded as pastors responded to the increasing material prosperity and growth of the influential planter class in the South. As a result, during the middle of the nineteenth century across much of the South, the descendants of the pioneering generation ironically edged closer to becoming what their spiritual parents had once criticized. Even though they had only recently broken away from what they saw as spiritually dead, professionally led, eastern churches, evangelicals soon acquiesced to the benefits of joining the spiritual “establishment.” DeVotie both piloted and typified this transformation among Alabama and Georgia Baptists.

Beth Schweiger and Brooks Holifield specifically examined the transformation of the pastoral role in the years subsequent to the Second Great Awakening. Evangelicals had expanded with remarkable speed across the frontier through the grassroots efforts of poorly paid but full-time Methodist circuit riders and bi-vocational Baptist pastors.¹⁷ Holifield and Schweiger noted that as the nineteenth century progressed, beginning in the larger towns many evangelical churches began to seek professional clergy. These men had often received formal theological training, worked full-time as pastors, and received significant compensation.¹⁸ Those clergy led extensive building programs, seeking to surpass in capacity and grandeur the latest structure of sister churches in other towns or other denominations in their own town. Baptists certainly were not alone in this. According to Hatch, “American Methodism in the nineteenth century evolved from Francis Asbury’s ‘boiling hot religion’ to the Gothic-cathedral Methodism of William McKinley.”¹⁹ Along with building physical structures, churches and their leaders organized to spread their faith, not just through occasional revivals, but also through

¹⁷ Bi-vocational pastors typically worked in a secular calling for their primary material provision and thus only served “part-time” in ministry.

¹⁸ Wyatt-Brown, 508. He showed that churches in Alabama began seeking educated eastern and northern pastors.

¹⁹ Nathan Hatch, “The Puzzle of American Methodism,” *Church History* 63.2 (Jun 1994): 181.

denominational colleges, Sabbath schools, public schools, Bible societies, mission agencies, regional church associations and religious newspapers. Whereas Schweiger focused on the development of the professional pastorate in the state of Virginia, I look at what DeVotie reveals about the same pattern in Alabama and Georgia. My study shows that DeVotie's name was virtually synonymous with all these initiatives and, through DeVotie, provides further insight on what motivated pastors to professionalize.²⁰

As he led the generation of evangelicals that followed the Second Great Awakening, DeVotie did not begin his work on a cultural blank page. Rather, he and others like him followed the first generation of evangelicals who had encountered a southern society resistant to evangelical belief. Christine Heyrman noted that southern perspectives on race and gender made evangelicalism unpalatable for many slaveholding southerners prior to the Second Great Awakening. However, this form of Christianity eventually prospered, partly by adjusting its original approach to these social, political and cultural issues. DeVotie fully participated in this "adjustment" as he, though of northern upbringing, embraced southern sectionalism and slavery. Yet, DeVotie reveals how easy it can be to overstate this accommodation. For him and the evangelicals he led in the middle to late nineteenth century, the dramatic expansion of southern evangelical churches was as much a result of the spiritual beliefs they retained as those they compromised. They were spiritual hybrids, still strongly promoting the convictions of their predecessors - evangelical doctrine, necessity of personal conversion, blessing of revivals, and

²⁰ Beth Barton Schweiger, *The Gospel Working Up: Progress and the Pulpit in Nineteenth-Century Virginia*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 5. Schweiger skillfully mapped the course of institutionalization in Virginia through pastoral upward mobility, by examining 800 ministers from the Baptist or Methodist denominations. She also noted, "Southern religion has borne a peculiar moral burden in historical scholarship that has prevented the imaginative study it deserves, and that has stripped religious people and their institutions of agency in Southern history."; Brooks Holifield, *God's Ambassadors: A History of the Christian Clergy in America*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 1-9; Randy J. Sparks, *On Jordan's Stormy Banks: Evangelicalism in Mississippi, 1773-1876*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994), 2-4.

church discipline - but also adjusting the outworking of their beliefs to advance among the growing affluent elements in the South.²¹

DeVotie's background as a northern transplant to the South does not in itself make him unique. Yet as one who hailed from the Oneida region of New York and who implemented several elements of his institution building in collaboration with fellow northern transplants, interesting lines can be drawn between that region and DeVotie's work in the South. Although Mary Ryan's study of Oneida focused on gender, she also highlighted how that county served as the "Cane Ridge" of northern evangelical revivalism.²² My study shows how DeVotie brought elements of this northern strand of evangelicalism south. He not only eventually connected with other northern transplants, but also readily utilized various institutions, operating parallel to the local church, in order to extend his vision for Baptist growth. Whereas Hardshell Baptists and others who sympathized with them saw the combination of revival ministry and institution building as a dangerous cocktail of spiritual approaches, DeVotie believed in advancing both.

DeVotie's personal story of family death and loss also provides a unique vantage point for the nexus of several factors shaping the life of the evangelical churches in the South after the Civil War. Drew Faust has shown how the southern worldview altered in the face of a massive death toll, loss of property, and lack of self-determination, during the Civil War. Experiencing such extensive collective loss impacted all of southern life. DeVotie's suffering, and his response to it, shows not only how spiritual leaders endured suffering but also how evangelicals

²¹ Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), 3-27; Wyatt-Brown, 526. He affirmed the impact of evangelicalism on the South, "Yet revival religion played as emphatic and lasting a part in shaping the southern mind as the romantic posturings which Cash so colorfully described."

²² Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), xi-xiv.

processed death during this period. In addition, DeVotie displays how a life of suffering actually propelled his ministry influence among Baptists in the South.²³

Examining DeVotie's ministry also sheds additional light on the ways in which the evangelical church in the South responded to Reconstruction and Redemption. Rufus Spain assessed this as a period when, despite the devastation the South had experienced, the Methodists and Baptists of the South became "at ease in Zion." Leaders like DeVotie had propelled Baptists first to a position of acceptance in the South and then to become one of the dominant spiritual voices. But now Baptists risked losing completely the very counter-cultural stance and evangelistic outreach which had been central to their purpose in the South a century earlier.²⁴ Furthermore, as Charles Regan Wilson and Foster Gaines showed, even while evangelical religion had come to dominate the southern spiritual mindset, its ascension also made it susceptible to being reduced to merely a southern civil religion. DeVotie's final ministry years as head of the Georgia Baptist Mission Board show how he and other Baptists continued to view themselves on a mission to spread the Gospel to all parts of the South through efforts to launch new churches, directed and supported by the state conventions. In this regard, DeVotie shows that not all Baptists were comfortable being "at ease" in the final quarter of the nineteenth century.²⁵

Wilson Fallin carefully and ably documented the development of black Christianity in Alabama. However, his study covered a broad time period and for the years after the Civil War,

²³ Drew Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 2008), xi-xiii.

²⁴ Rufus Spain, *At Ease in Zion: Social History of Southern Baptists, 1865-1900*, (Nashville: Vanderbilt Press, 2003), 3-11.

²⁵ Gaines M. Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South, 1865 to 1913*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 3-6; Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920*, (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2009), ix-xviii.

focused primarily on the undeniable tension between black and white Christians.²⁶ For Georgia, much less has been written recently about the black church. By looking at the areas in which DeVotie collaborated with the black church and exploring the dynamics between his efforts and the various northern agencies seeking to gain black converts in the South, my work offers fresh insight on what William Montgomery noted as an “under studied” period in black spiritual history.²⁷ Montgomery also argued that this period of southern Reconstruction, Redemption, and establishment of Jim Crow was at least as meaningful as other periods of black American spiritual history, since the black community essentially restructured around the black church. The dynamics of this restructuring cannot be examined in broad detail through DeVotie, but looking over his shoulder sheds additional light on this period when black church leaders were making crucial steps which would determine not only the future of black spirituality, but arguably, black life in America.²⁸ In particular, although Montgomery sees the formation of the black church in the late nineteenth century as essentially the outworking of the white northern Baptists and the black leaders in the South, DeVotie reveals the ongoing participation of the white Southern Baptists in this process.

By approaching these transformations in a biographical manner, examining the life and impact of one noteworthy leader, my study is intentionally a top-down approach to the remarkable spiritual developments which followed on the heels of the Second Great Awakening. But DeVotie was no mere figurehead. His life and work are a reminder of the important

²⁶ Wilson Fallin, *Uplifting the People: Three Centuries of Black Baptists in Alabama*, (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2007), ix-xiv.

²⁷ William E. Montgomery, *Under Their Own Vine and Fig Tree: The African American Church in the South, 1865-1900*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993), xi-xii. Referring to the black church, he explained, “Despite all the attention the church has received, however, few scholars have yet focused on the extremely important role it played in the critical period between emancipation and the urban migration early in the twentieth century.”

²⁸ Montgomery, xii. “So vitally important was the church, in fact, that it is difficult to imagine how the black community in the post-Civil War South could have developed as well as it did without it.”

decisions spiritual leaders made which shaped the Baptists in the South for good and sometimes for ill. My work follows other useful biographical accounts of noteworthy southern religious leaders, including James Fuller's analysis of Basil Manly, known as the "chaplain to the Confederacy," whose life closely paralleled DeVotie's.²⁹

Nevertheless, there are several pitfalls to using one figure as a lens on any historical topic, even if that figure clearly had a determining influence far beyond himself and is carefully set within the broader historical context. One can risk unjustified adulation for that person, failing to fully grapple with his or her failings. In the case of DeVotie, I attempt to avoid false steps in this direction by showing DeVotie's weaknesses in the midst of seeking to unveil his truly significant accomplishments.

Examining one key leader can also lead to missing the history from the bottom up. However, as the elected shepherd of numerous congregations and a designated leader in a highly democratic denomination, DeVotie was also representative of that population. By showing him as both leader and lens, I thereby aim not merely to tell the history of his accomplishments, but also to demonstrate how these revealed the priorities of those sitting in Baptist pews in Alabama and Georgia.³⁰

DeVotie steered the Baptists of Georgia and Alabama on a course to establish, expand and entrench. He did so amidst a climate shaped by the ongoing spirituality of the Second Great Awakening, southern sectionalism, rapidly expanding black Christianity, compromises with secular cultural values, wrestling with internal factions and devastating personal loss. He

²⁹ A. James. Fuller, *Chaplain to the Confederacy: Basil Manly and Baptist Life in the Old South*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), 1-10.

³⁰ Daniel W. Stowell, *Rebuilding Zion: The Religious Reconstruction of the South, 1863-1877*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 8. Referring to the latter part of the nineteenth century, he noted, "Religious reconstruction, like political reconstruction, was not an impersonal historical process. Individuals – women and men, blacks and whites, southerners and northerners – wrote, spoke, acted, and reacted according to their varied perceptions of God's will. Their collective words and actions shaped religious reconstruction, and their decisions had profound, and frequently unforeseen, effects on their own religious lives."

propelled the denomination in his own time, shaping its future trajectory, right up to the present. None of this would have happened without DeVotie's own upbringing in the Christian faith and personal conversion to Christ. His decision to join the Baptist faith and his first steps in Baptist ministry also dramatically shaped how he lived out his "divinely mandated duty."

CHAPTER 2

DETERMINING HIS DIVINELY MANDATED DUTY

DeVotie's early family spiritual influences, primarily through his devout mother, prepared him to embrace the evangelical faith around which he would build his adult life and ministerial calling. But his upbringing near the epicenter of northern evangelical fervor also paved the way for the transformational role he would play in the Baptist churches of the South through his vision to combine evangelical revivalism and institution building. In the early nineteenth century, western New York State experienced waves of evangelical revival. These revivals not only brought numerous converts into the Presbyterian faith already subscribed to by many in the region, but also fostered a plethora of religious societies and charitable organizations. The intent of nearly all of these spiritual institutions was to support the work of the church and extend it through collaborative effort. The climate of this spiritual movement not only exposed young DeVotie to the Gospel message which would lead to his dynamic personal conversion, but also showed him a model for building ministry institutions alongside the local church which would eventually bear great fruit as a centerpiece of his initiatives in Alabama and Georgia.

Through his family DeVotie certainly gained a vision for the promised purpose of God in his life. Yet he also, at his uncle's bidding, received the opportunity to move south. Although their mutual goal was business success, upon his relocation DeVotie soon began to discover his

particular “divinely mandated duty.”¹ Before he could begin achieving it, however, he would have to overcome several setbacks in his early ministry years including expulsion from Furman Seminary and from his first pastorate in Alabama.

For DeVotie his family religious heritage was just as important as the spiritual framework he learned from his childhood community. Reflecting back on his upbringing, he perceived that he was raised to be a man of purpose and destiny, fulfilling a generational continuum of family spiritual progress. A firm believer in God’s providence, DeVotie even perceived the Divine hand in his family name. He recorded:

The name DeVotie, indicates its derivation from ‘a vow’...by whom made, when, where, what about, no one now on earth can tell. Perhaps it was a promise of some ancient Huguenot in the day of persecution, and peril, which God keeps in remembrance before him and perpetuates in the name with blessings upon children’s children, to a thousand generations. The vows of God are upon us, we have promised to be the Lord’s forever. I trust our name, and deportment may ever be in agreement.²

DeVotie was born in 1813 in Oneida,³ New York, to James and Anne DeVotie. His father was born in New Haven, Connecticut, in 1775, and descended from French Huguenots, many of who settled in New York City. On his father’s side his ancestry could be traced to Peter DeVaux, the great grandfather of DeVotie. He, along with his wife and two sons, James and John, immigrated in the middle of the eighteenth century to the American colonies from France, seeking freedom to practice their Protestant beliefs. DeVaux’s wife died during the journey and Peter died during the Revolutionary War. His son, John, lived in New York City but both he and his wife died in the 1830s. Peter’s other son, James, married in New York City and then moved to New Haven. His first wife passed away but he remarried to Eunice Hough before dying in

¹ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 34, 89, 106, and 201. In all of these places DeVotie described his life purpose as fulfilling a duty mandated by God.

² DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 3. Sadly, due to the loss of all his male children, he was not able to perpetuate the DeVotie name through his part of the family line.

³ This region of New York state, known as the “Burned-Over District” became a hot bed of Evangelical movements and other spiritual initiatives in the early 1800s.

Wallingford, Connecticut, in 1804. His son James, DeVotie's father, was a child of the first marriage.⁴ According to DeVotie, around the turn of the century his father moved to Oneida and secured a farm on what was then the frontier. Although thankful that his father had always been "a strictly moral man," DeVotie noted that his father did not come to Christian conversion until age 45. He then joined the Methodist Church and died while DeVotie was still a boy.⁵

DeVotie's mother, Anne Lockwood, also from Connecticut, went to Oneida to teach school. She was born in Goshen, Connecticut, in 1777. Descended from English Puritan lineage, she embraced faith in Christ during her childhood and lived out her days as a devout Presbyterian. She married DeVotie's father in 1803 and she died in 1848 in Ohio at the home of one of DeVotie's brothers. DeVotie was the youngest son of six who survived infancy, with one sister, Mary Anne, younger than him.⁶

Anne DeVotie contributed greatly to determining her son's divinely mandated duty. DeVotie recalled his sincere respect for and deep attachment to his mother: "Her godly example, her ardent love for my soul, with the religious instruction received from her lips, have had a most powerful influence in leading me to Christ, and controlling my entire course through life. Often, even in advanced years, the question is suggested, what would mother think of what I am to do, coupled with an effort to act as I conceive would please her."⁷ Anne DeVotie invested herself in her son's spiritual growth by praying for him, personally instructing him in the Bible, and involving him in the life of the church.⁸

⁴ William C. Levere, *The Record*, 26.3 (Sep 1906): 249, Sigma Alpha Epsilon Archives, Evanston, Illinois. *The Record* is a publication for Sigma Alpha Epsilon members and supporters.

⁵ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 4-5.

⁶ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 10.

⁷ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 6-7.

⁸ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 7-8. DeVotie copied the prayer his mother had prayed for her children, recorded at the time of her death, "My petitions in your behalf were, that the Lord would change your heart from the love of sin to the love of holiness. That you might live a sober righteous, and godly life. So live, that you might be a witness to others, that you had been taught of God, born of the Spirit, created anew in Jesus Christ unto good works,

Although DeVotie made respectful mention of his father in his memoirs, he pointed to his mother as almost exclusively responsible for instructing and modeling the faith to him. In this manner, DeVotie's childhood home life typified a dynamic of maternal spiritual influence Mary Ryan documented in her study of this region. This was not simply the circumstance for DeVotie's family, but also typical of northern evangelicalism in and around the Burned-Over District. Here women made up a majority of church members. They organized their own mission societies and even frequently provided the spiritual direction for their family. The revivalism of this region impacted women and children at a greater percentage than men to the degree that the movement drew criticism for being simply an emotional response among women and children. Although women generally accepted the traditional maternal role under the spiritual leadership of the husband, in the absence of such leadership, and with newfound religious conviction, women often emerged as the spiritual guides for their families.⁹

Regardless of its source, paternal or maternal, the imparting of spiritual direction to the next generation was not always seamless. Such was the case with DeVotie. As a result of his mother's instruction, DeVotie showed early spiritual promise. Yet he regretted that "[t]he goodness which had promised so favorably, passed away like the morning cloud and the early dew." When his mother's health declined he fell in with an ungodly crowd and recorded, "From nine to 15 years of age, I was profane and reckless in rebellion against God...I mourn that these things were facts, but though painful to think of these evidences of depravity, yet their mention

that he would encircle you in the arms of his mercy, and keep you from everything which is evil, and offensive in his sight, and that whatsoever you did you might do it to the honour of his great name."

⁹ Ryan, 104. "Within families, furthermore, it was mothers rather than patriarchs who exerted increasing control over the religious allegiances of the young. In other words, a more decidedly privatized and feminized form of religious and social reproduction was beginning to take shape around the relationship between evangelical mothers and converted children. This was perhaps the most significant social change that germinated on the charred landscape of the Burned-Over District."

makes way for the grace of God to be magnified in their cleansing and pardon.”¹⁰ This cleansing did not transpire immediately.

However, during this time in his life, DeVotie did remember experiencing a regular sense of God’s holiness and his own sinfulness: “The acquaintance which I had with the scriptures showed me the fearful peril of my conduct. I had often been convicted and trembled when thoughts of God’s anger flashed across my dark soul. The certain ruin which awaited me at the judgment day and an eternity of banishment from the presence of My Maker... would alarm and terrify me.”¹¹ Attending a revival at age 13, DeVotie had attempted unsuccessfully to change by his own power when confronted by the preacher with his spiritual need. Yet, the definitive conversion experience DeVotie had on this occasion sought, and at other times resisted, did not occur at a revival meeting or even a regular church service, but at a small prayer gathering.

After several years receiving a public school education, DeVotie had moved about a hundred miles away from his home to work as a school teacher. When visiting his mother one weekend, he accompanied her to a Christian meeting, apparently typical of others he had attended during his life. He intended to amuse himself with critical thoughts of these believers. Instead DeVotie experienced spiritual conversion. Alluding perhaps to some of the experiential roots for his Calvinist understanding of salvation, DeVotie perceived God’s sovereign hand in being “strangely plucked as a firebrand from the flames.”¹² Since the conversion experience proved central to all evangelicals and Baptists in particular, it is not surprising that DeVotie offered much detail on the actual event as follows:

¹⁰ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 13-17. DeVotie also recorded, “After about my ninth year, my mothers [*sic*] health became seriously impaired, and I was thrown among the youth of my own age, and the more advanced among whom I became an eager learner of wickedness,” and, “Through amazing grace and mercy I was not cut down. Surely no hard and impenitent heart ever treasured up wrath against the day of wrath faster than I did.”

¹¹ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 18.

¹² DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 19.

As the service progressed I was deeply moved. The reading of the conversation between Jesus, and Thomas, especially Thomas' exclamation, 'My Lord, and My God,' as he saw the pierced side, and wounded hands to which the Redeemer invited his gaze. I was affected, and my hardened heart was melted to tears. The meeting closed and a portion of the company departed my mother among them....

Some pious person commenced a conversation with a young friend, who was standing at my side, urging upon him the importance of immediate attention to the interests of his soul and warning him of the danger of delay. He proposed to return to the room, and make an effort if I thought the subject of religion so desirable, and necessary. Making a direct appeal to me....

I returned, and took a seat in a corner of the room. Where I could avoid observation. Prayer was offered, and my impressions became inexpressible, and overpowering, my sins arrayed themselves before me. They condemned, and alarmed me. I trembled under a sense of the just indignation of My Heavenly Father, whose goodness, and forbearance, I had abused, and insulted. Then I saw sin as exceedingly sinful, I loathed and abhorred [*sic*] myself, and saw clearly the justice of my eternal condemnation.¹³

He remembered, "I saw my need of assistance, and was led to apply for it at once....I realized that I was there seriously sorry for my sins....I prayed to be forgiven, and saved for Jesus sake....Then there came peace, a peace so sweet that it filled my soul with a new unspeakable joy, followed by that hope which has been as an anchor to my soul for more than 40 years."¹⁴ In recounting these events, DeVotie even correlated his conversion experience with the lyrics of a John Newton hymn, "In Evil Long I Took Delight," the entire text of which he wrote out in his memoirs.¹⁵

It is not surprising to see DeVotie emphasize in his memoirs the role of his mother in his spiritual development, since he wrote his memoirs as letters to his daughter, hoping to influence her toward godly womanhood. He remembered his mother's rejoicing at the news of his conversion, the answer to her enduring prayers. Even in her sickly condition DeVotie's mother

¹³ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 19-21.

¹⁴ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 21-22.

¹⁵ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 24-25. "In evil long I took delight, Unawed by shame or fear, Till a new object struck my sight. And stopped my wild career, I saw one hanging on a tree, In agonies and blood; He turned his dying eyes on me, As near his cross I stood. Oh, near till my latest breath, Shall I forget that look, It seemed to change me with his death, Though not a word he spoke. My conscience felt, and owned the guilt, It plunged me in despair. I saw my sins his blood had spilt, And helped to nail him there. A second look he gave, which said, 'I freely all forgive, This blood is for they ransom paid, I die that thou mayst live.'"

remained the spiritual instructor of her family and at this special moment she shared with him from Second Corinthians, chapter four. DeVotie recalled, “There she kneeled down and prayed for me, thanking God that he had received me, and inclined me to choose his ways, then anew, she consecrated me to his service and committed her son to his fatherly care. Most heartily did I unite with her in these words of consecration and seal them as my own.”¹⁶

DeVotie’s statements to his daughter toward the end of his life reveal how dramatic a change he believed he had undergone at this time of conversion. He described his condition prior to salvation as “poor wretched, . . . lashed into fury by an angry God, . . . a demoniac, foaming, tearing himself, murdering his soul” but now he was “safely born toward the haven of salvation upon the life boat provided by eternal love” and “suddenly transformed by Jesus, seated at his blessed feet, clothed and in his right mind, singing of redeeming love.”¹⁷ DeVotie’s extensive account of his spiritual transformation highlighted each major element which evangelicals believed to be necessary for salvation. He apprehended God’s existence and holiness, followed by seeing his own sin as a deep internal failure, not simply occasional mistaken actions. Then he grasped the reality of Jesus’s work as the only pathway, and the very personal sacrifice, for redemption. He expressed sorrow for sin, received mercy and grace through asking for forgiveness, and believed himself to then be a new person spiritually with the power of the Holy Spirit available to live a new life.

However, DeVotie’s newly embraced faith was not without obstacles. He continued to outline in his memoirs a pattern of Christian conversion which was often followed by a struggle for growth in holiness. DeVotie acknowledged the tumultuous start to his new spiritual life. He remembered shortly after his conversion experience handling a team of horses and using a curse

¹⁶ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 28-29.

¹⁷ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 27.

toward them when they would not obey. Although this might seem a minor infraction, in his tender spiritual state this sin produced temporary uncertainty concerning his spiritual condition. Yet, ultimately he was strengthened in his devotion, explaining, “Then Satan thundered in my ears, all was lost, and I could not see how it could be otherwise. But I wept, confessed before God, and prayed for pardon, and was soon able to hope in the forgiving mercy of the Lord through Christ. Thus, I learned about the fiery trials which try believers...and as often as I strayed and O, how often I grieved my Saviour, I fled for reffuge [*sic*] to Jesus, and found succor, and deliverance at the mercy seat.”¹⁸

DeVotie’s early upbringing in New York was not merely important for the establishment of his evangelical faith, taught through his own family structure, and received by him as he emerged into adulthood. As a resident of Oneida County, DeVotie also spent the first part of his life at the center-point of northern evangelical revivalism and its reform movements. DeVotie came to faith in the midst of the explosion of northern Second Great Awakening spiritual revivalism. His “backyard” served as an incubator for a particular form of evangelical revivalism, one which birthed, rather than resisted, collaborative ministry initiatives organized outside the structure of the local church. This spiritual movement not only spurred young DeVotie’s interest in evangelical faith, but also provided an early blueprint for his vision of how revivalism and institutional initiatives could work hand-in-hand.

As a Presbyterian, Anne DeVotie undoubtedly found herself very at home in this region dominated by that expression of the Christian faith. Indeed in Utica, the rapidly expanding population center of Oneida County, the Presbyterian Church spawned the majority of the revival efforts and religious societies that came to define the region. The revivals also spread to the less numerous Baptists and Methodists but it was in Oneida County and primarily through

¹⁸ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 31.

Presbyterian circles that Charles Finney introduced his “new measures.” This approach to revival meetings and evangelism generally rejected “Old School” Presbyterian theology. Old School Presbyterianism emphasized the total moral depravity of each person and the necessity of God’s sovereign unconditional choosing in order for a person to be ready to respond in faith to the offer of salvation presented in the Bible.

Finney chose not to pursue any formal theological education. Indeed, he had little formal education of any kind save his apprenticeship in the practice of law, which he abandoned when he sensed God’s call for him to enter the ministry. Thus, although he aligned with the Presbyterian denomination and greatly influenced many Presbyterians, along with countless other evangelicals of the time, Finney’s beliefs and practices stood against previously defined Presbyterian convictions. Instead, his “new measures” emphasized the need to press the unconverted very directly to make a decision of conversion. Finney believed strongly in the use of emotional appeals to bring about this decision. Because he also struggled to embrace the historic Presbyterian view of the perseverance of the saints, his teaching stressed the importance of holiness as a demonstration of belief more than assurance in Christ because of the Holy Spirit’s power to sanctify the believer. Unlike Finney, DeVotie accepted and retained an “Old School” Calvinist theological framework, but he aligned with Finney’s priority on revivalism.

Yet even before Finney arrived on the scene, Oneida County had already experienced several waves of revival that propelled a rapidly expanding number of evangelical reform movements and institutions.¹⁹ DeVotie grew up in an environment with significant similarities to the areas where he would minister in his early Alabama pastorates. Utica was just a small

¹⁹ Ryan, xii. “In the decades before the Civil War the region was set aflame with evangelical religion and reforming zeal. As the men and women of west-central New York flocked to revivals, joined a plethora of voluntary associations, and lent their support to a variety of reform movements, they also bespoke their domestic concerns and enacted a complex range of gender and familial roles.”

community on the New York frontier in early nineteenth century. But by the middle of the century over 20,000 people called the city home and many more dotted the outlying county. Just as new residents regularly flooded into the Burned-Over District in the first few decades of the nineteenth century, many newcomers populated the towns of Montgomery, Tuscaloosa, and Marion in Alabama when DeVotie ministered there during the 1830s and 1840s.²⁰

For the youthful and newly converted DeVotie the vision to combine revivalism and institution building remained dormant until he would have opportunity to implement it as a pastor in the Baptist churches of the South. Indeed the first thing on DeVotie's mind after his conversion was to simply follow further in his mother's spiritual footsteps. He consulted a Presbyterian pastor in hopes of joining his mother's preferred denomination, but the pastor missed a scheduled meeting with DeVotie. Shortly thereafter, by then age seventeen, DeVotie relocated to Savannah, Georgia, to work as a merchant in his uncle's business. He began worshipping with his uncle in the First Baptist Church of Savannah and started to compare Baptist belief to Presbyterianism. Presbyterians structured their church leadership more rigidly and with more hierarchy than the purely congregational governance of the Baptists. They also differed in more obvious fashion on the time and mode of Baptism. Presbyterians practiced infant baptism, as well as adult baptism for new converts, and were content to sprinkle recipients with water. Baptists only administered the rite to those old enough to personally profess belief and insisted on immersion under the water. After studying Baptist beliefs, DeVotie joined the Baptist church in Savannah in 1830.²¹

At the same time, DeVotie sensed a call from God to pastoral ministry. His actions at his own baptism show the combination of bold leadership and occasional rashness that would

²⁰ Ryan, 5.

²¹ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 19, 21-22, and 33-34.

characterize much of his early ministry. Himself a recipient of the sacrament and merely a new inductee to the church, he decided to add his own address to the preacher's remarks, hoping to move any unsaved people among the crowd to conversion.²² DeVotie did not record how those listening responded but his uncle fully supported his calling to ministry even though it meant losing a business partner. As a father figure in DeVotie's life he became a trusted encourager for DeVotie's early ministry endeavors.

DeVotie's first step toward the ministry, enrolling at what was then Furman Seminary in South Carolina, indicated his participation in a new generation of formally trained Baptist leaders. His brief stint at Furman also revealed his propensity for contentious leadership which sparked several early ministry setbacks. DeVotie led a group of students who opposed faculty member, Jesse Hartwell, concerning high boarding costs. Although DeVotie gives little detail about the incident, Hartwell prevailed and DeVotie's early withdrawal from the school proved the first instance in a pattern of instigating conflict and reluctant departure, which manifested itself throughout DeVotie's early pastorates.²³

The abrupt ending to DeVotie's incomplete theological training did not hinder him from attaining the position of pastor to the Baptist church in Camden, South Carolina, where he was ordained in 1833. Hartwell's participation in the ordination service revealed an element of DeVotie's personality which counteracted his contentiousness - his ability to repair conflicted

²² DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 35, 37-38. DeVotie recalled, "I found foremost an intense desire to influence sinners to believe in the Redeemer, that they might enjoy the satisfaction in Christ which I had found, and finally be saved."

²³ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 44. DeVotie recorded, "This sudden disruption was occasioned by a youthful indiscretion in permitting myself to be used by my fellow students as spokesman concerning our board." Hartwell took DeVotie to task forcing him to depart the seminary without completing his studies. DeVotie also departed from the Montgomery and Tuscaloosa churches due at least in part to conflict with members.

relationships.²⁴ Much later, DeVotie recalled a quick restoration to “kindest Christian relations between the professor and myself which continued through many years, until his death,” and noted, “I had in him one of my most ardent supporters.”²⁵ Indeed, Hartwell and DeVotie worked closely throughout many years of ministry, the former eventually teaching at Howard College in Marion, Alabama, while the latter led the Baptist church there.

DeVotie’s tenure at Camden proved brief. Dr. Samuel Furman encouraged him to pursue ministry opportunities in what was then the growing southwestern United States and in 1834 he left for Montgomery, Alabama.²⁶ In Alabama he gained a foothold for his ascension to the place of prominent Baptist pastor and leader of Baptist expansion in the Deep South. Although Montgomery was already an established town, the surrounding frontier environment shaped DeVotie’s early ministry in the still newly formed state. Just a few years before his arrival, the Alabama Baptist State Convention recorded the frontier setting, “The wilderness is all before you, behind you, around you; the inhabitants of the waste places are in the midst of you and before your eyes, a living spectacle of ignorance, superstition, and crime.”²⁷ As DeVotie migrated to what was then the “south west” he joined the waves of other settlers relocating to Alabama. Poor farming conditions and curtailed economic opportunities in the East propelled settlers to enter what was still a very sparsely populated region. The removal of Indians meant the prospect of inexpensive land and the rising value of cotton gave hopeful migrants visions of

²⁴ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 50. Due to the special nature of this service in the life of a minister, it is unlikely that Hartwell would have agreed to serve, or that DeVotie would have invited him, were their conflict not largely resolved.

²⁵ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 44-45.

²⁶ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 52. “Following the advice of Dr. Samuel Furman, who thought I might be more useful in Ala, I resigned the charge at Camden in July 1833.” By attending Furman Theological Institute, as it was initially known, DeVotie connected early on with one of the most prominent Baptist families in America. Richard Furman served as the first President of the Triennial Convention and as pastor of First Baptist Church of Charleston. His son, James Clement Furman, served as Furman’s first president. Dr. Samuel Furman was also one of Richard’s sons.

²⁷ Alabama Baptist State Convention Minutes, 1827, Special Collection, Samford University Library, Birmingham, Alabama, 11.

prosperity. For the spiritually minded, this region also displayed great need for missionary activity and great promise for extending God's kingdom on earth.²⁸

He recounted his journey and subsequent humble start in this new town, "Passing through Georgia...and on through the Indian nation, all the way by stagecoach, as there were no railroads there...I found myself in Montgomery in the middle of August. I had no acquaintance, no introduction to anyone, a perfect stranger, among perfect strangers; my money nearly expended, my wardrobe in a dilapidated condition, and things generally anything else beside promising."²⁹ More important than DeVotie's condition was the condition of the town, which was wracked with deadly illness. DeVotie seized the opportunity to preach at a funeral and the Baptist church asked him to serve as their pastor alongside a Mr. Worthington, who preached once a week. Worthington passed away during this season of illness and DeVotie became the first fulltime pastor of this growing congregation.³⁰

In Montgomery, DeVotie met Christian Margaret Noble. She was five years older than DeVotie, born in North Carolina in 1808, and raised a Methodist. After moving at a young age with her family to northern Alabama, her father died and her family relocated to Montgomery. DeVotie described his marriage proposal, "I believed she possessed the qualities of mind and heart, to make me happy as my life long companion. I informed her of the affection which I entertained for her, that my heart had elected her above all others to be the light of my house and

²⁸ William Warren Rogers, Robert Davis Ward, Leah Rawls Atkins, Wayne Flynt, *Alabama: The History of a Deep South State*, (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1994), 60. "The isolation of families was intense, and women especially missed the kinship networks left behind. Neighbors were so distant that smoke from another house was rarely visible. The loneliness of everyday life made community events an irresistible attraction. House raisings, cornshucking parties, and camp meetings brought distant neighbors together. The first missionaries, always at least ambivalent toward earthly pleasures, reported that there was little religion on the Alabama frontier. Settlers in Washington County were described as 'grossly worldly and extremely wicked,' and the Tennessee Valley was 'destitute of spiritual instruction.'"

²⁹ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 53.

³⁰ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 54-55. First Baptist Church of Montgomery Records, Special Collection, Samford University Library, Birmingham, Alabama.

home. She delicately considered, and decided that she would be mine.”³¹ The couple married on January 29, 1835, and commenced their life together in Montgomery.

After just a year, DeVotie’s involvement in what he vaguely referred to as “politics” cost him the favor of the congregation. Episodes of this sort highlight DeVotie’s nature and conform to Wayne Flynt’s brief summary of him as “a fractious, opinionated man whose pastorates were both stormy and generally successful.”³² DeVotie did not spell out the details, but the politics may have been very personal, centered on his wife’s social class and denominational affiliation. It was probably one thing for DeVotie to marry a Methodist, but his new bride did not elect to receive the central defining rite of Baptist spirituality, believer’s baptism, until a full two years after their marriage. Observers also reported her interest in fine clothing. Since the Baptist churches on the frontier were only beginning to transition at this time to engage wealthy southerners, DeVotie’s wife may have seemed a bit “worldly” for Baptists at the time, who understood holiness to include material simplicity.³³

In subsequent periods of his ministry DeVotie would have to overcome Hardshell resistance, reluctant support for his ministry vision, and significant personal suffering. Before he would tackle those obstacles he had to first learn to overcome himself. On May 17, 1835, the church voted to terminate DeVotie as pastor because he was at odds with a portion of the congregation. As a last ditch effort at reconciliation, the church asked five Baptist ministers from other communities to help seek a resolution to the conflict, but only Alexander Travis came.³⁴ According to Lee Allen, who wrote a history of First Baptist Church of Montgomery,

³¹ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 55-56.

³² Flynt, 18 and 87.

³³ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 251. In a pasted article taken from an obituary tribute to DeVotie’s wife, Samuel Boykin specifically noted, that she “was baptized by him (DeVotie) at Tuscaloosa, in January 1837, though for a number of years previous to her baptism, she had been a believer in Jesus.”; Flynt, 18.

³⁴ Flynt, 1-3. Travis served as one of the early Baptist pastors in Alabama, and ministered 34 year at several churches in the southern half of the state. He died in 1852.

“Members of each side told him [Travis] their respective sides of the story. He then decided to call for a general prayer meeting. DeVotie at first said he would not attend the meeting, but later changed his mind. He concealed himself behind a door.” After prayer, DeVotie came forward “bathed in tears.”³⁵ Despite these efforts the relational damage had already been done. The church made an effort to restore DeVotie as pastor, but he did not accept.

The failure in Montgomery devastated the young pastor. What he had seen as his divinely mandated duty now seemed unclear. Dejected, he requested to return to business with his uncle who agreed but also warned DeVotie, “If God has called you to preach the Gospel he will have nothing in the way.” The two met in New York and planned for DeVotie to go ahead to Savannah. DeVotie described what he saw as God’s shocking fulfillment of his uncle’s words, “When the vessel left the wharf bearing me away, I saw him standing where I parted from him, until distance hid him from my sight. I never saw him again. A few days afterward, he was struck down with Appoplexy [*sic*],³⁶ and before the time which we had appointed to meet his body was in the grave, and I believe his ransomed spirit with Jesus.”³⁷ With DeVotie’s business plan thwarted by what appeared to him as the clear hand of Providence, he began to believe God was directing him to stay in ministry but he remained greatly discouraged: “My great spiritual enemy, suggested that I had rushed into the ministry uncalled and now my feet were snared, and God was punishing my presumption, and I would be forced to labor in some other way, to support myself, that I was utterly unworthy to be a minister of Jesus Christ.” Although still disappointed, DeVotie described receiving peace and satisfaction, “God in his own time rebuked

³⁵ Lee Allen, *The First 150 Years: Montgomery’s First Baptist Church*, (Birmingham: Oxmoor Press, 1979), 21-22.

³⁶ In the nineteenth century this term commonly referred to what was likely an aneurysm or cardiac event which produced unconsciousness followed rapidly by death.

³⁷ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 61-62.

the tempter, and the Master said peace be still, to the agitated elements of my soul, and a calm faith in his direction and care, pervaded my relieved heart.”³⁸

DeVotie saw God’s direction in closing the door of escape from ministry which he temporarily sought. He clearly wrestled with the challenge of his predicament, “The way appeared to be perfectly closed against me. Where should I turn, where go, all was dark.” Whereas God took away one special influence, DeVotie’s uncle, the Divine hand brought him another through Luther Rice, one of the most influential national Baptist leaders. Rice was a household name for Baptists in the early nineteenth century. He had famously accompanied Adoniram Judson to the mission field in Burma. After several years, Rice returned to the States where he sought to expand Baptist world mission efforts and raise funds for the work of Judson. Eventually he lost the full support of Baptists by expanding his varied domestic ministry pursuits so broadly that many felt he had lost focus on the highest goal, world missions. How he heard of DeVotie or what specifically prompted his decision to visit the young struggling pastor is unclear. Nevertheless, his brief investment in DeVotie clearly made an impact at this crucial turning point for DeVotie who recalled:

That visit raised me up from dispondency [*sic*] when almost at the verge of despair. He spoke of the tenderness, and love of Jesus toward his ministers, and assured me that the firey [*sic*] trial through which I was passing, was in some way accomplished in all the brethren. He told me to cheer up, to look to Jesus, and where my unruly discontented spirit chafed under the treatment I had received, he reminded me of him, who suffered the contradiction of men against himself. Exhorted to be meek and patient waiting for God.³⁹

Shortly thereafter, Alva Woods, then President of the University of Alabama and a member of First Baptist Church in Tuscaloosa, led the process which brought DeVotie back to

³⁸ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 64.

³⁹ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 58-59. “Just in this emergency that great, and good man, Luther Rice came to see me, whose counsel, advise and prayers, were of endless comfort, and benefit to me....Blessed old man, he did good work that day. He raised me up from the dust, and gave me lessons which I have tried to practice ever since, with benefit to myself, and others. I hope to meet him in heaven, and thank him in person again for that visit.”

pastoral ministry. He invited DeVotie to come visit and preach since the Tuscaloosa congregation had no pastor at the time. Still not having fully recovered his confidence in his ministerial calling, DeVotie remembered asking himself, “How could I expect a call from such a people?” and he remembered being “filled...with painful apprehension of a sad failure.”⁴⁰ Nevertheless, after hearing DeVotie deliver just two sermons the congregation promptly extended a “call” for him to come serve as pastor.⁴¹

DeVotie had now re-determined his duty from God. His understanding of his duty began with his conversion to the evangelical Christian faith in New York State. His mother had been the primary human instrument of implanting that faith, but it began to grow through DeVotie’s experience of conversion. The surrounding spiritual movement of the Burned-Over District shaped his divine duty by encouraging maternal spiritual influence in the home and providing an environment of evangelical fervor which fostered DeVotie’s conversion. However the context of his upbringing did not merely shape his personal spirituality. DeVotie also inculcated a model of ministry which combined revivalism and institution building. This model found ready reception in the spiritual climate of the Oneida region, but would require decisive leadership to develop in Alabama and Georgia. The very hard driving personality that nearly derailed DeVotie’s early ministry efforts would prove to be a necessity rather than a liability for him to fulfill his divine duty, through institution building and other pathways. Although he carried the mantel of Baptist institutional expansion throughout his ministry, DeVotie began to be an instrument of institution building in Tuscaloosa and Marion during the first few decades of his pastoral work, leading up to the Civil War.

⁴⁰ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 65.

⁴¹ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 65.

CHAPTER 3

INSTRUMENT FOR INSTITUTION BUILDING

During the middle of the nineteenth century, DeVotie and a growing number of Baptists in the South envisioned a Baptist world built around denominational institutions rather than completely decentralized congregations. In general, each individual Baptist congregation possessed a clear but simple structure, typically with a constitution, articles of faith, and rules of governance. However, the founding Baptist churches in the Deep South could only loosely be called a denomination. In fact, they outwardly resisted most attempts to organize into an overarching agency. Even voluntary collective efforts at centralized ministries raised concerns for fear that collaboration might turn into ecclesiastical hierarchy.¹

Yet shifting spiritual, social, and political winds in the 1830s and 1840s opened the doors for Baptists to increase their denominational cohesion and to pursue collaborative ministry institutions. In the early years of the nineteenth century, freedom of religious expression afforded by the Bill of Rights paved the way for an expanding number of American religious sects. However, it also meant that Baptists who still acutely remembered being outsiders to the religious establishment in the colonies along the eastern seaboard, could relax their fears of authoritative church hierarchies. In Alabama and Georgia, Baptists also started to enjoy a

¹ Robert Andrew Baker, *The Southern Baptist Convention and Its People, 1607-1972*, (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1974), 8-9. “Organized connectional or denominational life among American Baptist [*sic*] developed quite slowly. This would be expected in the case of churches which emphasized their own independency.” He also notes that the history of the earliest Baptist association in America shows the “extreme sensitiveness of Baptists toward connectionalism and authoritarianism.”; Spain, xiii. In the foreword Samuel Hill explained, “This particular church body... were the descendants of a prophetic people who viewed all institutions with suspicion – not least the Christian church whenever it was inclined to think of itself as a centralized agency with the right of authority over local collectives.”

numerical standing they had rarely experienced in other parts of America. Instead of being stuck as a small minority group needing to defend their spiritual borders, they could now picture extending their influence to a large portion, if not the majority, of southerners. As political tension with the North increased, the building of Baptist religious institutions located in the South, as well as funded and controlled by southerners, became more appealing. At the same time, the growing wealth in the South and the increasing number of Baptists who were wealthy provided a revenue source for building religious institutions beyond the local congregation.

However, as Baptists in Alabama and Georgia began to work together in establishing institutions beyond the local church they lacked the leadership to champion these efforts or raise the funds to see success. DeVotie changed all of this. He led a generation who transformed Baptist life by building Sabbath schools, Bible societies, church newspapers, robust denominational structures, and enduring academic centers. DeVotie upheld this vision for Baptist institution building throughout his career, but he rose to the forefront in this revolution during his pastorates in Tuscaloosa and Marion, Alabama, spanning 1836-1856.

When he arrived in Tuscaloosa on January 1, 1836, DeVotie took on a church struggling to get fully established. He found First Baptist Church of Tuscaloosa “in a feeble condition numerically, pecuniarily [*sic*] and spiritually.” In order to see progress, he reflected on having to “call forth all my powers of mind, and body.” Yet DeVotie saw God’s blessing, such that the Divine One “soon filled the small house and there were tokens of promise that seed sown bountifully with tears would in due time end in a joyful harvest.”² Both the white and black segments of the congregation soon expanded.

By leaving Montgomery and relocating to Tuscaloosa, DeVotie had jumped from a contentious church environment into a contentious town. During this period Tuscaloosa served

² DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 66.

as state capital. The community was growing in refinement through the academic influence of university professors and the social uplift of political elites. However these interests frequently clashed with the raucous student population of the University of Alabama and with yeoman settlers in the region who were often poor and uneducated.

Basil Manly, DeVotie's noteworthy fellow Baptist pastor, relocated to Tuscaloosa shortly after DeVotie arrived. In his biography of Manly, Fuller described the population of the town during this period as "rough-and-ready" and noted about the students that "many of them spent most of their time in the local brothels and taverns rather than in the classroom."³ Manly observed that the combination of a male student population and southern perceptions of masculine honor yielded regular violence, including duels. During a particularly contentious period between Manly's predecessor, Alva Woods, and the student body, students shot firearms at Woods and hit him with whips. Woods responded by suspending about a third of the entire student body. Woods clamped down so tightly that in 1837, only one student qualified to graduate. Soon Woods resigned and Manly accepted the position. Manly initially quelled some of the student volatility by implementing a more lenient discipline policy, but in 1840 students launched riots on campus. Manly expelled Legrand Capers, who then confronted Manly, hit him in the face and attempted to pull his nose.⁴

If the university students and many nearby frontier settlers made for an unruly environment, Tuscaloosa's status as the seat of the state government meant the beginnings of a genteel population. Referring to this contingent, the *Alabama Baptist* declared, "The society was remarkable for culture and refinement, as it has been ever since."⁵ Just a few years later, Manly proudly described the town as having 3,500 residents and some 20 stores. While writing to J.D.

³ Fuller, 154.

⁴ Fuller, 156, 164.

⁵ *Alabama Baptist*, Mar 31, 1874.

Averell, a friend of his from South Carolina who was contemplating following Manly in a move to Alabama, Manly summarized the effects of the growing prosperity on fashion: “you would not see any such a congregation, in all Charleston, in this respect, as you will find in the Methodist Church in Tuscaloosa [*sic*], on Sunday, when the Weather is fine.”⁶

DeVotie described the First Baptist Church that he was called to in Tuscaloosa as a place “where learned legislators, judges, and the wisest, and most fashionable people were accustomed to assemble. The Governor was an attendant at the Baptist Church and Dr. Woods who was a member and his accomplished wife with him.”⁷ Although previous Baptist leaders deemed it inappropriate to mix political involvement or social prominence with pastoral integrity, DeVotie hoped to extend Baptist spiritual influence by carefully entering into circles of power. Increasingly in places like Tuscaloosa, Baptists no longer took a back seat to other denominations in the fight for social status. This shift not only would correlate to the professionalizing of the pastorate, but opened the door for DeVotie to experiment with establishing Baptist institutions. As the Baptist congregation in Tuscaloosa progressively incorporated those with wealth and power, they grew more desirous to exert that influence collectively through religious institutions previous Baptists had neither the means nor the vision to develop. The work of institution building by DeVotie in Tuscaloosa would not only be a starting place for further and larger efforts by him, but also an example of what would happen across the South as Baptists increased in wealth and status.⁸

⁶ Fuller, 139. He cites Basil Manly to J. D. Averell, Feb 16, 1841, in Manly Diary 2, 284-286.

⁷ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 65; Luther Quentin Porch, *History of the First Baptist Church: Tuscaloosa, Alabama 1818-1968*, (Tuscaloosa: Drake Printers, 1968), 15.

⁸ Fuller, 136-137. “Evangelicals became part of the political establishment in the midst of all of this, and as they charged ahead, Bibles and pulpits at ready, they transformed the American political scene, even as they themselves were changed by it.” and, “This was a far cry from the traditional role that clergymen were expected to play in politics. The context of American politics had changed since the early days of the nineteenth century, when the minister was to remain aloof from politics, careful not to move beyond the limitations set by society. But the job

In his four years in Tuscaloosa, DeVotie initiated several central elements of his strategy to establish, expand, and entrench Baptists through institution building. He would launch several others soon afterward, during his Marion pastorate. While in Tuscaloosa, DeVotie earnestly applied himself to Sabbath schools, Bible societies, local associations and the state convention.

DeVotie traced his interest in Sabbath schools to his early years in New York and he joined other Baptist and Methodist leaders of various backgrounds who advocated this effective tool. The least controversial and perhaps most widely embraced “institution” of Baptist church life, the Sabbath school, was administered at a separate meeting time from the worship service. It served the children of the church but also reached children who were not affiliated and even some adults, aiming both to spread Christian beliefs and provide basic reading lessons. It was to the Sabbath school that DeVotie attributed much of his own early spiritual growth and is therefore not surprising that he advocated this Baptist institution all of his life. His model for this was his own mother who “studied the lessons with me, pointed out portions of scripture to be committed to memory, and on Sabbath morning often early preparation all being ready, she accompanied me to the place of instruction, and the house of God....she kneeled down and prayed for me, then we passed on, I to recite a perfect lesson, and she to see her son approved by his instructor.”⁹ He envisioned each family, in similar fashion, doing its part together with the church, to raise a generation of committed believers.

of the preacher moved between both public and private worlds, while their position as spiritual leaders made them likely candidates for more secular duties as well.”

⁹ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 10-12, and 45-46. DeVotie wrote, “I have often thought she understood the true method of Sabbath school success, parents cooperating with teachers. Were this not the case, there cannot be that degree of benefit which would otherwise attend S. School instruction.

In after years, when she had passed on to her reward, and gray hairs testified that my life was well nigh passed away, I sought upon a visit to my childhood home, that place in that grove, where that anxious mother was accustomed to rest, teach, and pray with her son on Sabbath morning. That scene is daguerotyped [*sic*] immortally upon my inmost soul,” and, “Even in my most sinful days I kept up my connection with the Sabbath school. After

For DeVotie, the Sabbath school served not only as a stimulus for spiritual growth in families and as a vehicle of outreach into the community, but also as a restraining force on destructive behaviors. He queried, “Was the Sunday school thus a strong cord to hold me back from the shipwreck in youth?” In addition to providing moral restraint, DeVotie believed the Sabbath school contributed to the growth of the church’s shining lights, her future pastors. He reflected, “I have some acquaintance with the Scriptures, and am indebted to this source of youthful information for the ability to quote correctly, and draw illustrations from the Bible comparing Scripture with scripture. God’s word, committed to memory over fifty years ago is fresh upon the tablets of my heart today.”¹⁰

Baptist church historian James Tull described the eventual result of DeVotie’s efforts to build this institution, “Few if any historians would deny that the Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention has been one of the most powerful influences of the Convention. It has been more than a publication house for instructional materials; it also has been the vehicle of expansion for the Convention. Sunday school classes in the local churches have been enlistment and enlargement arms.”¹¹ Indeed, DeVotie recognized that this organizational tool could be implemented cheaply, at a grassroots level, and readily customized across lines of denomination, location, class and race. Sabbath Schools also grew rapidly because they functioned as an effective vehicle for extending Biblical principles and morality out into the community at large. Even if participants did not reach the point of conversion to Christianity, those leading this movement knew that they were impacting the social and cultural climate of the South.

thirteen years of age mainly as a teacher, Strange teacher! I even commenced a Sabbath school in our neighborhood.”

¹⁰ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 45-46. DeVotie reflected, “I acknowledge with gratitude unspeakable the invaluable instruction which I received by many years attendance upon the Sabbath School both as schollar [*sic*] and teacher. In no other day of the week have I learned so much of God’s word, and that which is most useful to me as a preacher now, as on the Lords day. In this respect to me a ‘Day of all the days the best’.”

¹¹ James E. Tull, *High-Church Baptists in the South: The Origin, Nature, and Influence of Landmarkism*, (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2000), 162.

In a sermon on the topic of Sabbath Schools, DeVotie presented his case for this institution: “All organizations or systems which profess moral power and truth, are dependent upon the revelations which God has made....The Sabbath school is the offspring of Christianity and eminently displays its spirit and tenderness.”¹² DeVotie pointed to the results in Britain from the churches there organizing to support this work and noted the establishment of the American Sabbath School Union as a helpful institution to further this goal. In an apparent effort to overcome any remaining objections, he worked systematically through numerous reasons for supporting this effort including increased knowledge of the Bible, promotion of moral virtue, and supporting parents. DeVotie concluded by invoking a speech by a man not known for his friendship with evangelicalism, Thomas Jefferson, who called religion “the cheap defence of nations.” Clearly DeVotie felt compelled to promote the case for this form of institution building which became one of the most widely accepted and implemented “institutions” of the church in America.¹³

Even though DeVotie saw the Sabbath school as a denominational mechanism for expanding Baptist influence among the masses, as a local church pastor, he also rejoiced in the impact on each individual. He recalled one uncharacteristic student, an elderly woman he met when he led an informal Sabbath school in a poor neighborhood during his time in South Carolina: “There was an old woman, nearly seventy years of age who could not read when she came there, and who had no saving knowledge of Jesus. Before I removed to another field of labor, she had learned to read the bible, understandingly and had become a believer in Jesus....I should consider my ministry a blessed success if the Lord had specially chosen me as his

¹² James H. DeVotie Sermon Journals, Vol 5, 600-610. Special Collection, Samford University Library, Birmingham, Alabama.

¹³ DeVotie Sermon Journals, Vol 5, 600-610.

instrument to comfort the humblest lamb of all his flock.”¹⁴ DeVotie hoped that through spreading the Sabbath school method many others like this woman would come to know Christ better.

DeVotie’s commitment to developing Sabbath Schools in Alabama and Georgia did not go unnoticed by his pastoral peers. In his later ministry years he wielded his fundraising acumen to build this Baptist institution, which although important in the mind of many Baptists, rarely drew the same excitement as world missions or even home missions. In an article DeVotie pasted in his memoirs, one observer noted DeVotie’s efforts to speak for the support of the denominational Sunday School Board: “Under his hand it was made to present a picture second to none that claimed our contributions. His text was: ‘Will the Sunday School Work Pay?’ And most conclusively did he prove that it did pay – pay every one and in many ways.”¹⁵ Given DeVotie’s efforts to advance Sabbath Schools, it is not surprising that in 1872 he was pursued to lead this denominational board on behalf of the Southern Baptist Convention. Despite the hefty \$2500 annual salary offered, he declined, but only because he was not ready to move away entirely from pastoral ministry in the local church. Nevertheless he was honored that his heart for Sabbath Schools had been recognized.¹⁶

¹⁴ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 41 and 212. DeVotie included a pasted article on the growing popularity of Sunday Schools written by J. Wm. Jones May 2, 1872. Although many Baptist churches in the South had implemented a Sunday School program earlier in the century, Jones expressed enthusiasm that this institution continued to spread to new churches, “They are fast realizing the idea of a “Bible School””; Flynt, 18; Wyatt-Brown, 521.

¹⁵ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 189. See pasted article from *Atlanta Constitution*, May 20, 1881.

¹⁶ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 253. “The President of the S.S. Board of the S. B. Convention, Dr S Landrum, offered the Secretaryship of his board to me a few days ago, with a salary of \$2500 and traveling expenses. I declined upon the ground that my life had been spent in the pastors work, and if I am adapted to any work, that is the field for which I was designed, and it is most congenial to my feelings and with which I am better satisfied and pleased than with any other. This unsought and unexpected election is gratifying because of the confidence of my brethren in me which it manifests.” Dated December 9, 1872.

Also in Tuscaloosa, in 1836, DeVotie initiated his twenty-year leadership of The Alabama Baptist Bible Society.¹⁷ Bible and “tract” societies exemplified the evangelical zeal to thoroughly saturate the South with the Christian message. Yet they also reflected a process of institution building by bringing together multiple churches and sometimes multiple denominations. Tracts usually consisted of short booklets or pamphlets summarizing the core evangelical belief in God, sin, salvation, obedience, and heaven, in light of the person of Jesus Christ. These might contain various texts of Scripture related to the specific message of the tract but were not meant to contain a comprehensive treatment of Biblical truth or content. Their shorter format not only made them easier for the less literate or less interested to digest, but also less expensive to distribute than full Bibles.

However, for Baptists, a people who placed high value on the Bible as God’s inspired truth, putting the complete text of the Bible in the hands of neighbors and friends was always the ideal. Bible societies sought to place a Bible in every home, and even enlisted the help of government statisticians to discover the number of homes which lacked the Scriptures. The goal of dispersing the Bible was not simply to see people experience conversion to faith in Christ through reading its message. The full hope was to extend God’s Kingdom in this world through His word. This, it was hoped, would bless all those in the region, both believers and those unconverted, by encouraging goodness and restraining evil. Simply put, Baptists and other evangelicals believed access to the Bible could transform society.¹⁸

¹⁷ Flynt, 31. DeVotie was President from 1836-56; DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 105.

¹⁸ John W. Quist, “Slaveholding Operatives of the Benevolent Empire: Bible, Tract, and Sunday School Societies in Antebellum Tuscaloosa County, Alabama,” *The Journal of Southern History* 62.3 (Aug 1996): 488. “The Bible crusade preached more than conversion of those unmoved by evangelical Protestantism. Advocates of the Bible were convinced that neglect of the Scriptures would result in a society governed by chaos. So, to inhibit base impulses, encourage self-control, and promote a peaceful and well-ordered republic, it was necessary to place the Bible in the hands of as many people as possible.”

DeVotie had certainly learned firsthand in Oneida County a model for Bible and tract distribution ministries among evangelicals. In Utica during the 1820s, the leadership of the Utica Tract Society divided the city into 31 “districts.” With the city divided into these manageable population units, as many as 60 “agents” sought to make sure every residence was approached with inexpensive and some free literature about the Christian faith. In one year they distributed at least 1,000 Bibles in the city.¹⁹

By the late 1830s passion for Bible societies among Protestants in general, and evangelicals in particular, had fueled the growth of a national Bible distribution organization which sought to accomplish the type of work DeVotie had seen in Oneida, all across the developing American frontier. But as DeVotie began to develop ministry initiatives in Tuscaloosa, the most prominent national Bible and tract organization, the American Bible Society (ABS), was already beginning to suffer a reduced following in the South due to its northern origins and support of abolition. Because of both sectional allegiance and denominational adherence, DeVotie chose to invest in the Alabama Baptists’ version of this national organization. Although it might have been an easier course for DeVotie to align with the well-established and well-funded ABS, he followed a riskier path by starting an unproven local organization. This eventually proved a shrewd maneuver for institutional control since in the years following DeVotie’s Tuscaloosa ministry the ABS became a particular point of sectional contention. An 1857 reprinted and published letter from Basil Manly to DeVotie, expressed the reasons many southerners withdrew their participation in the ABS: “The Southern people are not unwilling to consider their duties before God, in the matter of slaveholding. . . . But God has not promised that He will teach a remote, unsympathizing people what are the separate

¹⁹ Ryan, 109.

and peculiar duties of other people.”²⁰ In this way, the implications of sectional division reached all the way into matters of Bible distribution. For DeVotie this meant he was now leading the preferred organization in Alabama for a primary initiative of Baptist outreach. His success in this regard drew such attention that in 1854 he was offered the role of secretary for the Bible Board for the entire Southern Baptist Convention, but he declined. Relieved that DeVotie would not be relocating from Alabama, one writer praised DeVotie’s influence on the Alabama Baptist Bible Society: “No minister in our State would be more sadly missed than this excellent man of God.”²¹

During DeVotie’s tenure as the pastor of the First Baptist Church of Tuscaloosa, he continued to experiment with institution building beyond Sabbath Schools and Bible society work. He extended the activities of the local Baptist association as well as the state convention, which was just over a decade old. The practice of forming these collaborative groups at the local and statewide level had taken decades to develop even in more established Baptist areas.²² In the Baptist understanding of church polity each local church was “the church.” The Episcopalians and Methodists practiced their carefully structured denominational hierarchy and the Presbyterians implemented their more democratically chosen but still obligatory church “courts.” In contrast, for Baptists any connection or collaboration was purely voluntary. Furthermore, the one widely accepted connecting point, support of world missions through the efforts of the Triennial Convention, proved frustrating for efforts at collaboration, since northerners and southerners had vied for control over this body from its inception.

²⁰ *South-Western Baptist*, Jun 18, 1857. Printed statement affirmed by DeVotie and others declining further participation with American Tract Society and agreeing with a letter published in same edition from Basil Manly’s letter to DeVotie.

²¹ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 102; *South-Western Baptist*, Aug 24, 1854. An anonymous writer expressed disappointment at DeVotie declining to continue as Secretary of Bible Board of Southern Baptist.

²² Spain, 5. “For more than half a century after the first Baptists settled in America, they made no attempt to organize above the local church level.”

Through the work of the associations and conventions, Baptists in the South came to function collectively as the Southern Baptist denomination rather than simply a collection of churches with similar doctrine and practices.²³ The more localized association meetings allowed ministers and lay leaders from nearby churches to combine their efforts and also consider important topics facing their churches. By 1823, Alabama already had seven associations: Muscle Shoals and Flint River in the north, Cahawba, Alabama and the smaller, Mt. Zion, in the middle, and Bethel and Beckbe in the south. During his ministry in Tuscaloosa, DeVotie began to appear in the Cahawba association records as the chairman of various committees and served as the moderator of that body.²⁴

As Baptists in Alabama tested the waters of organized local associations they experienced the benefits of cohesion with nearby sister churches and in some cases even collaborated to engage missionaries from the association to reach out with the Gospel to the surrounding region. Seeing the success of collective ministry without any obvious threat to individual congregational autonomy, Baptists in Alabama also formed the state convention, which served a similar function to the association, but statewide. This proved no small feat in light of the still primitive frontier transportation system present in Alabama at the time. Without a water or road route linking north Alabama with south Alabama, connecting statewide was often challenging.²⁵ Not only geography but also socio-economic factors and regional political patterns separated the state. Thus the state convention initially remained a less active body than the local associations. Yet as sectional tension increased in the 1840s and 1850s, the desire to organize by state, as well as

²³ Baker, 12. He explained associations “grew out of a distinctly denominational consciousness.”

²⁴ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 105; Alabama Baptist State Convention and Cahawba Association Records, Special Collection, Samford University Library, Birmingham, Alabama.

²⁵ Flynt, 61. “No navigable river ran between the Tennessee Valley and south Alabama...No north-south railroads existed prior to the Civil War that afforded passage through the mountains of north Alabama.”

region, mounted. Fear of ecclesiastical hierarchy took a back seat to fear of northern influence and Baptists invested in statewide bodies as bulwarks of pro-southern, pro-slavery evangelicalism.

Although this component of institutional infrastructure began in 1823, well before DeVotie had even arrived in Alabama, the state convention launched with goals DeVotie would have admired. Those invited represented either a local church or mission society, or were simply individuals committed to support the work of the convention. Unlike a synod, general assembly, conference, or ecclesiastical court found in other denominations, the convention, like its local counterpart, the association, allowed Baptists of a certain region to unite in whatever areas they felt compelled to voluntarily unite in order to propel their outreach locally or abroad.

The founders at the first Alabama Baptist State Convention declared just such an intention in their constitution and in a message they addressed to Baptists statewide. The body boldly purposed to support 15 missionaries to meet needs within Alabama. Yet, in these early years, the convention remained in a rudimentary form and some Baptists even sought to organize alternative conventions. These alternative efforts stemmed in part from the Hardshell Baptists who resisted the formation of mission agencies and later from Landmark Baptists who rejected cooperation with other denominations. As early as 1829 the Alabama convention struggled to cover its expenses. Internal theological and political conflict continued right up to the national Baptist schism over slavery in 1845. In its formative years the Alabama convention struggled to become representative of the statewide Baptist population, in part because some of the associations had grown so large and influential.²⁶ Through his spoken and written words as well as his organizational efforts, DeVotie propelled the convention forward in the face of these

²⁶ Flynt, 63.

setbacks.²⁷ DeVotie's connection to fellow pastors and his partnership in collective ministries of the convention did not begin until shortly after his arrival in Alabama in 1834. By the time of his departure from Alabama in 1856, the Alabama Baptist State Convention stood on much more stable footing, in part because sectionalism drove Baptists in Alabama to localize their support in robust regional church structures. Having departed Alabama in 1856, DeVotie reflected on the collegial connection he had enjoyed as a pastor working collaboratively with other pastors in the convention. He recalled that he had always been received by fellow members "with a kindness of christian esteem, and hospitality which marked my relations with those noble brethren to the end."²⁸

In 1840, DeVotie departed Tuscaloosa for Marion, Alabama. Although later he displayed great skill in the professional pastoral role, for the still youthful DeVotie, negotiating congregational politics among Tuscaloosa elites proved challenging. Conflict had emerged between him and Manly. Manly had arrived in Tuscaloosa after DeVotie, but at the time DeVotie was just beginning to develop his status as prominent Baptist leader. Manly came to Tuscaloosa with impressive credentials, even before he assumed the presidency of the University of Alabama. Ultimately Manly's imposing presence and forceful opinions collided with DeVotie's equally intense vision for the Baptist church in Tuscaloosa. Although the positive nature of the opportunity in Marion drew DeVotie, he was also getting out from under Manly's sometimes heavy-handed influence.²⁹ Manly criticized DeVotie for what he saw as too much

²⁷ Alabama Baptist State Convention and Cahawba Association Records.

²⁸ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 103; *Daily Morning News*, Savannah, Georgia, Apr 15, 1859; *The Daily News and Herald*, Apr 24, 1867, Issue 88. DeVotie continued his strong involvement in and leadership of Baptist state conventions when he moved to Georgia. The First Baptist Church of Columbus hosted the state convention several years during DeVotie's tenure there.

²⁹ Fuller, 183. "Often ignoring the rest of the members, Manly took it upon himself to recruit most of the seven ministers who officially filled the pulpit during his years at the university. Although these men came to Tuscaloosa at his urging, Manly usually found fault with them, constantly badgering them on issues that he thought were important and criticizing their efforts as ministers."

emphasis on revivals and not enough energy given to the regular needs of the local congregation. Some in the church apparently also preferred Manly's superior academic pedigree.³⁰ DeVotie did not make any extensive records concerning the reasons for his departure from Tuscaloosa but clearly this criticism pushed the young pastor to seek another church.³¹



Basil Manly

In Marion, then a growing town of about 1,200 residents, DeVotie began the first of two fourteen-year pastorates. DeVotie had already established a positive reputation in the vicinity prior to his arrival. Members of Siloam Baptist Church had invited him to lead several revival meetings which brought a number of new members to the church and allowed Baptists in the

³⁰ Porch, 16-19; Flynt, 19. Flynt wrote, "some well-educated University of Alabama officials in the congregation criticized his lack of scholarly credentials."

³¹ *Alabama Baptist*, Mar 31, 1874. Although some members of First Baptist Church of Tuscaloosa may not have fully appreciated DeVotie while he was there, a historical summary of the Tuscaloosa church acknowledged DeVotie's influence.

community to observe DeVotie's ministry firsthand.³² The church being at that time in need of a pastor, extended the position to DeVotie and he began serving there in 1840. Just as DeVotie had led numerical growth of the church in Montgomery and Tuscaloosa, he also oversaw the increase of membership at Siloam from 285 when he arrived to 676 when he departed in 1854. This made DeVotie the leader of one of the South's largest Baptist congregations.³³

Equally important to the burgeoning size of DeVotie's congregation, was the rising status, influence, and prosperity of the membership which provided a powerful support base for him to continue his institution building strategy. By relocating to Marion, DeVotie positioned himself at the heart of Baptist wealth and ministry development in Alabama. Not only did prosperous planters reside in Marion, but their prosperity also fueled other areas of the expanding local economy. In Marion, as in Tuscaloosa, DeVotie continued to extend Baptist influence among the socially prominent. In particular, he learned to interact skillfully with influential church members like Edwin D. King and Julia Ann Tarrant Barron and engage them in institution building endeavors.

King was renowned as one of Alabama's most successful planters. Born in Georgia, his family had gained great wealth through its plantations in Virginia and North Carolina. In 1816, King moved to Perry County, Alabama, where his brother, Elisha, already owned a large cotton plantation. King soon possessed thousands of acres and hundreds of slaves of his own. He eventually served as a trustee at the University of Alabama.³⁴ DeVotie remembered the former general from the War of 1812 as "a supporter, and friend, who stuck to me while life lasted

³² DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 73. "I had conducted a protracted meeting there a few months before, and some thirty had united with the church as the result. My labors had been graciously blessed at a camp meeting in the neighborhood a year before, so that my removal was not among strangers but I became associated with those who knew and loved me."

³³ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 95.

³⁴ Flynt, 56 and 107.

closer than a brother.” DeVotie acknowledged outright King’s use of his immense wealth for Baptist causes, “He was rich, but dispensed his benefactions in a princely, and unstinted liberality.”³⁵ Others recognized King as one “entitled to more thanks and gratitude, for his large donations for the cause of religion and learning, than any man in the Southern States.”³⁶



Julia Tarrant Barron

Barron was a wealthy Marion widow, whose ardent verbal and financial support also propelled numerous elements of institution building launched by DeVotie.³⁷ Born in South Carolina, Barron’s family moved to Alabama in 1820. The death of her husband, William Barron, after just four years of marriage, left her a young, but wealthy widow. At one point she owned 35 slaves and prospered greatly up until the Civil War, when she lost much of her wealth.³⁸ In Marion, with financial backing from the likes of Barron and King, DeVotie

³⁵ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 74.

³⁶ *Greenville Mountaineer*, Aug 6, 1847, Issue 13. King contributed the lead gift of \$1,000 out of a total \$6,000 raised for a church building project.

³⁷ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 74. “There too was Mrs. Julia A Barron, a gentle lovely, noble, with ample means, and a heart always open for good to be moved even beyond her means to aid in every good work and worthy enterprise.”

³⁸ Flynt, 56-60.

expanded upon his Tuscaloosa efforts to propel Baptist infrastructure by overseeing one college, establishing another, and redeveloping a denominational newspaper.

A particular area of institution building where social prominence, pastoral professionalization, and skilled fundraising intersected was higher education. The boldness and the success of DeVotie's efforts in this area shone even brighter against the backdrop of previous Baptist efforts. On a national level, in the early nineteenth century, Luther Rice, then the most respected promoter of Baptist causes and missions in the country, succeeded in establishing a Baptist college in Washington, D.C. Columbian College opened in 1821 and quickly drew many students. Although initially a success, this effort eventually failed due to poor financial support and management. The campus later became George Washington University and separated from its Baptist foundations. The whole project became synonymous with Baptists overreaching and entangling themselves in distractions from important foreign mission work.³⁹ Likewise, in Greensboro, Alabama, right near Marion, Baptists had only recently launched a college to train pastors and others, designed on the "manual labor" model. Students worked part of the day on a functioning farm attached to the college in order to defray the educational costs. Begun in 1836, with much promise, the effort had folded by the end of 1837 due to lack of support exacerbated by an economic slump at the time.⁴⁰

Against this discouraging track record for the development of Baptist educational institutions, DeVotie plowed ahead in his efforts to build institutions, no doubt braced by the success of the Alabama Female Athenaeum in Tuscaloosa. Noted Baptist theologian, John Leadly Dagg, had moved to Tuscaloosa to serve as president of this school which Woods had

³⁹ H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage* (Nashville: Broadman, Press, 1987), 355-356.

⁴⁰ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 75-76; Flynt, 56.

founded.⁴¹ DeVotie served on the board of trustees there for three years. More importantly, when DeVotie arrived in Marion, Judson Female Institute was just getting underway. Barron had already induced DeVotie to participate in the planning meetings for Judson while he was in Tuscaloosa. Judson opened in 1839 and by 1840 already had a four-story facility. The Siloam Baptist Church spearheaded the establishment of Judson and the board of that school called Milo P. Jewett as their first president. Like DeVotie, Jewett had northern roots, born in Vermont. When Jewett left Judson in 1855, he returned to the northeast and established Vassar College. By that time Judson had 239 students and 17 faculty members. Judson continues today as a female Baptist college in Marion.⁴²

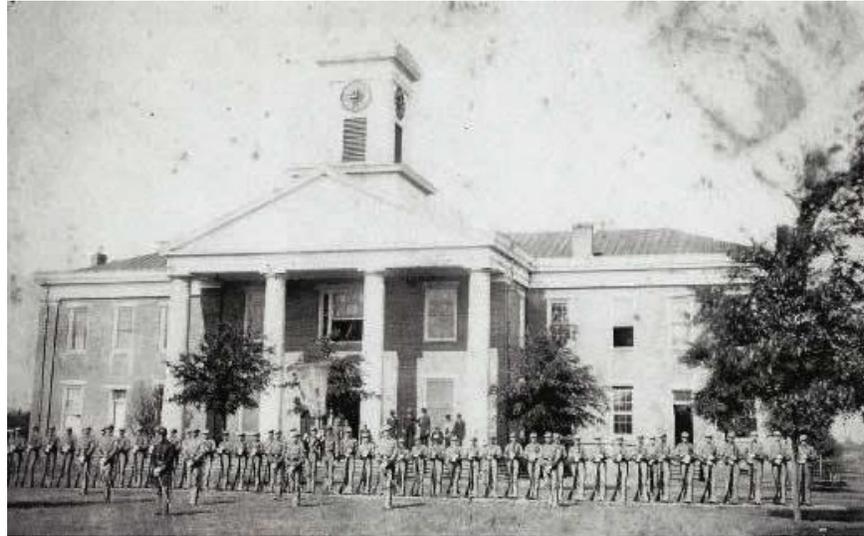
DeVotie strongly supported the continuing growth of Judson. Yet, he expressed great pride in playing the instrumental role to establish the first Baptist men's college in Alabama, Howard College. Originally located in Marion, this institution was renamed Samford University, currently located in Birmingham. DeVotie not only participated in a small group of organizers for Howard, but also selected its name and served as the first president of the board of trustees.⁴³ A contributor to the *South-Western Baptist* noted DeVotie's instrumental involvement: "I speak knowingly when I say, that under God, Bro. DeVotie was the master spirit in this work. – It was through his winning influence that the College was first organized by the Convention at Talladega – by his incessant labors that the Theological fund was raised; and in the absence of this, it had been impossible to concentrate on it the affections, confidence, and support of the

⁴¹ *The Tuscaloosa News*, Aug 3, 1988. Founded in 1836, the school remained in Baptist control until 1845 when it was sold to Methodists and renamed Tuscaloosa Female College. The institution closed completely in 1906.

⁴² Flynt, 54-55.

⁴³ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 77. "The Board of Trustees met, and after prayer fervently offered that the institution about to be established might succeed, and prove a lasting blessing. I was unanimously elected president of the Board. And the name, 'Howard College,' was given the new object of our love at my suggestion."

denomination.”⁴⁴ Edwin King through his financial backing and Milo P. Jewett through his academic leadership were both also instrumental in the founding of the school.⁴⁵



Howard College in Marion, Alabama

The Baptist churches in the South had several reasons to establish institutions for higher education. Baptists across the country needed to educate leaders for the growing domestic and world mission movements. In addition, many young men and women, along with their parents, were not interested in religious service but simply desired the status symbol of formal education.⁴⁶ At a later point in his ministry, DeVotie celebrated the pastors trained at Howard: “More than fifty young ministers have received an education within its halls in part or whole; and are now filling important positions from Va to Texas.” He also rejoiced in the benefits Howard brought to society in general, “While multitudes of laymen, lawyers, merchants, and

⁴⁴ *South-Western Baptist*, Sep 16, 1853; *South-Western Baptist*, Sep 27, 1853. The Resolutions of Siloam Baptist Church also affirm DeVotie’s influence on Howard College; Flynt, 58-59. DeVotie suggested the name of John Howard, British prison reformer and philanthropist, be used for the school. Flynt wrote, “The manual labor school’s guiding principle of labor and religion was replaced by Howard College’s emphasis on learning and religion, and the college curriculum emphasized liberal arts.”

⁴⁵ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 19, 76-77.

⁴⁶ Flynt, 55.

mechanics, have received liberal advantages of education. Some have filled honourable [*sic*] places of grace and dignity – the halls of legislation and the supplied confederate ranks, with intelligent heroes, of which any institution might well be proud.”⁴⁷ DeVotie clearly believed his efforts to establish Howard College would help spread the benefits of both Baptist belief and higher education to all of southern society. Baptists could extend their ranks by shaping those who would become the educated leaders and perhaps even draw in those from other denominational backgrounds.

The origins of Howard also highlight the challenges leaders like DeVotie faced in developing Baptist institutions, even from among their own ranks. By moving to Marion, DeVotie placed some distance between himself and his Tuscaloosa rival, Basil Manly. But as the president of the University of Alabama, Manly resisted DeVotie’s efforts in Marion to organize a Baptist college that would compete for students. DeVotie recalled, “Dr. B. Manly had an overshadowing influence, which made every step in the direction of success most difficult.”⁴⁸ Ironically, DeVotie’s efforts to establish Howard near Marion, though fulfilling his vision for Baptist establishment through denominational entities, ultimately produced a negative situation similar to the one he had faced in the church in Tuscaloosa. DeVotie explained, “Preachers, not actively employed in preaching often unintentionally damage a pastor’s influence, by intermeddling with this duties, and arrangements.”⁴⁹ He was referring to the sometimes critical and vocal members of the Howard faculty who were part of the Marion church and opposed him at the end of his ministry in Marion.

DeVotie not only participated in the early planning of Howard, but also raised the \$20,000 endowment necessary to attract a theology professor and helped solicit for the job. In

⁴⁷ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 78.

⁴⁸ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 79-82.

⁴⁹ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 96.

these ways, DeVotie demonstrated his lifelong commitment to education in general, as well as to training young ministers in particular.⁵⁰ While recruiting for a professor of theology he wrote, “We greatly need the services of some suitable man,...to devote himself to the instruction of pious young men, entering the ministry. When the requisite amount of funds is raised, arrangements will be made for providing a supply for our destitute congregations, from the numbers of pious, talented young men whom the late revivals have brought into the churches.”⁵¹ Perhaps the words of the influential Alabama Baptist leader and state legislator, D.P. Bestor, in a letter to DeVotie’s eldest son, Noble, best summarize DeVotie’s role in education: “Our denomination is indebted to him, more than to any other man living or dead, for the establishment and success of our schools, the Howard owes its life and the Judson its growth to him.”⁵²

The irony of DeVotie’s leadership in Baptist higher education was that, unlike many of his prominent pastoral peers, he never completed college and his seminary training was cut short by his expulsion. This likely explains some of the early criticism DeVotie faced in Tuscaloosa where, although he attempted to fulfill the role of astute professional pastor, he could not compete with the credentials of men like Manly. This also explains why he served the cause of education in an organizational and development capacity, rather than as president or professor. Later, Howard would confer an honorary Doctorate of Divinity upon DeVotie, returning the favor of his efforts toward institution building.⁵³

⁵⁰ *South-Western Baptist*, Jun 9, 1864. Note about DeVotie’s involvement in ordination service of M. J. Wellborn in Columbus.

⁵¹ *Alabama Baptist*, Feb 4, 1843.

⁵² DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 81-84. Over the years, DeVotie brought in nearly \$100,000 for Howard; *Alabama Baptist Advocate*, Apr 27, 1849; Flynt, 86. Flynt described the importance of Howard College.

⁵³ Jerry M. Windsor, “Preaching Up a Storm from 1839 to 1889,” *Alabama Baptist Historian* 29.1 (1993): 14.

If Howard College fulfilled DeVotie's aim to build the Baptist infrastructure necessary to train pastors and reach the children of the wealthy who sought a general higher education, the creation of public grade schools served his goal of extending the benefits of the Kingdom of God through institution building to reach the masses. DeVotie's own life experience clearly shaped his vision for public education. He explained, "For three or four years, I enjoyed the advantages afforded by the Public School system which then existed in the state of New York." DeVotie recognized the benefits garnered for his own life's work from public schools. He detailed their usefulness: "The beauty, and excellence of these schools consist in their development of all the mental capital in society. They give all classes an opportunity to rise from ignorance, to a good degree of intellectual culture."⁵⁴ While in Marion, he, along with Bestor and Jewett earnestly pursued the establishment of public schools. Bestor did so as a state legislator, introducing the first bill to organize public education in Alabama.⁵⁵ Whereas Alabamians were reluctant to embrace DeVotie's efforts, and he saw little success in the cause of advancing public education, Georgians, in the post-war years, would welcome them.

Through his work for Judson and Howard, as well as advocacy of public education, DeVotie participated in a wave of northern-born Baptist educational leaders who came south during this phase of institution building. Jewett, after whom DeVotie named one of his sons, came from Vermont to lead the all-women's Judson College. Samuel S. Sherman, also from Vermont, served as the initial president of Howard and then later as president of Judson. Jesse Hartwell, under whom DeVotie studied at Furman, was born in Massachusetts and eventually

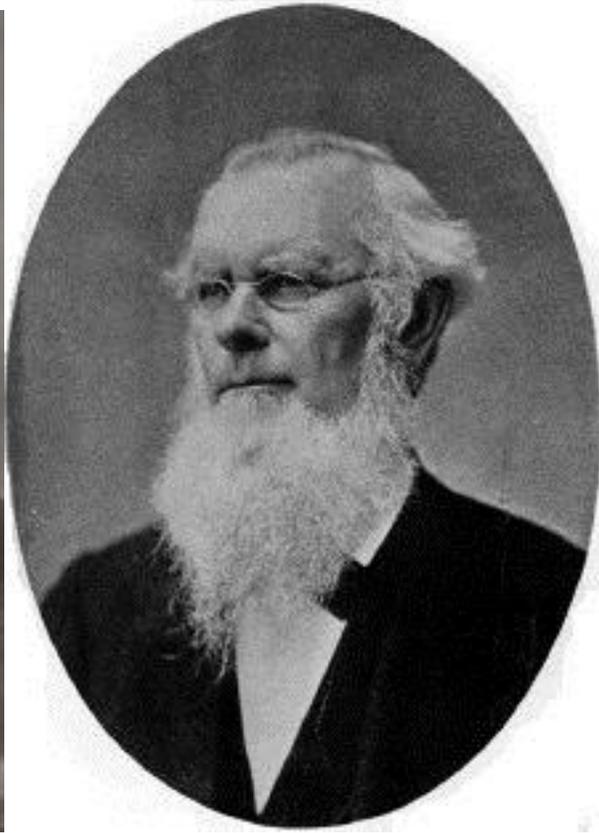
⁵⁴ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 43.

⁵⁵ Flynt, 54-55; *Alabama Baptist*, Jan 6 and Mar 2, 1844. These articles advocated public education; DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 4-5. Referring to his own father, DeVotie recalled, "By honest industry and economy he supported his family and raised up four sons, and one daughter affording them the best advantages of education within his power at that early day."

came to lead the theological training at Howard College. Hartwell also served as president of the state convention and on the Southern Baptist Conventions's Domestic Mission Board.



Samuel Sherman



Milo P. Jewett

Like DeVotie, these men adopted much of southern life, but they also helped advance causes with northern origins such as Christian higher education and public schools. Indeed, although southern-born evangelical leaders participated in institution building, these northern-born men led the process.⁵⁶ The Baptists of Alabama benefitted from this influx of leadership,

⁵⁶ Wyatt-Brown, 508. He showed how northern institutional models were applied to the work of the southern church in an attempt to organize for greater effectiveness; Louise Manly, *History of Judson College: 1838-1913*, (Atlanta: Foote & Davies Company, 1913), 12-15 and 33-35; Chriss H. Doss, "ORIGINAL FIFTEEN TRUSTEES OF HOWARD COLLEGE." *Alabama Baptist Historian* 29.2 (1993): 16; Flynt, 59. Regarding Hartwell: "Born in Massachusetts and educated at Brown University in Rhode Island, Hartwell had moved in 1836 to Alabama where he pastored the church in Carlowville and quickly rose in Baptist ranks. In 1839 he was elected

but the process did not always go smoothly. In the case of Howard College, not only did some Baptists differ with Sherman and Hartwell on the method of training pastors, but even whether such training was necessary at all. Eventually this issue resulted in the departure of Sherman and Hartwell from Howard. Although the cost of attending Howard kept enrollment levels low, the devaluation of pastoral education itself also proved a significant hindrance in Howard's early years.

Later, when DeVotie relocated to Georgia, he continued his ardent support for Baptist higher education. Although not instrumental in the founding of Mercer University, he served thirty-four years on the board. Mercer was a Baptist educational effort, very similar to Howard College, which also continues today. Even in his later ministry years, DeVotie served as more than a figurehead among the trustees. He was the primary impetus behind a strategic relocation of the entire institution from Penfield, Georgia to Macon, Georgia.⁵⁷

While in Marion, DeVotie also expressed his commitment to strengthening the internal cohesion and expanding the external reach of Baptists by founding, and for a season personally funding, the *Alabama Baptist* newspaper. It was later known as the *South-Western Baptist* and eventually merged with the *Christian Index*. As with several other religious institutions DeVotie developed, the paradigm for impacting a region through a religious newspaper was something DeVotie observed in his formative spiritual years. Utica, New York was the publication hub for all sorts of literature, including newspapers, in the Burned-Over District and beyond. Several

president of the state convention, and while living in Marion he became president of the Board of Domestic Missions.”

⁵⁷ *Christian Index*, Jul 11, 1872; DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 107-108; James C. Bryant, “From Penfield to Macon: Mercer University's Problematic Move,” *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, Winter 2005. Bryant discussed the progression of Georgia Baptists in connection with Mercer and DeVotie's involvement in relocating the school to allow for growth. (Recorded by McCall in the Mercer trustee minutes); Spright Dowell, *A History of Mercer University: 1833-1953* (Atlanta: Foote and Davies, 1958), 55 and 127. DeVotie served as a Mercer Trustee for 34 years.

businessmen who ran the presses called the Presbyterian church their home, as Anne DeVotie had.⁵⁸

Just as DeVotie's prowess for developing Baptist causes had brought success to Howard following the earlier attempt at a manual labor school, so too in the area of publications. Following a failed newspaper attempt by Baptist leaders in the 1830s, DeVotie, along with Jewett and Barron, sponsored a new, and ultimately successful publication in the 1840s. By 1847, DeVotie took full ownership of the *Alabama Baptist*. He recalled, "Its history has been labor, sacrifice, and loss to its owners, but its existence a perpetual string of blessings to the people, promotion of learning, piety and all the benevolent interests of our denomination."⁵⁹ Eventually reaching sufficient circulation to sustain itself, this source of denominational information addressed doctrine, advanced Christian morality, discussed contemporary events, advertised for Baptist causes, promoted missions and encouraged education.⁶⁰ This publication remained in circulation until 1865 when Federal troops ended printing. In Flynt's recent history of Baptists in Alabama he applied careful detail to his expansive study of two centuries of Baptist life in the state and summarized the newspaper's impact: "Next to colleges, no institution was more important to the emerging denomination than the *Alabama Baptist*."⁶¹ Newspaper

⁵⁸ Ryan, xii.

⁵⁹ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 85-86; Flynt, 19; *Alabama Baptist*, Feb 10, 1844. DeVotie was listed as General Agent. He wrote, "The Alabama Baptist was published by four individuals who assumed the responsibility involved in its issues for one year, who were Mrs. Julia A. Barron, Langston Goree, Milo P. Jewett, and J.H. DeVotie. Our clear loss for the first year was \$1622, or \$405. 50 each. Mr. Goree retired, and the remaining three continued it the second year, making it pay the loss of the first year and sustain itself and no more. At the end of the fourth year, I was sole proprietor all the original proprietors having abandoned it at the end of the second year.

I had purchased an office, a fine new press, and new type and fixtures, disposing of the concern by sale without loss. It was a success, moderately sustained by the denomination. It was continued under the names of 'The Alabama Baptist Advocate,' + 'South Western Baptist,' until merged in to the 'Index,' now located in Atlanta."

⁶⁰ *Alabama Baptist*, Sept 30, 1843. An advertisement for Howard College, typical of those regularly printed, shows how different components of institutionalization supported the others; Flynt, 60-61; Bob Terry, "State Paper Still Important Part of Baptist Life," www.thealabamabaptist.org (July 2000). Terry argued that the paper produced "more involvement in Baptist life than had been experienced prior."

⁶¹ Flynt, 60.

publications possessed a powerful capacity to not just shape the policies, beliefs and perspectives of Baptists in Alabama, but all Christians across the South.⁶²

For DeVotie, the denominational newspaper was not just another element of developing Baptist infrastructure, it actually propelled the other aspects of his vision for the denomination. Through a statewide publication he could overcome the geographical separation of the disparate associations. Baptists across the state could now be linked through a common communication piece. Although individuals chose freely whether to subscribe, as they read articles on theological matters, state mission work, the expansion of Howard College, the labors of the associations, and the value of Sabbath schools, they exposed themselves to DeVotie's vision for Baptist life and ministry. Thus, even without the more rigid ecclesiastical structures found in sister denominations, DeVotie could purposefully urge his initiatives through newspapers.⁶³

In 1854, DeVotie determined that God intended him to transition from his fourteen-year tenure at one of the South's most influential Baptist churches, located in a town that now hosted several central institutions of the not-yet-decade-old Southern Baptist denomination. When he resigned from the church in Marion he served briefly as a pastor in Hopewell, Alabama, and then briefly with the Domestic and Indian Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, before accepting the job of pastor to the Baptist church in Columbus, Georgia, in 1856. As a Baptist newspaper, the *South-Western Baptist* certainly could not claim a neutral opinion, but the editor's comments still shed light on the DeVotie's leadership in Alabama: "It is not saying too much to affirm that the entire Baptist family in Alabama regret his leaving the State. But we are

⁶² Tull, 121. "Between the Civil War and the turn of the century the denominational newspaper was one of the most powerful instruments in forming denominational opinion."

⁶³ Tull, 159. "In the nineteenth century the state newspapers were a primary medium of doctrinal discussion, and therefore, a shaper of doctrinal beliefs."

cheered by the fact that his position being on the confines of each State, his influence can be felt, and his labors enjoyed by each Commonwealth.”⁶⁴

At the same time DeVotie was leading Baptists to develop the institutions of denominational infrastructure to expand and entrench in Alabama, he was also piloting the transformation of the Baptist pastoral role and status. He aimed to elevate the community standing of Baptists to more effectively reach beyond their traditional membership among the poor, uneducated southern population. In order for his vision to succeed he would have to keep a foothold in the foundations of the faith held dear by Baptists influenced by the Second Great Awakening as well as numerous Baptists outside of the scattered cities in the South. He would also have to face-off against the Hardshells and Landmarkers.

⁶⁴ *South-Western Baptist*, Aug 14, 1856; *Alabama Baptist*, Sep 12, 1849. An extensive description of Siloam by DeVotie.

CHAPTER 4

FOOTHOLDS IN THE FAITH AND FACE-OFF WITH HIS FOES

DeVotie not only championed the building of Baptist ministry institutions, but he also embodied and envisioned a more elevated social status and professionalized pastorate than prior generations of Baptists had sought or would have accepted. He began this pursuit with his enrollment at Furman Seminary for ministry training. He developed his own role as a professional pastor throughout his Tuscaloosa years rubbing shoulders with academics and politicians. His efforts to transform the Baptist pastoral model solidified in Marion among wealthy planters and continued through his Georgia ministry years.

DeVotie's aim to elevate and professionalize the pastorate stood in marked contrast to earlier Baptists in the South who were generally simple, poor, and uneducated. As the nineteenth century progressed, these frontier evangelicals began to clash with southern elites who valued demonstrations of wealth and influence including formal education, social status, and impressive buildings.¹ As the unestablished regions of Alabama and Georgia developed into settled communities, DeVotie led the first generation of seminary trained, socially prestigious, well-compensated, fulltime professional clergy who preached polished sermons and embraced much of wealthy, educated, elite southern culture. He advanced this transformation in tandem with his goal to create and develop institutional structures among the Baptist churches in Alabama and Georgia.

¹ Wills, 13. Referring to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, he explained, "The southern gentility, in turn, despised the Baptists especially as poor, uneducated, and lacking culture. Baptist social criticism and Baptist discipline exemplified not only opposition to sin but also a separation of social worlds."

DeVotie's vision to steer the Baptist churches in the South to connect with the growing population of professionals, academics, businessmen, and planters, threatened to detach him from the older generation of frontier Baptists, and many poor Baptists in his own time. In addition, his emphasis on preaching as a trained profession placed DeVotie in a tenuous position among many Baptists in the South who saw verbal polish and academic preparation as antithetical to pastoral spiritual purity and fervency. Baptists of this perspective were concerned that a professional approach to pastoral ministry threatened to stifle the free movement of the Holy Spirit in preaching and that formal training would lead pastors away from simple strong evangelical conviction.

Although a sense of distinction from the wealthy certainly contributed to poor Baptists' resistance to change, they also expressed legitimate spiritual concerns. They feared regressing to the deadened spiritual state of the church prior to the religious awakenings of the early nineteenth century. Without confidence that more professionalized and institutionalized churches would remain spiritually true and alive they felt obliged to resist on spiritual principles as well as socioeconomic ones. Baptists who opposed DeVotie's plans to elevate their social and economic standing were often dispersed among the various Baptist churches and therefore presented a potentially widespread resistance. By holding on to several "footholds in frontier faith" DeVotie persuaded many that he was improving the Baptist faith, rather than damaging it. In this manner he kept many Baptists on his side and won others over. Yet whenever fellow Baptists persisted in opposing DeVotie he did not hesitate to face off against them. In particular, DeVotie had to contend for his vision for the Baptist faith in the South against the organized alternative pathway for Baptists presented by those called Hardshell, Anti-Mission or Footwashing Baptists, as well as Landmark Baptists.

DeVotie saw that without the support of wealthy southern planters and professionals, working to build robust church institutions, the Baptist church would remain a minority movement in the South. The challenge he faced was to build Baptist institutions and professionalize the pastorate without alienating his support base. If, as local wags put it, “One step ahead a leader, two steps ahead a martyr,” then DeVotie managed to appear only one step ahead because he retained a passion for traditional early frontier evangelical priorities. He did so not simply as a diplomatic ploy to advance his vision for a professional pastorate without alienating the Baptist masses, but also because he genuinely believed in their ongoing benefits.

Specifically, even as DeVotie spearheaded Baptist institution building, social elevation and pastoral professionalization, he maintained fidelity to traditional Baptist doctrine, emphasized the individual conversion experience, promoted revival meetings and upheld church discipline. By maintaining these four elements of Baptist life, DeVotie kept four footholds in the particular expression of evangelicalism which had so recently prospered on the frontier. Especially in the early decades of DeVotie’s ministry, the majority of Baptists strongly valued these principles and practices. In the mind of many Baptists, these approaches had undergirded their initial advancement during the early nineteenth century and remained essential to faithful Baptist life.

In all of the initiatives DeVotie pursued, both to maintain traditional Baptist practices and to spread his vision for a professional Baptist ministry, he utilized the pastor’s chief weapon to great effect. He not only preached with great skill, but also did so on numerous occasions and settings, to many people. DeVotie showed remarkable pulpit longevity, preaching regularly for over half a century, including 5500 sermons to an estimated one million listeners, according to

his own calculations.² Through his expansive preaching ministry, he not only outlasted and outspoke most of his detractors but he also gradually solidified his connection to Baptists across Alabama and Georgia. He was able to be a leader, not a martyr, by what he preached (traditional doctrine), his goal in preaching (individual conversions), the context in which he preached (revival meetings) and the enforcement of the morals he preached (church discipline).

Throughout the nineteenth century, evangelical pastors generally preached the Bible unapologetically in an expository fashion. Expository preaching involved the explanation, illustration and application of a particular Biblical text as the centerpiece of the sermon. To these clerics, preaching was not to arise either from mere human insight or personal feelings, but from the message of the Bible. They did not see themselves as inventing or adding to, but reading, explaining, and applying the Scriptures. Thus, although across denominational lines and even within their own denominations southern evangelicals differed in many respects, they also agreed on a series of commonly held doctrines: God reigned as a sovereign judge, revealed the Divine will and plan in an infallible Bible, urged believers to seek the conversion of those outside the faith, and worked in human lives through the regular preaching of the Bible.³ As a result, during the first half of the nineteenth century the general doctrinal content of sermons remained consistent in evangelical churches.

² DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 135-152; Flynt, 75. He called DeVotie one of the “most respected antebellum Baptist ministers.”; *South-Western Baptist*, Sep 16, 1853. An anonymous contributor stated, “I have heard him preach more than five-fold oftener than any other minister within the last fourteen years, and I have yet to hear the man on this earth, whose preaching has been sweeter to my soul.”

³ Kenneth Startup, *The Root of All Evil: The Protestant Clergy and the Economic Mind of the Old South*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997), 4. “Clearly the slave state ministers agreed that they served a sovereign God who took a direct and jurisdictional interest in the lives of individuals while also judging the collective nature and behavior of communities. Further, southern ministers were essentially Biblicists. They regarded the Bible as the accurate representation of the nature of God and the guidebook for righteous living, and they tended toward literalism in their biblical interpretation... Whether the individual minister could read Greek or Hebrew, or could barely read English, the Bible stood as the ultimate authority.”

As a highly skilled evangelical preacher DeVotie regularly reestablished this first foothold in frontier faith through his orthodox messages. In whatever setting he preached, DeVotie believed he was conveying God's inspired message revealed in the Bible and the doctrines which flowed from the Bible. His regular sermons contained the content typical of evangelical messages in their emphasis on the need for all people to recognize their sinfulness before a holy God, confess their condition to God and, through faith, appropriate the atoning sacrifice of Christ for salvation. One listener described his approach in detail:

His addresses have been the means of drawing many to Jesus...Our minister is a textual preacher. He indulges in no fine spun theories – he does not endeavor to elaborate a mysterious doctrine. With his text before him, he presents this view of it, and that view of it – draws this conclusion, explains this analogous expression or draws from it that fearful denunciation, so that, afterwards, you feel that the verse in all its most important bearing has been opened up to your view; and that you are edified, consoled or warned, according to the nature of the text.⁴

The same author praised DeVotie's ability to deliver doctrinal realities with sincerity but straightforwardness, explaining, "There is with him no effort at oratorical display; but earnestness marks his delivery, an earnestness that sinks into insignificance the gaudy trappings of elocution, and makes the sinner think not of the speaker, but of himself."⁵ Through the content of his preaching, every time DeVotie spoke in support of commonly held evangelical truths, he displayed solidarity not only with fellow Baptists in the South but also with all southern evangelicals.

DeVotie not only pronounced general evangelical doctrine but as a traditional Baptist, he also advocated a Calvinistic understanding of Scripture. Later generations of Baptists would migrate to the "Arminian"⁶ theology of their frontier sister denomination, the Methodists, but

⁴ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 109.

⁵ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 109.

⁶ The conflict between Calvinism (or Reformed) theology and Arminianism dated back to the seventeenth century. Arminians believed humans were sinful but still capable of placing saving faith in Christ, and that when the

Baptists in the early to middle nineteenth century still held strongly to their historic Calvinist roots. Standing at a historical distance, the debate concerning these matters may seem like theological splitting of hairs, but evangelicals from both perspectives staunchly defended their views and convictions about Calvinism and Arminianism. When Baptists shared similar beliefs on these matters they experienced a powerful sense of cohesion and identity through their similar convictions. In sermons entitled “Election” and “Predestination,” DeVotie revealed details about his allegiance to Calvinism which undoubtedly kept him theologically tethered to the masses of Baptist membership at the time.

DeVotie clearly embraced Calvinism because of his conviction to follow what he saw as the teaching of the Bible rather than any human philosophy. Regarding predestination, DeVotie implored, “It has long been a settled article of our church. And there must be a sad deal of evasion and unfair handling with particular passages to get rid of the evidence which we find for it in the Bible.”⁷ He elaborated, “Assenting as we do to this doctrine, we state it as our conviction, that God could point the finger of his omniscience to every one individual amongst us and tell what shall be the fate of each, and the place of each and the state of suffering or enjoyment of each at any one period of futurity, however distant.”⁸ DeVotie firmly held to Calvinism as what he believed to be the correct way of understanding the Scriptural passages concerning human nature and God’s role in salvation. He believed that God was the chief actor in salvation and that only through God’s will would anyone be chosen to respond to missions and

Bible states that God elected or predestined people for salvation, that this choosing was based on the exertion of faith, prompting God to then elect the individual. They also believed that God’s saving grace could be resisted and that salvation could be lost. Traditional Calvinists believed humans were so depraved that they possessed no capacity to place faith in Christ outside of God’s special calling and predestining grace. This saving grace could not be resisted by a person whom God had chosen to save, and anyone genuinely saved could not lose that salvation.

⁷ “Predestination,” Sermon by James H. DeVotie, from the personal collection of sermons held by Rev. John Elder, current pastor of First Baptist Church of Columbus, Georgia, 1.

⁸ “Predestination,” 3.

evangelism efforts. Other Baptist leaders in the South, like Basil Manly, a staunch defender of orthodoxy, powerfully preached Calvinist doctrine, as well.

The First Baptist Church in Griffin, where DeVotie served later in his ministry provides one example of how important Calvinism was even at the level of the local congregation. The congregation started in 1841, with clearly expressed Calvinist beliefs affirmed in their “articles of faith.” The 14 members who established the church wrote, “We believe in the doctrine of eternal and particular election,” and, “We believe in man’s impotency to recover himself from the fallen state he is in by nature of his own free will and ability.” Such statements were typical of many Baptist churches begun in the early to middle nineteenth century.⁹

As the nineteenth century progressed American Christians of all stripes sought to integrate their democratic political beliefs with their spiritual views, even if not systematically and explicitly. Although it took several generations, eventually some Baptists, already predisposed as a denomination to prioritizing the human conversion decision and planted in a soil of growing American individualism, began to gradually downplay and even reject entirely, their Calvinist underpinnings. Despite this gradual shift, DeVotie kept his flag firmly planted with the numerous Baptists in the South who held to the Calvinism of prior Baptist generations.

DeVotie showed his awareness of the increasing controversy among Baptists about God’s sovereignty and revealed his view clearly. In one of his sermons for the First Baptist Church, Columbus, he stated, “The prejudices against this doctrine are very strong, many cannot even bear to hear the words election, predestination and the like mentioned.”¹⁰ In the same message, DeVotie demonstrated where he stood. Referring to the verses of Ephesians which speak of

⁹ John H. Goddard, *History of the First Baptist Church of Griffin, Georgia, 1841-1977*, (Atlanta: Cherokee Publishing Company, 1978), 4-5.

¹⁰ “Election,” Sermon by James H. DeVotie from the personal collection of sermons held by Rev. John Elder, current pastor of First Baptists Church of Columbus, Georgia, 3.

predestination, DeVotie queried rhetorically, “Does it not mean that the whole human family lying in ruin in his presence he chose whom he would out of that mass and purposed to save them?”¹¹ He added, definitively, “That God passes by some and chooses others in the world, is a truth only denied by universalists. But why he does this, Arminians differ from us, in their opinion. They hold that God elects conditionally, that is, on account of Faith and repentance and good works foreseen in the creation. We resolve it into the will of God...”¹² This first foothold in frontier faith, helped keep DeVotie in good standing among the masses of Baptists in the South who would not begin to shift in large numbers to Arminianism until late in the nineteenth and early in the twentieth century.

Although a Calvinist view of Scripture could influence a variety of related theological beliefs, the crux of the issue, and the most debated point for evangelicals, was the extent to which humans could freely chose to seek salvation. From their inception as a distinct sect of Christianity, Baptists emphasized the conversion experience. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries they distinguished themselves from their fellow Puritan believers, based on a differing understanding of Baptism. Baptists held strongly that the New Testament taught only baptism of adults after a recognizable conversion experience. As Protestantism developed in Britain and the American colonies during the seventeenth century, Baptists felt compelled to depart from their Presbyterian and Congregationalist friends who believed in baptizing infants of Christian parents as a way of claiming God’s promises to work in the child’s life to bring conversion. Although a hearty view of God’s sovereignty in salvation might seem to contradict an emphasis on urging individuals to decide to convert to Christ, during the first half of the nineteenth century, Baptists generally held tightly to both convictions.

¹¹ “Election,” 7.

¹² “Election,” 17.

DeVotie's ongoing efforts to preach and teach with an aim toward individual conversions served as a second foothold in the bridge to older Baptists and more rural Baptists in his own time.¹³ DeVotie ultimately traced his desire to see people converted to Christ to his childhood, "Often in childhood I had preached to my children companions, and my mother, showing an inclination of my young mind toward that profession. Once in a dream in my most wicked days I was aroused from slumber deeply affected by a solemn exhortation I was making to my brothers and family to become Christians, and escape the wrath to come."¹⁴ DeVotie literally dreamed of conversions, beginning, apparently with his own family members. Whether or not the conversions DeVotie dreamed of became a reality among his family members, they certainly materialized in the lives of many Alabamians and Georgians throughout the course of his lengthy ministry.

DeVotie felt the great weight of the responsibility of preaching for conversions. With still 20 years of life and ministry left he explained, "I have probably during my ministry preached to half a million of my fellow men, and have had twenty thousand for a longer or shorter time under my pastoral care in the several charges to which I have ministered. For every sermon and for every soul a strict account must be rendered to the Master, and judge."¹⁵ Although a desire to professionalize preaching sometimes meant pastors focused greater attention on using lofty language, elevated themes, and carefully structured messages to educate

¹³ Wills, 5. "In antebellum evangelical churches, the conversion experience defined church membership...The experience separated those within from those without. It formed the first support of evangelical exclusivism."

¹⁴ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 37.

¹⁵ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 198 and 213. DeVotie wrote, "...fear lest I should fail to please God or lack of faithfulness in addressing my immortal fellow sinners in view of eternal salvation, and the dreadful consequences of their rejecting Jesus on account of the imperfect manner in which he was presented to them by me often before preaching filled me with fearful anxiety.

...Woe is me if I preach not the Gospel. Mingled with desires to do good in that way, together with fears that harm rather than blessing might ensue, with unbelief, the fear of man, pride, and love of applause, all uniting, produced a sense of unfitness, a confusion of soul, a bitter distress utterly indescribable."

the committed, DeVotie seemed to always keep in mind the lost person who might know nothing of the faith. His earnest concern to reach the spiritually lost kept him rooted in the traditional Baptist mindset.

Through this evangelistic preaching, targeted toward individual conversions, DeVotie aligned himself with the traditional evangelical emphasis on conversion of the spiritually lost. Evangelicals believed every sermon benefited those who had already embraced the faith by encouraging their spiritual progress, but preaching that produced conversions was most highly prized.¹⁶ DeVotie's numerical accounting of his ministry is not only impressive from the fact that he kept such careful records, but also specifically for the total number of baptisms and the annual average. In his memoirs DeVotie recorded that he had baptized at least 1300 people amounting to an average of 34 per year. Given that his congregations ranged in size from 200 to 600, the annual average represented a significant percentage of congregational growth.¹⁷

The milieu of the Second Great Awakening was directed far more toward individual salvation than to church programs for believers, or making sure congregants felt comfortable in an elegant church facility. The widely popular movement of Charles Finney's "new measures" only intensified the evangelical quest for preaching which produced conversions.¹⁸ DeVotie always upheld the value of saving the lost, and continued to pursue it even in the latter years of his ministry through what had become a common Baptist method of ministry, revival meetings.¹⁹

¹⁶ Loveland, 43.

¹⁷ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 208. "The sum of my work through a period of thirty eight years of pastoral labor will not vary far from the following figures. Preached 5500 sermons. Conducted 1976 prayer meetings. Made over 10,000 pastoral visits. Attended over 500 funerals. Walked in the performance of ministerial work probably over 5,000 miles, baptized over 1300 professed believers all but six in connection with the seven churches of which I have had charge. Making an average of over thirty four baptisms a year. Blessed be his holy name who hath given me this degree of success through so many years." Also on 196 DeVotie lists the numbers converted and baptized annually including approximately 15 ministers.

¹⁸ Holifield, 105. See for a description of the revivalist ethos.

¹⁹ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 198. "Nothing but the earnest, honest preaching of Christ crucified with desire thus to save those who hear will receive the approbation of Jesus."

Continuing to champion revival meetings served as a third foothold in frontier faith for DeVotie. From the early days of his ministry in Tuscaloosa, DeVotie displayed his proficiency for organizing and leading successful revivals. During extended religious meetings through 1838 and 1839, DeVotie and several other pastors recorded the conversion of more than 100 white believers, many of them university students, through revivals. This movement brought not only new believers, but also many future ministers into the Baptist fold, establishing DeVotie as a homiletical exemplar for many young Alabama preachers.²⁰

Although for some, like Basil Manly, elevating Baptists' social status and professionalizing the pastorate meant hesitancy about revivalism because of its association with lower class emotionalism. DeVotie rejected any inherent conflict between the two. In 1844, while DeVotie served in Marion and continued to lead revivals, the *Alabama Baptist* ran a series of articles presenting various views on the proper nature of revival meetings. Few Baptists rejected the revivals entirely. Rather, the argument centered on limiting the excesses many feared characterized camp meetings. Writers to the newspaper suggested that preachers needed to be careful to do more than just exhort the will and appeal to the emotions. Instead, a text of Scripture should be expounded and all rowdy commotion avoided as a hindrance to "deep religious feeling."²¹

DeVotie understood both the religious and irreligious excesses of revivals. Referring to DeVotie, historian Wayne Flynt wrote, "while attending one camp meeting, he saw young men trading horses on the edge of the clearing. After accepting the offer to share a meal, the first item offered him was a bottle of brandy."²² Evidently revivalism had spread further than

²⁰ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 66-68; Porch, 17-18. E.B. Teague was converted in this revival and became a Baptist leader.

²¹ Flynt, 51-52. Flynt discussed the flare-up of a debate on revivalism in 1844 among Alabama Baptists.

²² Flynt, 51-52.

temperance. As Baptist churches expanded across Georgia and Alabama in the nineteenth century, revivals evolved to a more structured format than the camp meetings of the Second Great Awakening. When churches began to meet weekly and built facilities sufficient to handle the large crowds they aimed to reach through revival meetings, the schedule of revivals became more structured and the gatherings began to meet indoors.

Even as revivals changed from highly emotional and largely unregulated outdoor camp meetings to more systematically organized indoor church gatherings, they still held a special place in DeVotie's ministry. During his time in Columbus, revivalism remained central to DeVotie's ministry. He recalled, "In the summer of 1858, there occurred in Columbus one of the most remarkable revivals of religion which I have ever known." This was a unified effort among several denominations in the city, beginning with a concentrated time of prayer in the morning and meeting on weeknights on a rotation among the churches. When he wrote about these events later in life, DeVotie still marveled at what he saw as God's mighty working, "The Holy Spirit was sent down, and from the first, the work commenced with power. The largest houses were crowded at the morning prayer meetings. The influence pervaded the whole community, and the subject of religion was the theme of conversation everywhere, and by all classes." According to DeVotie, this was no flash in the pan, but resulted in two months of steady community revival. "At the Baptist Church at night the work was wonderful. Multitudes believed, and that year I baptized 212 persons, 100 of whom were white. Over 1000 persons, made a profession in the city as the result of the effort....A very large proportion of those who became members of the Baptist church during revival, adorned the doctrines of the Gospel, and remained steadfast as followers of Jesus, and a number became ministers."²³

²³ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 113-114.

Throughout the course of his ministry, DeVotie preached at numerous other revivals, both within the confines of a church building and at outdoor locations. In 1855, he spoke at the WeWokee Camp Meeting site, near Talladega, Alabama. In 1854, he spoke at a revival in the Hopewell, Alabama church. Ten came to faith including DeVotie's son. DeVotie also preached at camp meetings that often included multiple denominations.²⁴ Through these varied revival venues, DeVotie constantly solidified the third foothold in frontier faith.

The fourth foothold DeVotie maintained with frontier Baptist faith was the deliberate practice of church discipline. He combined this with his preaching of traditional Baptist doctrine, efforts at conversion of the lost and organizing revival meetings. In contrast to evangelism and revivals which aimed to bring people into the church, discipline frequently resulted in removal of people from the church body. Described in Matthew 18 and First Corinthians 5, the goal of church discipline was maintaining Biblical standards and beliefs among members. In principle, members of Baptist churches subjected themselves to one another so that any serious infraction of church morality would lead first to the rebuke of a fellow parishioner and then, if the offender showed no repentance, to an inquiry by the entire church. If the offender remained contumacious, the congregation would vote to exclude him or her from membership. In his conflict with the Montgomery congregation DeVotie experienced being the subject of the formal church discipline process. He did not reject the process just because he had personally undergone the abasement of it. In fact, the congregations he led over the years regularly applied this church practice to fellow church members. Although DeVotie wrote little about issues of church discipline, the association records for the churches under DeVotie's

²⁴ *South-Western Baptist*, Sep 13, 1855, Oct 19, 1854, and Mar 3, 1864.

leadership reveal an ongoing commitment to this significant element in church solidarity and behavioral transformation.²⁵

The church discipline process could also be used as a vehicle for resolving personal or business conflicts between members without going through the secular judicial process. Like orthodox theology, personal conversions and revival meetings, this community moral enforcement characterized the most successful denominations in the South during the first half of the nineteenth century. Yet many churches across the nation began to relax their application of it during the middle of the nineteenth century, finding the process difficult to square with a growing sense of republican individualism and a desire to advance among the socially prominent.²⁶ Even as he led prominent, wealthy congregations DeVotie maintained this practice in his churches throughout his ministry, resisting the slowly rising tide against this traditional element of Baptist church practice.²⁷

DeVotie's steadfast commitment throughout the course of his ministry to these four footholds linked him solidly to older generations of Baptists even as other aspects of his ministry set the pace for Baptists to advance in a new direction. DeVotie zealously placed one foot

²⁵ Cahawba Baptist Association Records. See "State of the Churches" section in these annual reports for tallies of members excluded from the churches in Tuscaloosa and Marion which DeVotie led during the 1830s and 1840s.

²⁶ Christopher Waldrep, "'So Much Sin': The Decline of Religious Discipline and the 'Tidal Wave of Crime'," *Journal of Social History* 23.3 (Spring 1990): 535-552. Basil Manly, *Christian Index*, Mar 24, 1843. He describes the process of discipline in the church and its purpose.

²⁷ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 13-17. The debate about proper church discipline erupted on the pages of the South-Western Baptist newspaper in a 13 week series in 1860. Whether he received or inflicted church discipline, DeVotie demonstrated a respect for its benefits which seems to have been instilled in him early in life through his family. He recalled that, "the reins of government were judiciously, and firmly held by my parents," and proceeded to describe, "an instance of wrongdoing, and punishment I can never forget." DeVotie's father had entrusted him to attend to a farm field one day, but the young boy left to join his friends instead. DeVotie hoped to remedy his disobedience by pulling a field of flax his father had planted. He hoped this would conceal his indiscretion and assuage any anger if caught. He remembered, "The next day disclosed the facts, the crows had pulled up the corn, I had ruined the flax, and in due time my falsehood was detected. Then came the reconvincing my father applied the rod, my mother approving, yet afflicted by every stroke, though insisting I was thoroughly subdued and made to confess my falsehood and learn that obedience was better than sacrifice." DeVotie wrote that this incident had "not lost its effect and cannot cease to affect me while life lasts."; Flynt, 87.

forward in his vision for building institutions and professionalizing the pastorate, and he was able to bring his congregations along without losing his position because he kept his other pastoral foot firmly planted in the traditional Baptist pastoral priorities: Calvinist theology, calls for conversion, revival meetings and church discipline.

Even though DeVotie, and those who agreed with his vision, succeeded in winning sufficient Baptist support to develop one of the predominant Christian denominations in the South, the story could have been different. In particular, Hardshell Baptists and their stepsister, the Landmark Baptists, vigorously contended for an alternative Baptist vision and sought to pull followers in their direction. Although DeVotie was often able to bring Baptists along with his plans by keeping footholds in frontier faith, he sometimes could not avoid facing off against frontier foes. The contingent of Baptists known variously as Anti-mission, Hardshell, or Footwashing, eventually became a distinctive denomination, the Primitive Baptists. However in the early nineteenth century they remained a significant segment within the larger Baptist community of the South. They distinguished themselves from other Baptists through their particular mix of convictions about theology, interchurch cooperation, and Christian practice.²⁸

As a result of these beliefs the Hardshell Baptists resisted much of DeVotie's vision for the expansion, establishment and entrenchment of Baptist faith in the South. They exerted powerful influence among Alabama Baptists beginning most clearly after the 1823 inaugural Alabama Baptist State Convention. From that time, through the 1850s, Anti-mission leaders and members continued to vie with DeVotie and those who shared his vision for the direction of the Baptist faith in Alabama and other southern states. DeVotie stands out as a dominating force to not only develop Baptist practices to reach a broader portion of the southern population, but also to resist the powerful regressive approach of the Hardshells and exclusivism of the Landmarkers.

²⁸ Flynt, 32-34.

Although Calvinism remained strong in the Baptist churches of the South, the majority of Baptists, including DeVotie, rejected the Hyper-Calvinist views of the Hardshell Baptists. The Hyper-Calvinist perspective contrasted with traditional Calvinism's affirmation of both God's sovereignty and human responsibility, by instead suggesting no human role in salvation. Hyper-Calvinists exalted God's sovereignty to a point of resisting intentional efforts to bring salvation to those outside of saving relationship with Christ, since they believed God did not plan to use human effort in this way. DeVotie explained the middle ground of traditional Calvinism, "God has not determined to save his elect in impenitence, unbelief and disobedience; but he has determined to call them effectually, to work repentance, faith, sanctification and every grace of the people of God, in them, as well as their final glorification." DeVotie chided his Hyper-Calvinist Hardshell opponents on these matters with the model of the early church believers, "Were they like some idle speculators of our day they would fold their arms and say O it is predestinated for us to be saved and what is the use of all this stir and bustle about the matter. But it was not so. They worked for their lives. They worked out their salvation with fear and trembling and God blessed their efforts."²⁹ Theological convictions drove men like DeVotie to choose a widely accepted theological middle ground between Arminianism and Hyper-Calvinism.³⁰ This was such an important issue for Baptists that it was not uncommon for some

²⁹ "Predestination," 14, 17. "The will of man, active and spontaneous and fluctuating as it appears, is an instrument in his hand and he turns it at his pleasure and he brings motives to bear upon it and he plies it with all its excitements and he measures the force and proportion of each of them and every step of every individual receives as determined a cast from the hand of God as every mile of a planets orbit, or every gust of wind, or every wave of the sea, or every particle of flying dust, or every rivulet of running water. This power of God knows no exceptions. It is absolute and unlimited, and while it embraces the vast, it carries its resistless influence to all the minute and unnoticed diversities of existence. It reigns and operates through all the secrecies of the inner man. It gives birth to every purpose. It gives impulse to every desire. It gives shape and color to every conception."

³⁰ "Predestination", 4. DeVotie showed awareness of the pitfalls of his position, stating "It is not our duty to be altogether silent about the doctrine of predestination; for the Bible is not silent about it, and it is our duty to hold up our testimony for all that we find there. But there is caution to be observed with regard to it. Owing to our natural depravity on the one hand it begets presumption on the other it fosters despondency."

associations to delineate their Calvinist beliefs and require full assent by all participating churches.

For Hardshells, convictions concerning theology joined with and contributed to vehement differences on mission agencies and mission societies as a means for advancing the Christian faith. One can see how the Hyper-Calvinism of the Hardshells generated resistance to human mission efforts. Why evangelize or deploy missionaries if you believe God is going to save people exclusive of any human decision or response to hearing the Gospel? Yet the Hardshell position also stemmed from a fierce resistance to any centralization or hierarchy in the church that might result from the establishment of formal mission organizations.

These Hardshell theological and missiological perspectives even combined with differences in church practice. During the early nineteenth century, foot-washing in many Baptist churches in the South, took on an almost sacramental importance. The practice displayed Christian service for one another stemming from the actions of Christ recorded in John 13. This became a lightning rod issue between pro-mission and Anti-mission sides of the debate, since the pro-mission churches generally did not believe in the mandatory practice of foot washing.

Although Anti-mission beliefs and practices stand outside the mainstream of later generations of Baptist life, for Baptists in the South in the nineteenth century they exerted very strong influence. Hardshell Baptists filled the ranks of many of the churches and associations in Alabama. By 1837, 12 of the 21 associations in Alabama were divided on the Hardshell issues. In places where Hardshells held the majority in the association, they sometimes simply expelled those favoring the organized missions approach or more moderate Calvinism. Although the churches located in larger settled communities like Montgomery, Tuscaloosa, and Marion often stood against the Hardshells, they were sometimes in the extreme minority of their surrounding

association. First Baptist Church of Montgomery where DeVotie served was the only church in the Alabama Association which did not have an influential Anti-mission contingent. When this association split in 1838, 17 churches joined to create Ebenezer Association which held to Hardshell convictions. The other 23 churches remained with a missional bent. Across Alabama, in many cases other associations split with decidedly Anti-mission majorities.³¹

Clearly DeVotie, and those who joined with him in leading Baptists in Alabama and Georgia, faced a huge challenge from within their ranks. Although in hindsight, the massive expansion of the Southern Baptist Convention in the South and eventually across the whole country makes the success of DeVotie's perspective look inevitable, this was far from the case in the 1800s among Alabama Baptists. The Hardshells opposed nearly everything DeVotie stood for – missions agencies, ecumenical revival meetings, robust denominational structures, and even collaborative Bible societies. This internal Baptist conflict might have easily derailed the rapid spread of Baptists in the South beyond a poor agrarian sect. It certainly threatened the progress promised to come through the cohesion and collaboration of shared ministry institutions. The conflict also subsumed precious time and energy exerted on an intramural squabble, while much of the state population remained not just outside Baptist, but any Christian influence. At the very least it frustrated leaders on both sides of the issue, who saw the opposition as misdirecting the Baptist faith. Men like DeVotie undoubtedly experienced the temptation to compromise their convictions for the sake of maintaining unity, even if only for the purpose of displaying a loving peaceful church body to the watching frontier world. The temporary retraction in the size of the Baptist churches in the South at this time, due to Hardshell defections, makes the eventual

³¹ Flynt, 32-33. "Many of the oldest churches and associations... were dominated by antimissionary forces, who retained control of the institutions and forced missionary Baptists to withdraw and form new associations."

expansion of the Southern Baptist Convention an even greater testimony to the effectiveness of the strategies DeVotie doggedly pursued.

Although perhaps less familiar to later generations of Baptists, the Landmark movement among Baptists in the nineteenth century exerted a powerful influence similar to that of the Hardshells. Part of the argument made by the Landmark movement was not simply that they had the truest understanding of Biblical teaching or were presently the only true church, but that they were the continuation of the true faith going all the way back to the apostolic era. For adherents of the Landmark perspective no universal church existed beyond the Baptist churches, which they believed traced back to the time of Christ. The name Landmark came from this thinking, since adherents saw themselves as reestablishing the old landmarks of the faith, which they accused their own Baptist brethren, like DeVotie, of removing. When DeVotie partnered with Presbyterians and Methodists to extend outreach through revivals and display Christian unity, this flew directly in the face of Landmark beliefs. DeVotie's more ecumenical and winsome approach to other Christian denominations eventually prevailed, but the isolated and insular perspective of the Landmark contingent drew strong support.³²

Landmarkism grew popular in the lower and upper South, as well as Texas in the decades preceding the Civil War. The greatest allegiance was found in Tennessee, Arkansas, and Louisiana. Like Hardshells, members of the Landmark movement opposed centralization of Baptist ministries, but they were even more concerned with partnerships, locally or nationally, between Baptists and other denominations. Their primary motivation arose from the conviction that Baptist faith was the only true expression of Christianity. They therefore valued the authority of the local congregation to practice and enforce the Baptist form of baptism and church government and only extend membership and church leadership to those who believed in

³² Tull, 1.

the exclusive nature of the Baptist faith. So rather than resisting denominational structures, as the Hardshells did, they sought to influence those structures toward isolation from other denominations and push power back to local churches supportive of their views.³³

The movement gained support by capitalizing on several latent mindsets among Baptists. In the colonial era and in the eastern states, the Baptist faith had been looked down upon by the established Anglicans, as well as the unestablished, but more accepted, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and Methodists, all of whom practiced infant baptism and did not insist upon immersion as the method of Baptism. Baptists therefore perceived themselves as a persecuted minority, living out the true faith in the face of a larger misguided Christian community. Through the period of the Second Great Awakening the Baptist churches expanded in number and in many cases also partnered with other denominations. Leaders like DeVotie, sought to share the basic Gospel message of salvation despite areas of doctrinal disagreement on specific church practices. For many Baptists this had opened the door to a broader understanding of a universal Christian faith. For Landmarkers this was tantamount to abdicating the faith.

Through the vocal and enduring leadership of its prominent leader, James Robinson Graves, the Landmark movement proved a strong reaction to DeVotie's more ecumenical approach to reaching the South for Christ. Graves and his numerous followers feared any movement away from exclusive Baptist belief. The parallels between Graves and DeVotie add an intriguing context to their conflict to determine the future of Baptists in the South. Both hailed from the Northeast, Graves having been born in Vermont. Their ministries both extended from the 1830s to the 1890s. Both were widely recognized skilled preachers with a large following and significant donors underwriting their plan for the Baptist churches. They differed in one noteworthy respect. Although DeVotie never achieved the full academic credentialing

³³ Flynt, 83-84. List of notable Landmark leaders.

possessed by some pastors, he nevertheless was raised by a teacher, attended primary school, and had attended Seminary, prior to his expulsion. Graves enjoyed very little formal education of any kind and lacked any seminary training. This was not uncommon for the time, but played into both his willingness to assess essential theological positions versus negotiable ones, and also his questionable historical assessment of Baptist apostlicity.³⁴

Both dynamic leaders also followed similar paths to promote and solidify their views, extensively utilizing newspaper communication. Like DeVotie, Graves saw the importance of print media for shaping the direction of Baptists. He served initially as an assistant editor to *The Baptist*, the Tennessee Baptist paper. In 1848 he became the sole editor and the name was changed to *The Tennessee Baptist*. Graves immediately began to use this vehicle to advance Landmark principles. Whereas DeVotie used newspaper publications to promote the building of Baptist institutions, Graves focused much more exclusively on doctrinal concerns, specifically those that mattered most to the Landmark Baptists.³⁵

Like DeVotie, Graves' skill as an orator propelled him not only as a spiritual leader, but also as a shaper of Baptist church life and development. In 1851, Graves accelerated his use of verbal communication by organizing mass meetings of sympathetic Baptists, and the Landmark movement really began to gain ground. Referring to a particular message from Graves, J. L. Lloyd, pastor of First Baptist Church of Knoxville wrote, "The sermon surpassed anything I ever heard from the lips of moral man. It simply beggared description. The loftiest flights of oratory and the grandest efforts of poetry utterly fail to express the lofty grandeur, the touching pathos, the melting tenderness of that matchless sermon."³⁶

³⁴ Tull, 1.

³⁵ Tull, 2.

³⁶ *The Baptist and Reflector*, Sep 28, 1893.

In 1859, the Landmark movement reached its zenith, after which it receded significantly until the latter part of the century.³⁷ That year Graves determined to take his case to the Southern Baptist Convention as a whole. The irony in all this was that Graves, who lauded the authority of the local congregation, sought to gain influence through the associations and conventions, and use them as doctrinal watchdogs, conflicting with the voluntary nature of these gatherings in Baptist polity. For Graves, the actions of the Baptists as a denomination, through home and foreign missions boards, were misguided. At the time, both of these were based in what had been DeVotie's backyard, Marion, Alabama. DeVotie had just served in 1855 as the Corresponding Secretary for the Domestic Mission Board. Graves vehemently wrote and spoke against these institutions up to the 1859 Southern Baptist Convention.

The 1859 Southern Baptist Convention meeting proved to be a watershed with Graves and the Landmarkers seeking to grab much more control of the denomination and nearly rupturing the cohesion of the denomination in the process. Although Graves usually contended that he was trying to correct, rather than destroy the Convention, he argued that the denominational boards did not have biblical warrant, were not actually necessary, and did not do a very good job of the tasks intended. Robert Boyte Crawford Howell, the past President of the Southern Baptist Convention, and its public face was an obvious opponent to Graves. Howell won reelection, but then, to preserve unity, chose to step down.³⁸

DeVotie led among Southern Baptist leaders who favored the Convention and its boards and did not believe the Baptist church to be the only true expression of the church. They pushed

³⁷ Tull, 85-90. Although various Baptist leaders pushed back against Graves agenda, R. B. C. Howell, then President of the Southern Baptist Convention, and serving as pastor for the church in Nashville which Graves attended, countered Graves forcefully and publically. The two conflicted in the Nashville First Baptist Church, and an action of the congregation pronounced Graves divisive. However, Graves used his leadership among the other Tennessee Baptist churches to have the entire church removed from the local association.

³⁸ Tull, 92.

back by essentially categorizing the Landmark movement as a repackaged form of the Hardshell or Primitive Baptist movement. Ultimately, DeVotie and other Baptist leaders successfully contained the Landmark movement. However, whereas most Hardshells had chosen to withdraw from the Southern Baptist Convention, Graves and his followers remained and ensured new policies were developed including the ability for churches and local associations to support missionaries of their choosing, even if they opted to channel the funds through the convention.

This result was not inevitable. Other denominations, like the Church of Christ, contended they were the only true church. As a result they isolated themselves from other denominations well into the twentieth century and ultimately stunted their expansion as a denomination. The role of DeVotie and others like Howell and J.B. Jeter curtailed what might have otherwise been a very different path for the Southern Baptist Convention. Although in the early days of the Landmark movement, these men did not realize the need to address it forcefully with a clear and powerful argument to the contrary, by 1859 they had learned to do so. Rather than further inflaming Graves, this concerted resistance to his perspective took some of the wind out of his sails, and the Civil War shifted the entire focus of the church on other matters, pushing Landmarkism to the back burner.³⁹

Neither before nor after the war did Landmark Baptists assume any sizeable portion of denominational leadership.⁴⁰ Landmarkism reorganized after the Civil War, but Graves toned

³⁹ Tull, 98, 101. “At the Convention [1859] meeting Graves seems to have felt for the first time the power of healthy counterforces in the convention, which, led by able and resourceful men, were prepared to prevent his dominating the course of the Baptist cause in the South.” The Landmark movement might have been able to continue building strength, but when the Civil War ensued, believers of all denominations across the South quickly set aside theological differences to work for the spiritual strengthening and unity of the Confederate States. Even for a population interested in Biblical truth and theological precision, the war brought other matters to the forefront. Only after the war and the early Reconstruction years, did Landmark Baptists mount some resurgence, still led by Graves.

⁴⁰ Tull, 101-106. Graves and other Landmark Baptists did manage to get the Bible Board located to Memphis when it was restarted after the war. It had fallen under DeVotie’s leadership for a period, but in 1863 it ceased operations. In the meantime, leaders like DeVotie managed to keep the Southern Baptist Convention Home

down his previously caustic rhetoric.⁴¹ J. B. Jeter maintained the most public resistance of any Baptist leaders, using Virginia's *The Religious Herald* as a vehicle. He shared the perspective men like DeVotie held regarding Landmarkism: "The denomination has certainly practiced an interchange of pulpits for a hundred years, and we have seen no resolution of any convention, association, or church condemning the practice, that dates back more than about twenty years." He pointed out that any resolutions which had been offered reflected only a small minority among Baptists and concluded, "Our fathers were earnest Baptists...but they were not Landmarkers. They opposed Pedeo-baptism, by sound and scriptural arguments; but accorded its advocates due credit...and cooperated with them, so far as they could without sacrificing their distinctive principles."⁴²

Throughout his ministry DeVotie stood with one foot firmly planted on traditional frontier Baptist principles but one arm pushing against the regressive ingrown approach of Hardshells and Landmarkers. From this posture, he certainly alienated the latter contingent, but was able to maintain substantial popular Baptist support. With this backing, he not only spearheaded institution building but he also boldly stepped forward as architect of an increasingly professionalized Baptist pastorate.

Mission Board, and its predecessor, The Domestic and Indian Mission Board, in Marion, and away from more Landmark friendly regions of the country, until 1882. Eventually it was relocated to Atlanta, no stronghold for Landmarkism. The agencies of the Southern Baptist Convention were also strengthened because, despite Landmark objections, their purity of purpose seemed clearly preferable to the efforts of the northern Baptists, which were renewed during the war, to advance their version of Baptist faith in the South. Because of its ability to resource Baptist ministries, many Baptists, particularly in the upper South remained involved with the Northern Baptists Home Mission board, but by 1887, the Conventions in each of the southern states were committed to their own agency.

⁴¹ Tull, 113-114. Landmarkism continued to shape a notable portion of the Southern Baptist Convention due to the longevity of Graves, who continued to speak around the South and capitalize on a weakened, but still influential publication effort. The movement was sustained also by the ongoing population shift of the Baptist denomination. As more and more settlers moved to Arkansas, Louisiana, and Texas, they were usually moving from areas of the South less favorable to the Landmark movement, and joining churches, aligned with associations, which advocated for it.

⁴² Tull 95, 129; *Religious Herald*, Sep 13, 1877. This conflict did not leave DeVotie when he moved to Georgia. Crawford, President of Mercer University, where DeVotie would serve as a trustee, advocated for dissolution of Southern Baptist Convention upon Landmark convictions.

CHAPTER 5

PROMOTING A PROFESSIONAL PASTORATE

By seeking to elevate the Baptist pastorate, DeVotie prepared the way for the Baptist faith to dramatically impact all classes in Alabama and Georgia. This transformation came with the liability of compromising the faith to win approval of the wealthy. Yet it also promised to expand Baptist membership numbers and to engage the considerable resources and influence of upwardly mobile southerners.¹ For DeVotie, professionalizing the Baptist pastorate meant not only transforming how much time pastors had for their work, how pastors trained for ministry, the amount of compensation pastors received and the manner in which pastors spoke, but also in what type of facilities pastors preached.

The professionalization of the evangelical pastorate in the Deep South certainly resulted from pastors, like DeVotie, hoping to reach the growing wealthy population for the sake of God's kingdom and for the expansion of their denominational footprint. However, this shift would have gone nowhere if it did not resonate with the desires of prosperous church members who valued social prominence, professional preaching, fine facilities and organizational power. Increasing numbers of well-off southerners aligned with the Baptist expression of Christian

¹ Ryan, 12. She observed the interconnectedness of the spiritual movement of the Second Great Awakening not only with the issue of class but also gender. "A closer look at the Second Great Awakening indicates that the history of class and religion was hopelessly entangled with questions of family and gender."

teaching but also wanted their church and its pastor to reflect their personal elevated social, educational, and economic status.²

Along the frontier in the early years of the Second Great Awakening and continuing later in the nineteenth century in rural and poorer segments of southern society, lay pastoral leadership remained the Baptist ideal. These ministers were bi-vocational, working in a secular calling for their primary income and serving in ministry on the side. Just as DeVotie's vision for a professional pastorate connected more readily with the increasing number of wealthy and educated southerners, lay pastors of poorer congregations gained connection with their flock through a common lifestyle. As lower class Baptist pastors worked in farm fields or in a trade, they experienced the daily existence of their flock and could more readily comport with the lives of their congregation.³ This is not to say that each pastor fit precisely in a category of social, economic or educational status. In fact, pastors in the South during the nineteenth century were sometimes challenging to classify definitively simply because each pastor carried out his calling based on his individual understanding of ministry.⁴ Nevertheless, general patterns can be drawn.

In frontier regions, Baptist usage of unlearned lay preachers rather than full-time seminary-trained pastors had proven beneficial. The rapid spread of the population across a wide landscape left denominations like the Presbyterians, who required seminary educated pastors, flatfooted in their efforts to provide enough trained clergy. However, as the South increased in prosperity and towns grew in refinement, the model of uneducated, unrefined lay pastor began to be a liability rather than an advantage. Beginning in the larger towns, Baptists in the South now sought what they had in past times rejected. They hired professional clergy, like DeVotie, who

² Fuller, 131. "As men like Manly won their place in society, their denomination, so long on the social periphery, so long the revolutionaries, the religion of the poor, became respectable."

³ Stephen Presley Barber, *The Gospel Horse in the Valley: Evangelical Slavery and Freedom in the Chattahoochee Valley, 1821-1877*, Auburn University, 2011, 68. A dissertation.

⁴ Startup, 3.

had often received formal theological training. Those pastors not only preached in a particular professional manner but also in a professional setting. They led extensive building programs, seeking to surpass the latest church structure of sister churches in other towns or other denominations in their own town. All of this accelerated the expansion of the Baptist movement among wealthy southerners.

The model of a professional pastor which DeVotie fostered in Alabama and Georgia also developed in other parts of the country. During the nineteenth century, in regions like Virginia, a whole generation of evangelical ministers aspired to conform to the increasing degree of professionalism their parishioners desired in a church leader. With this aim of professional advancement, sometimes pastors lost sight of their call as servant shepherds of the flock. An examination of DeVotie's ministry casts light specifically on professionalization as it developed in Alabama and Georgia. But DeVotie also reveals how professional pastors could pursue social and material advancement, while not completely compromising their ministerial calling.⁵

DeVotie's life shows what was true for many professional ministers. They were strongly motivated by a sincere belief in the central tenet of the Second Great Awakening - salvation from sin through repentance and faith in Christ. Undoubtedly, developing a professional Baptist pastoral model in the South brought personal economic and social benefits. However, DeVotie and other southern professional pastors still ultimately hoped to extend the message of salvation through their newfound prominence among political, business, and social elites. DeVotie typified these transitional church leaders who lacked an entirely pure motivation, but were not

⁵ Schweiger, 5; Wyatt-Brown, 508. He showed that the practice of churches in Alabama seeking educated eastern and northern pastors was not unique.

completely self-serving either. In short, DeVotie was obviously fascinated with his own pay and power, but remained a sincere, fervent proclaimer of the evangelical message.⁶

Studying DeVotie not only provides insight into the motivations of this new generation of pastors but also highlights the increasing influence they wielded from their elevated social position. Examining the pastorate of DeVotie provides a test case for the question of “actual” versus merely “apparent” influence of evangelical pastors. Far from merely appearing significant, as a southern evangelical preacher DeVotie joined an army of ministers who shaped the culture of nineteenth century America.⁷ Other groups of professionals in the South impacted the culture, but no other group had the opportunity to speak and lead regularly as many people as crowded the increasingly refined pews of southern evangelical churches. By decisively engaging with cultural elites, academics, politicians, and wealthy planters, DeVotie, and others like him, only furthered their influence.⁸

DeVotie’s vision to raise the status and influence of Baptist pastors meant transforming the amount of time pastors allotted for their work, the methods used by pastors to prepare for ministry, the pay pastors received, the style of speaking pastors used, and even the buildings in which pastors spoke. Part of what set professional preachers apart was allocation of time for preaching preparation as well as other duties. This stood in contrast to part-time bi-vocational pastors who generally could only commit evenings and weekends to pastoral duties. This barely left time for pastoral visitation, let alone intensive, careful sermon preparation. As Baptist membership numbers grew and congregations increased in wealth, beginning in towns, churches

⁶ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 209. DeVotie listed his salary at each church he served for his entire career.

⁷ Holifield, 103. He highlighted the debate concerning whether clergy had “unbounded influence” or “merely apparent”. He contended, “Their preaching gave them a larger public audience of adults, week after week, than that of any other professional group.”; Startup, 11. “Clearly, Protestant evangelicalism towered in the slave South as an especially prominent social and cultural edifice, with obvious influence.”

⁸ Flynt, ix. The continuing predominance of Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, and non-denominational evangelicals, among all classes in the South, more than a century later is also no small litmus of the influence of these nineteenth century pastors.

could afford to pay a fulltime pastor. In return they received more polished messages delivered on a more regular basis. Fulltime professional clergy generally preached a formal message that was at a minimum one hour long, at least two times each week.⁹ DeVotie led the new generation of these pastors in Alabama and Georgia, evincing his devotion to this divine duty through countless hours in weekly sermon preparation. Pastors pursued a variety of ministry endeavors, but because both they and their parishioners championed the pastor's role in proclaiming the Word of God, preaching proved his most important clerical task.¹⁰

Thus, DeVotie led the movement in Alabama and Georgia toward a more professional pastorate as a local church pastor who aimed at spiritual and social change through weekly spoken messages. His volume of preaching and success as a preacher paved the way for acceptance of his vision for an elevated Baptist ministry. He estimated that he preached 5500 sermons in his lifetime and recorded detailed manuscripts of over 600 sermons in his five volumes of sermon journals. Prior to the Civil War he usually preached three sermons on Sunday - in the morning to the white portion of his congregation, in the afternoon to the black portion, and in the evening to whites again. DeVotie regularly preached in a wide variety of settings: his own pulpit, weddings, funerals, denominational gatherings, association meetings, convention meetings, mission events.¹¹ His skilled speaking ability and numerous speaking opportunities allowed him to regularly exemplify the case for why Baptists should seek a professional pastor.

⁹ Loveland, 39.

¹⁰ Loveland, 38 and 42; Holifield, 105.

¹¹ *South-Western Baptist*, Nov 29, 1860. DeVotie demonstrated his effectiveness in preaching on many occasions including funerals. Concerning the funeral of J. E. Dawson in Columbus, the article stated, DeVotie delivered "an appropriate and very affecting discourse"; *South-Western Baptist*, Aug 23, 1860. DeVotie also preached often on missions; *South-Western Baptist*, Jun 28, 1860; *South-Western Baptist*, Jun 18, 1857. DeVotie preached the missions message at Columbus Association.

As churches expanded their ministry offerings, responsibilities for the pastor increased. Like his professional pastoral peers, DeVotie also carried out the other tasks typically required of the clergy: he taught Sunday School, provided spiritual counseling, led Bible studies, held prayer meetings, conducted seasonal religious gatherings, and sponsored revivals. On top of these duties pastors often also helped distribute tracts and Bibles, promoted Sabbath observance, led institutes to train other ministers, sought to curtail prostitution, served in prison outreaches, and led temperance initiatives.¹² Yet at all times, preaching remained their preeminent task.

As a full-time pastor serving an increasingly professional constituency, DeVotie not only confronted the weekly pace of preaching but also felt the necessity of being creative in his messages. His sermon journals reflect a variety of themes and a broad range of Biblical passages: the Bible, sin, salvation, righteousness, trust, comfort, heaven, hell, love, evangelism, money and temptation. DeVotie usually could not “recycle” a message since members might attend more than one of the services. In his various pastorates, he rose to prominence in the towns where he ministered and in the broader surrounding region of the Baptist association. His messages were often printed in local or denominational publications. Thus, he needed to regularly prepare fresh illustrations capable of captivating increasingly sophisticated congregations and providing poignant applications to challenge his expectant hearers. DeVotie’s lengthy pastorates in Marion, Columbus and Griffin intensified his need for sermon variety compared with pastors who moved from congregation to congregation more regularly and could recycle messages with every new group.¹³ All this required the time allotment only possible as a fulltime professional pastor.

¹² Holifield, 105-107.

¹³ Loveland, 39. She noted, that itinerants who traveled large distances to preach, generally from the Baptist or Methodist background, could spare some preparation of new messages since their audience shifted as they

Increasingly, professional Baptist ministers and the growing number of upwardly mobile Baptist members joined in supporting this allocation of pastoral time because of their shared belief that preaching held a particular theological place in these churches as the main means of God's grace descending upon the people.¹⁴ Evangelical preachers like DeVotie valued the time they had to prepare messages because they saw the impact of their labors. However, they perceived another, overriding force at work as well: the Holy Spirit, who they hoped would enter into the church community through their messages in such a way that what were otherwise merely human words would bring about spiritual change.

DeVotie not only led the elevation of Baptist ministry through his full-time commitment to preaching and other pastoral duties, but he also exemplified and promoted the formal academic training of professional pastors. Pastors often squabbled within their own denominational ranks concerning the benefits of clerical education. Educational background distinguished clergy from one another and greatly influenced their approach to preaching. It also shaped the type of people in the community with whom a pastor might connect.

Early in the nineteenth century "educated" simply meant possessing a college degree. For clergy this involved learning a full "liberal arts" curriculum as well as classical Biblical linguistics. Yet, even as late as the middle of the nineteenth century only about 900 students graduated annually from all eastern colleges combined. Furthermore, at the same time the overall percentage of college graduates entering the ministry was in decline. Prominent urban churches also began to expect their pastors to have a divinity degree available through a small but growing number of American seminaries. In an effort to expand enrollment, most seminaries

traveled. But they more than replaced their sermon preparation time with the hours needed to make their monthly circuit.

¹⁴ Loveland, 39. "The minister's task was to present God's plan of salvation, to warn sinners of the danger they were in, and to persuade them of their duty to accept salvation."

accepted some students, like DeVotie, who did not have a bachelor's degree. Thus, formally educated pastors remained scarce, especially in the rapidly expanding denominations along the frontier, even while formal scholarship was gaining importance for an increasingly professional pastorate.¹⁵

But the hindrances to educating pastors to fill professional pastoral roles went beyond academic supply and demand. Early in the nineteenth century, the frontier denominations, particularly Baptists and Methodists, generally considered formal theological training a detriment to pastoral fervor and effectiveness. DeVotie determined to change this mentality among Baptists by maintaining the footholds to frontier faith and simultaneously exemplifying a more learned ministry on the newly settled frontier. He held on to orthodoxy, conversions, revivals and discipline, while also advancing pastoral erudition. An 1846 article published in the *Alabama Baptist*, then operated by DeVotie, went so far as to define professionalization as one purpose in the academic training for pastors: "Preachers must learn proper grammar, refinement, oratorical skills, and mental discipline so as not to offend educated lay people."¹⁶ DeVotie modelled this pursuit through his own enrollment in seminary and by helping develop Howard College to formally train other ministers. His sermon journals also reveal his labors to polish and refine his messages into carefully prepared theological treatises, rather than speak extemporaneously and rely exclusively on the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to guide his words.¹⁷ In this manner, DeVotie paved the way for men like himself, who possessed formal training, to become the pinnacle and model for evangelical ministry.¹⁸

¹⁵ Holifield, 115-117.

¹⁶ Flynt, 86; *Alabama Baptist*, Sep 12, 1846 and Dec 5, 1849.

¹⁷ Holifield, 118-119. "Among the educated clergy, the sermon itself could become a polished cultural artifact. They often gave close attention to form and style, and visitors from Europe sometimes described the results as 'finished literary efforts.'"

¹⁸ Spain, 38. "By 1865 they [Baptists] had come to approve the principle of an educated ministry and an educated citizenry."

DeVotie also passed along his vision for an educated professional pastorate to his firstborn son. Noble embodied his father's educational philosophy for ministry preparation, beginning at Howard College and then transferring to The University of Alabama where he graduated first in his class. Subsequently, he became one of three Baptists in his class at the theologically conservative northern Presbyterian seminary at Princeton. Noble's valedictory remarks at the University of Alabama concerning the benefits of higher education would have shocked an earlier generation of Baptists who would have seen formal education as a spiritual liability. He urged his fellow graduates:

For its welfare and perpetuity, gentlemen, Alabama holds you responsible. If its light be dimmed and finally extinguished, what other central orb shall fling its rays into that mental darkness which will surely settle upon the State? We would not depreciate or undervalue the influence of her younger sisters; they have their special mission: but he must be shortsighted indeed, who does not see that it is reserved for Alabama's favored University to accomplish the grand result – the moral and intellectual education of her sons. If this fail the cause of education will receive a fatal shock. See then that the position the University occupies be not only sustained, but be advanced higher and higher, until, settled firmly in the affection and confidence of the people, it may defy the combined assaults of all its enemies. Yes, gentlemen, guard this sacred trust. Generations yet unborn will rise and call you blessed.¹⁹

As an educated professional clergyman, DeVotie not only expected to interact with an increasingly refined and prosperous constituency, but also to receive compensation commensurate with his rising status. Most Baptist pastors still remained poor and bi-vocational during the nineteenth century, but DeVotie and an increasing number of pastors rejected any inherent nobility in this approach. Instead they intentionally pursued positions of ministry with elevated social status and significant pay.²⁰ In fact, DeVotie seemed to pride himself on his earnings, writing repeatedly in his memoirs about the financial arrangements he achieved at each church. At a time when rural pastors might make less than \$80 per year, city pastors like

¹⁹ Levere, *The Record*, 28.2 (May 1908): 99.

²⁰ Schweiger, 3. "The ranks of the nineteenth-century ministry were filled with young men who left their fathers' fields and workshops to find an opportunity for self-improvement in the clerical profession."; Flynt, 76.

DeVotie who led prominent churches often made \$1,500, some as much as \$6,000.²¹ The issue was not simply for the professional pastor to have a certain raw income, but for that income to translate to an elevated socioeconomic standing for the pastor. Baptists rarely were bold enough to vocalize the motivation behind “providing better” for their pastor, but certainly part of the aim was for their visible leader to exhibit their rising success and influence to the surrounding community. This could be “sanctified” by rationalizing it as a means to the end of positioning the pastor to reach affluent southerners, but it was also an announcement that Baptists were insiders, not outsiders, and successful, not struggling.

The professionalization of the pastorate also meant growing congregations began to compete for skilled pastors like DeVotie. For several brief periods in his ministry DeVotie lacked a pastoral call, but he spent most of his career navigating between ever improving pastoral offers. Some six churches competed for him after he resigned from Siloam in Marion. He always couched his personal goals in spiritual terms stating at the conclusion of one pastorate, “The field was circumscribed, and I desired to work advantageously in view of increased usefulness.”²² Yet, DeVotie clearly sought to expand his influence and climb the professional pastoral ladder by securing the most prominent ministry position available to him.

Time allocation, educational background and a desire to advance in ministry combined with regional and socioeconomic influences to shape professional preaching style. The distinctive preaching approaches of evangelical pastors in the nineteenth century generally followed regional and socioeconomic lines more than denominational pathways. Cities tended to have a higher percentage of wealthy, educated, and sophisticated churchgoers than found in the

²¹ Holifield 129, 130; DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 209. DeVotie lists his salary at each church he served over his entire career.

²² DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 96-99; Flynt, 75-76. Flynt detailed DeVotie’s salary negotiations with churches that pursued him, at end of his Marion pastorate.

rural regions. As a result, a more eloquent, intellectual discourse, which might appear pompous or simply unintelligible outside the cities or among the poor, was well received by the prosperous in the cities.²³ Holifield contended, “It was the urban clergy who set the pace. Some became local, regional, even national celebrities. Tourists came to hear them preach, newspapers covered their sermons, and young pastors emulated their innovations.”²⁴ It would be difficult to classify the towns in Alabama and Georgia prior to the Civil War as “urban.” However, with mid-nineteenth century populations ranging from 5,000 to 10,000, places such as Tuscaloosa, Marion, and Columbus were more urban than the surrounding areas and were in the process of developing into full-fledged cities.²⁵

Regional and socioeconomic factors influenced what style of sermon delivery appealed to a particular church, but ultimately each pastor determined how he actually pronounced his message. The debate among evangelicals between extemporaneous and recitation preaching was a touchstone for the larger transition to a professionalized pastorate. Evangelical preachers might use no notes while in the pulpit, bring written notes to glance at occasionally, or recite verbatim from a full sermon text. Baptist and Methodist ministers proved least likely to recite sermons, but in the more sophisticated city churches it even occurred in the pulpits of these denominations.²⁶ Conversely, while urban Presbyterian divines often brought a whole manuscript to the pulpit, those in more rural areas rejected the practice. Although congregations may increasingly have hoped for more carefully prepared and Biblically focused messages,

²³ Holifield, 149. Although Holifield argued against setting too strong a distinction between city and country preaching styles, this is nevertheless a beneficial delineation. Although the nation was becoming more urban in the mid-nineteenth century, America remained mostly rural and most preachers served in rural areas. After the Civil War, rural came to be associated with backwardness and stagnation.

²⁴ Holifield, 158.

²⁵ Loveland, 45.

²⁶ Fuller, 50. He noted that Manly, in his early days, went to preach without putting pen to paper. He did arrange themes in his mind and meditate on them. He sought to become affected in his heart by the key themes and aimed to finish with a strong emotional appeal.

depending on the skill and preparedness of the pastor, sermons often devolved to mere storytelling. In general pastors used no notes and in many churches the congregation responded aloud. Pastors might also vary their approach within the context of an individual message. They might exhort the congregation forcefully and later speak with gentle urging. Almost any tool was fair game to illustrate key points, including anecdotes, poems, jokes, and physical demonstrations.²⁷

In stark contrast to the sometimes extemporaneous and perhaps disorganized preaching prevalent in evangelical pulpits in the South, DeVotie's sermon journals reveal carefully arranged and written outlines of sermons. He pasted typed scripture references, apparently cut from a Bible or reference tool, onto the handwritten pages, presumably to maintain complete accuracy in quotation. Indeed, the mere existence of extensive sermon notes for preachers like DeVotie shows that they intended to do more in the pulpit than follow the Spirit's leading and aimed to improve on their work once it was preached, for future reference.

Evangelicals who resisted the transformation of pastoral ministry which DeVotie championed, felt justified in their concern that too much "book-learnin" and "note-readin" would hinder what they saw as the most important stylistic element for preaching: "unction." Uction was the minister's ability to convey zeal, weightiness, urgency, and love – all at the same time. The formally educated Presbyterian theologian Robert Lewis Dabney pronounced "it is much more important that sinners should be excited to listen to the truth than that I should have the reputation of a pretty writer."²⁸ Evangelicals agreed that unction proved particularly compelling

²⁷ Holifield 104, 127. Holifield noted the increasing number those who "supported the ideal of the educated pastor and strove to enhance the standing of the clergy as a learned profession." While others, who opposed this perspective scorned "the demands for ministerial education, called for a ministry drawn – if God so willed – from the ranks of the poor and the uneducated and authorized not by learning but by the zeal flowing from a sense of divine calling."

²⁸ Loveland, 40. Taken from Thomas Cary Johnson, *Life and Letters of Dabney*, 87.

when a minister combined it with the ability to make a message seem personally directed to each individual. Concerning Basil Manly, Fuller wrote, “In those early years, he became a powerful preacher, known for his excellent ministry, his lofty yet touching style, his uncanny ability to move audiences and individuals to tears and to conversion.” He explained how this related to preparation methods, “He took notes with him into the pulpit, but often strayed far from them, as the passion of the moment took him off on an eloquent, extemporaneous tangent that stirred his listeners, yet always came back to his main point. Manly’s special gift was sentiment...”²⁹

Educated, eloquent pastors like Manly and DeVotie maintained and even expanded their influence for pastoral professionalization by preaching with unction. Uction, like orthodox doctrine, seeking conversions, revival preaching, and church discipline, also worked as a tether to link Baptists who might otherwise differ on professionalizing the pastorate. It served as a fifth foothold in frontier faith.

Uction was not only an experience for the hearers, but also for the preacher himself. Ministers regularly felt that they were caught up in a movement of God when they sensed a force at work that went beyond mere human energy or passion. DeVotie described this type of preaching as “a difficult and painful undertaking” but saw no other true way, stating, “the word is as fire in the bones and I cannot refrain.”³⁰ He pictured himself undertaking a great battle each Sunday against his own sinfulness and against the Evil One. He described his condition, “With my body excited, feverish, and unnatural in its functions, my ignorance sinfulness and unfitness, painfully realized, held up before me by the arch tempter, and pressed upon my attention until almost distraction; in this woeful plight I frequently approach the house of God, and the pulpit on

²⁹ Fuller, 48-51. Manly also thought it crucial to remember the worth of each soul; to be focused on the hearers and not just the message.

³⁰ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 214.

the Sabbath.” The ability to overcome and carry unction to the pulpit came for him through prayer. He explained:

I never dare to go into the presence of the congregation except from my knees. I tell Jesus that though I am the least of all his preachers, and not worthy of the least of all his mercies yet be pleased to be with me. He knows how earnestly I plead with him not to leave me alone, but to stand by me and grant me wisdom to know, and grace to do his will, that I may have his Spirit to show me the truth, and give me utterance, to benefit souls, and secure his approbation.³¹

In DeVotie’s mind, the exertion of prayer was not to be a solo act on his part. He wrote, “I have often thought of the pleasure of the private members, who come in, and take their seats so quietly, and calmly. Little do they consider how much I need their prayers to assist me in bearing at that moment my almost unsupportable burdens.”³² In the experience of DeVotie, the combined prayers of pastor and congregation for unction frequently worked to powerful but also demanding effect, such that, “The mists and gloom are lifted up, and I am usually happy while speaking. After the service of Sabbath, I am weary, exhausted, mind, and body depressed and almost comfortless.”³³

By the time DeVotie began his ministry career this expression of unction for both pastors and parishioners had already become a definitive element of the southern evangelical religious experience. One southern preacher contrasted the unction of southern sermons with stereotypical northern preaching described as containing “No bursts of passion, no involuntary emotion, no sudden and splendid inspiration, bearing a man away from his manuscript and from his commonplaces as in a chariot of fire. Yankees seem to say good things because they have studied them, calculated them out and know it to be a duty to say them. Southern men say good

³¹ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 214-215.

³² DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 215. “At Columbus I used to kneel at the foot of the stair way leading from the basement up into the pulpit the last thing before service, and pray that he would not permit me to go up, except he would go with me. I cannot preach unless I go right from the mercy seat, and I would be afraid to try.”

³³ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 215-216. “Sighing, praying groaning in spirit, I begin my discourses, at the last moment before, ejaculating. O Jesus leave me not alone! O Jesus help me! I believe he has heard, + that he hears me still. I feel then that I lean upon him and that he helps me.”

things as if they could not help it.”³⁴ DeVotie adopted many elements of a professional pastorate which might have been negatively associated with northern urban churches. Yet, as a southern pastor, his success lay in the ability to not only maintain footholds in frontier faith, but also in demonstrating spiritual vibrancy through homiletical unction. By preaching with unction, DeVotie also capitalized on the growing southern religious identity. As political sectionalism intensified, it carried over to the religious realm and southerners supported spiritual leaders who exhibited virtues they identified as superior to northern spirituality.

Part of the unction experience arose from a balancing act in the pulpit demeanor of the preacher. The people expected forceful and clear preaching, but did not welcome harsh, arrogant, or callous rhetoric. The minister typically aimed to address matters of great weight but to do so intelligibly. Since preachers were almost universally male, this necessitated a confident demonstration of masculine leadership. But with females generally making up the majority of church members, the pastor also had to demonstrate the gentleness and compassion normally associated with women during this era in this region. The style of a minister also arose from his particular voice and inflection. When they combined these skills, both natural and acquired, with a particular vocabulary, preachers could give messages that seemed either lofty and poetic or plain and earthy, but ideally always powerful.³⁵

DeVotie’s unction, along with his emphasis on theological orthodoxy, desire for conversions, commitment to revivals, and implementation of church discipline allowed him to keep one foot in the boat of traditional Baptist ministry while simultaneously putting the other

³⁴ Loveland, 41. She referenced Moses Drury Hoge to Drury Lacy, November 12, 1847, in Wyndham B. Blanton, *The Making of a Downtown Church: The History of the Second Presbyterian Church, Richmond, Virginia, 1845-1945* (Richmond, 1945), 132.

³⁵ Fuller, 44. “The minister’s emotional appeals resonated with the growth of sentimentalism and romanticism, his pathos endeared him to those in the throes of guilt and spiritual melancholy about their sins, his plan for salvation in obedience, faith, and membership in the community of believers offered an alternative to the life of sin and isolation.”; Loveland, 42.

into the vessel of a new southern professional clergy. Elevating the role of ministers was a distinctive component in DeVotie's vision to transform Baptists. However, he linked his efforts to professionalize the pastorate to his work of institution building in the church. DeVotie utilized the platform he achieved as a preacher to advance the institution building and denominational infrastructure necessary to further propel the Baptists to a place of primacy among the evangelical denominations in the South.³⁶

For instance, DeVotie contributed to establishing denominational associations, colleges, Bible societies and newspapers, through his efforts outside the pulpit, but also wielded his homiletical acuity specifically for this purpose. He spoke regularly at denominational meetings, women's gatherings, ecumenical revivals, and of course his own pulpit. Since his vision of institution building frequently met resistance, DeVotie's convincing communication skills helped persuade Baptist leaders and parishioners who were reluctant to buy in. A less convincing spokesman than DeVotie might have been able to envision and organize institution building, but he would not have been able to enlist and inspire supporters. DeVotie's use of his professional public speaking abilities joined with pastoral unction to advance institution building. This continued throughout his ministry culminating when he served during the final years of his life and ministry in the capacity of Corresponding Secretary of the Georgia State Mission Board.³⁷

DeVotie's efforts to both transform the pastorate and build institutions through his preaching coalesced locally in one very observable form of Baptist social elevation - the construction of bigger and better worship facilities at nearly every church he served. DeVotie's

³⁶ Schweiger, 3-4. "The possibilities of progress, achieved by an ancient faith channeled into new bureaucratic forms, defined the work of Baptist and Methodist pastors in the South throughout the nineteenth century. Their vision of spiritual, social, and material improvement was inspired by a faith in progress, and they energetically built their denominations as shrines to the possible, rather than to the past. Their God was an innovator and their churches changed the face of the nineteenth-century South."

³⁷ *Georgia Weekly Telegraph and Georgia Journal & Messenger*, Apr 30, 1878; Issue 37. Regarding the Georgia Baptist Convention in Lagrange on Apr 25.

ministry began during the period when most Baptist churches were still meeting in a rudimentary wooden or simple brick structures. Under DeVotie's direction, the churches he led moved to sometimes ornate and certainly expensive new edifices. Preaching in these impressive new facilities undoubtedly added to the professional aura pastors like DeVotie sought. More complicated in design than earlier Baptist meeting houses, the structure itself usually helped elevate the preacher, often physically, and certainly acoustically. Of course, more elaborate physical structures also visibly proclaimed to the community that the Baptists should no longer be categorized as a backwoods or fringe group but actually had come to represent the mainstream of southern religious experience.³⁸

Even before he left seminary in South Carolina, DeVotie already had a vision for improving Baptist standing through bigger and better worship facilities. Although he recorded very little about his time supplying the pulpit in Camden, South Carolina, during his season at Furman Seminary, he did note that he had been the instrument for directing that church to build a newer facility in a desirable location.³⁹ During his subsequent pastorate in Montgomery, DeVotie described the congregation as initially small in number and also lacking many members with means. Noting the feeble condition of the church building when he arrived, he recalled his part in helping them build improved facilities.⁴⁰

³⁸ Loveland, 43-44. She noted the importance of church buildings to show the growing status, education, socioeconomic level of evangelicals and that they were also designed to magnify and project the preacher's voice and convey a sense of the divine surrounding the preacher; *South-Western Baptist*, May 17, 1860. Harden E. Taliferro passed through Columbus, GA, and recorded the near completion of a "neat and commodious house" [sanctuary].

³⁹ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 51-52. "My connection with the Camden church continued happily for two years. I had pleasure of baptizing quite a number and influencing the brethren to undertake the building of a new house of worship in a more elligable [sic] part of the town than they then occupied. The removal, and building were successfully consummated within a year or two afterwards.

⁴⁰ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 54. "The First Baptist Church in Montgomery worshiped in a small unfinished wooden building located where their present brick edifice now stands...A number were led to Jesus and baptized, the congregations [black and white] became large and settled, and the house of worship was completed and dedicated."; Allen, 26.

During his ministry years at Siloam Baptist Church in Marion, DeVotie also helped build both church and collegiate facilities there.⁴¹ By the end of his time in Marion, his ministry vision had become apparent enough that churches desiring his pastoral services often sought to lure him to become their minister by promising to support the construction of new facilities.⁴² DeVotie did not limit his support for building projects to his own congregations. While in Marion and afterward, he regularly spoke at the opening services for Baptist churches dedicating new buildings.⁴³



Siloam Baptist Church - Pictured in 1861

⁴¹ Julia Murfee Lovelace, *A History of Siloam Baptist Church, Marion, Alabama* (Birmingham: Birmingham Publishing Company, 1943), 15.

⁴² DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 118-121. See also numerous letters from lay leaders at other churches in the DeVotie Collection.

⁴³ *South-Western Baptist*, Sep 28, 1859. Described DeVotie's involvement in a dedication service for a new church in Loachapoka, Alabama.

The development of the physical structure for the First Baptist Church, Columbus, illustrates the effort of Baptists to not only establish themselves and extend their ministry, but to also rise in local prominence through facilities. The congregation constructed its first worship building which was 28 by 40 feet, at a cost of \$800 in 1830. By 1841 the congregation had already dedicated their second worship building, a structure 85 feet by 52 feet at a cost of \$18,000. At that time the church had grown to around 400 members, largely the result of revivals held in 1837 where over 100 were baptized.⁴⁴ The third church building was erected under DeVotie's leadership just prior to the Civil War. This building not only reflected the high hopes of DeVotie and his congregation for continued numerical growth, it also reflected the growing prosperity and status of members. Able to hold 800 people, it spanned 116 feet by 66 feet at a cost of \$25,000, including the organ. It even had a furnace which allowed for heated rooms and a pump for the baptistery.



First Baptist Church, Columbus – Completed in 1859

⁴⁴ Frederick S. Porter, *The Origin and Growth of the First Baptist Church, Columbus, Georgia*, (Commercial Printers Inc., 1959), 6-7, and 11.

Founding members of the Baptist church in Griffin organized themselves as a congregation in 1841. This was the first year that land lots became available in that town, located about 45 miles south of Atlanta. In 1845, the congregation doubled in size as the result of a revival effort, bringing the membership to 90. By 1846, the church had built its first building, which was a simple structure located on a lot donated by one of the developers of the town.⁴⁵ In 1854, the church sold that property to purchase another location and build a new facility. The congregation constructed a far more substantial building in 1861, where regular services were held during the Civil War. The structure served as a hospital during the war and survived Sherman's attacks.

When DeVotie ministered there from 1870-77, however, the church strongly divided in opinion concerning whether to add one noteworthy internal element to the church facility: an organ. Although a fancy expensive building structure could presumably be justified as a "necessity" for expanded meeting space as a particular Baptist congregation grew, the organ, probably more than any other church building component, symbolized the efforts of a particular congregation to elevate in status. Only congregations of significant number and wealth could afford this luxury item and the style of the church worship service itself would be transformed by the usage of such a lofty sounding instrument, requiring a specialized musician to play it. The division in Griffin over the organ produced such forceful tension that before DeVotie came the two factions had begun to meet separately. In his early Montgomery ministry years, DeVotie's actions had threatened to cause separation in that congregation. Yet now in his more seasoned

⁴⁵ Goddard, 5 and 12. There are no detailed congregational records from 1841-1864.

ministry years, DeVotie led the reunification of the Griffin church, and the organ purchase was delayed.⁴⁶

Even at the very end of his life, DeVotie showed his commitment to seeing Baptists develop through better church edifices. He personally purchased a lot in Griffin, Georgia, for the purpose of establishing a church for families of workers at the nearby textile mills. Although DeVotie did not serve as pastor, it was named DeVotie Baptist church and remains an active church today.⁴⁷



DeVotie Baptist Church in Griffin Georgia

As with institution building, the professionalization of the Baptist pastorate required financial resources, not just to pay professional pastoral salaries but also to provide for the church buildings that accompanied rising Baptist status. Whether for church buildings, academic facilities, or mission programs, DeVotie gained renown for raising the funds necessary to elevate Baptists among upwardly mobile southerners. He revealed his quick wit and winsome demeanor during a particular speaking engagement. When he exceeded his allotted time considerably, one gentleman, seeking to politely remind the veteran pastor, placed his gold pocket watch on the

⁴⁶ Goddard, 27 and 200. *Georgia Weekly Telegraph and Georgia Journal & Messenger*, Sep 27, 1870, Issue 11.

⁴⁷ "Our History," <http://www.devotie.com/pdf/history.pdf>, April 2014.

podium. DeVotie paused, looked at the watch, thanked the man for his generous donation, and continued with his remarks.⁴⁸

DeVotie apparently managed to develop a recognized professional pastorate without neglecting his ministry to the poor. After DeVotie announced his resignation from Columbus church in 1870, the local newspaper announced, “But Dr. DeVotie will be longest remembered by the poor and distressed of the city, to whom he has devoted most of the time and means at his command, during the period which has marked his residence here.”⁴⁹ Thus, DeVotie maintained at least the appearance of a connection across socioeconomic lines even while his work of professionalization catered to the educated and affluent.

Having looked at what DeVotie’s vision for an elevated Baptist ministry meant for the time pastors devoted, what they got paid, the training they needed, the style of their delivery, and even where they preached, it is intriguing to examine the actual messages he expounded about money, class, and social status. By examining the sermon notes of a pastor like DeVotie, a great deal can be learned not just about the preacher but also how his words resonated with a congregation in a particular historical setting. In general the messages of pastors like DeVotie, who stayed at a particular church for extended periods, had to conform to the views of the congregation or the church body could take a vote at any point and he would be relieved. Preachers like DeVotie could also increase their influence and help further their particular pastoral agenda by making a strong connection through their messages to their hearers.

Although the democratic nature of evangelicalism, particularly in its Baptist form, meant pastors had to address the felt concerns of the congregation, leaders like DeVotie struck an

⁴⁸ Samuel Boykin, *History of Baptist Denomination in Georgia*, (Atlanta: Jas. P Harrison & Co., Printers and Publishers, 1881) 190. Volume reproduced from an 1881 edition in The Baptist Historical Collection, Furman University Library, Greenville, South Carolina.

⁴⁹ *Georgia Weekly Telegraph and Georgia Journal & Messenger*, May 13, 1870; Issue 39.

intriguing balance between this “accommodation” and their “prophetic” role. Many Baptist churches voted annually whether to continue their relationship with their pastor. So the longevity of a pastor proved tenuous. Nevertheless Baptist pastors in the nineteenth century prided themselves on their use of the “jeremiad,” a particularly prophetic form of a sermon, confronting specific areas of sin and calling for change.⁵⁰ The very nature and purpose of the jeremiad as a challenge to the culture meant that, at least in the eyes of the preacher, the values commended in such messages were apparently lacking in that society. Jeremiads were not the only form of message preached and even though evangelicals accepted this role for the preacher, their rejection in the South for instance, of pastors who pushed too hard against slavery, shows that even the jeremiad had limits.

Given his work for professionalization of the pastorate, one of the more interesting themes in DeVotie’s preaching was “mammonism.” Like other nineteenth century preachers, DeVotie spoke against mammonism.⁵¹ The term was taken from Jesus’ admonition that a person cannot love both God and mammon. Mammonism became an increasing concern for the southern clergy as the prosperity of their region grew during the antebellum period. Especially for pastors like DeVotie, who rejected the earlier Baptist principle of unsalaried pastors, decrying mammonism proved a sort of tightrope walk between Biblical convictions and pastoral professionalization. DeVotie was not so bold as other evangelical ministers who used mammonism as a trojan horse to address the evils of slavery.⁵² Yet because of his emphasis on

⁵⁰ Startup, 5. “It was precisely their sense of calling and of righteous duty that gave the ministers a certain detachment from the society.”

⁵¹ Startup, 8. “The ministers’ interest in things economic was intense. The Bible contains commandments and commentary in abundance concerning the use and misuse of money and other possessions. It was impossible for ministers, steeped in Biblicism, to ignore the Bible’s instruction in economic matters.”

⁵² Startup, 141. “Similarly, the clergy’s continual harping on the necessity of reforming slavery, and their demand that southerners employ their wealth – communal and personal – to benefit the lower economic orders, scarcely reflected popular attitudes. The clergy’s vision and message were out of another time, from the dim past of primitive Christianity or from some glowing millennial future.”

professionalization, including what seemed to many in his own denomination like a condescension to secular salary expectations and expensive facilities, DeVotie's emphasis on mammonism is particularly noteworthy.

Although DeVotie may not have confronted materialism and worldliness as forcefully as his less professionalized peers, he did not relent in this particular form of jeremiad.⁵³ In his sermon on James 2:5 titled, "God hath chosen the poor of this world," DeVotie declared that the poor are in a better position spiritually than the wealthy because they have no choice but to delight in God's free mercy. He reminded his congregants that Jesus said, in reference to himself and those who would follow, "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests; but the son of man hath not where to lay his head." Also referencing the words of Jesus, DeVotie proclaimed that the proper use of mammon served as a testing ground for proper use of spiritual wealth.⁵⁴ Simultaneous with his continuing elevation in social status and compensation, DeVotie led among Baptists by voicing concern that mammonism, just as Jesus asserted, was hindering spiritual growth for individuals and the denomination.

Cynics might argue that the clergy's attention to this particular sin was simply a veiled effort to fill church coffers. The assertion may not be entirely without warrant, but the evidence of the messages themselves indicates pastors preached this way out of genuine concern for their flock to avoid the dangers of materialism, warned about repeatedly in Scripture. They were not creating sins to justify some personal motive, but rather proclaiming what the Word of God expressed.⁵⁵

⁵³ Startup, 8. "Over time a consensus emerged among the slave state clerics that something was terribly wrong with the southern economic way of life, with the economic mind of the South."

⁵⁴ DeVotie Sermon Journals, 724, 728, 733, Samford University Library; Startup, 23-24. "The most serious of these sins was the emergence of a powerful spirit of greed and materialism that blinded southerners to their true duties to God and man."

⁵⁵ Startup, 19. "But nothing suggests that the ministers did not fully believe that the sins they attacked were very real. Their theology and traditions disposed them to look for sin and confront it, but not to contrive it."

During his 60 years of pastoral work in prominent Baptist pulpits in Alabama and Georgia, DeVotie engaged in a weekly Sunday morning campaign. His goal was to further establish, expand and entrench the Baptists of the South through an elevated, professional ministry. DeVotie led primarily with the weapon of his weekly preaching. He was winsome, as one anonymous congregant stated, “I have heard him preach more than five-fold oftener than any other minister within the last fourteen years, and I have yet to hear the man on this earth, whose preaching has been sweeter to my soul.”⁵⁶ But he was also determined to create a new type of Baptist preaching, marked by professionalism that he believed would allow Baptists to move from merely influencing a fringe constituency in the South to shaping the spiritual conscience of a greater percentage of the southern population. His commitment to traditional evangelical beliefs and practices helped him to lead without leaving his parishioners behind, even though he had broken decisively with influential Hardshell and Landmark Baptists. As he moved in 1856 to Columbus, Georgia, his vision for institution building and elevating the status of the Baptist church was now clearly defined and he had been progressively implementing it for several decades. However, in Columbus he would embark on the second half of his ministry career, which reveals how pastors led under the cloud of the Civil War and amidst the massive transition of slaves into independent Black churches.

⁵⁶ *South-Western Baptist*, Sep 16, 1853.

CHAPTER 6

WARTIME MINISTRY ON THE GEORGIA HOME-FRONT AND BATTLEFRONT

In 1856, DeVotie left Alabama, his home and place of ministry for over 20 years, and moved to Columbus, Georgia. Given DeVotie's prominence among Baptists he regularly received requests to consider new pastoral opportunities and, as a result, was often weighing a decision to stay or to go from a particular position. He expressed a clear sense that God directed him in this transition. Yet he offered little insight in his memoirs about other motivating factors such as whether the move also stemmed from reduced passion for the ministry in Marion on his part or reduced support from the congregation for his leadership, or both. Ultimately for DeVotie, moving to Columbus offered him the chance to build on his already noteworthy ministry accomplishments in another region of the South, which was nearby, but with a larger and more established population than Alabama.¹

Examining DeVotie's labors for the Lord during his 14-year pastorate in Columbus yields several fruitful insights concerning how Baptist leaders and their congregations addressed the challenges of sectionalism and the Civil War. In the late 1850s DeVotie continued applying his now widely recognized ministerial skills to expanding the footprint of Baptist ministry in Georgia, which was already growing substantially prior to his arrival. But nothing could prepare him or any other preacher for what was to come. Walking alongside DeVotie in Georgia through

¹ *South-Western Baptist*, Sep 16, 1853. A fellow minister in Texas familiar with DeVotie's impact in Marion, praised DeVotie while at the same time stating, "I am aware that his calls must and will be numerous, but cannot brother DeVotie give up the older States as his poor brother has done and come to this field, and labor, and if need be suffer for his blessed Saviour! Oh that he might come."

the rising sectionalism of the late 1850s, studying his ministry during the war, and looking at his efforts immediately after fighting ceased highlights his evolution pastorally and personally.

Looking at DeVotie also provides a close-up view of the waters Baptists navigated during the massive social, political, military and spiritual upheaval of war.

From Marion, DeVotie had already played a significant role in shaping the departure of southern Baptists from the northern Baptists in the 1845 denominational schism. In the years leading up to the war he could still plausibly have joined a handful of southern pastors who decried secession or simply used the shelter of his clerical role to remain neutral regarding the formation of the Confederacy. Instead he spoke and acted in full support of the southern cause. He joined in with other southerners who thought the costs of military conflict were worthwhile. Eventually, when the harshness of wartime reality set in, DeVotie began to long for the war's end. Just as the war changed many southerners personally, DeVotie changed as well. He also adjusted his ministry approach. In particular, he learned new applications for his previous ministry skills amidst the transformed wartime life at home and in the army camps.

Once war ensued, DeVotie faced the quandary common to many fellow pastors in both North and South of balancing spiritual needs on the home-front with opportunities to minister with those headed for the battlefield. DeVotie's ministry during the war as a chaplain proved his most obvious commitment to the Confederate cause. His hesitation about the propriety of receiving pay for ministry from the government initially delayed his enlistment as a chaplain. Since he was nearly 50 years old when the fighting began he opted not to be stationed indefinitely with the troops. Eventually he established a pattern of travelling between Columbus and army camps at locations in Georgia. He supported the war in this manner and in so doing heartily believed he was extending the Gospel ministry to help influence soldiers toward

increased faith. A few southern chaplains may have simply acted as perfunctory clerical figureheads to signify and solicit Divine support for their army. But many, including DeVotie, saw the necessity and opportunity to reach soldiers for salvation through revivals and conversion.

From 1856 to 1861 DeVotie enjoyed five productive years of peacetime ministry in Columbus and during the conflict he continued to spend most of his time ministering to those who remained in his Columbus flock. As such, he happened to minister in a town which, with its manufacturing industry and location far removed from the front lines, ended up being a protected arsenal for the Confederacy until the last days of the war. In this temporarily sheltered but important location, the activities of the churches give insight into how the priorities of spiritual life changed during the war in the Deep South. In particular, DeVotie shepherded his flock by preaching sermons for encouragement, organizing frequent prayer meetings, and supporting efforts by Columbus women to provide relief for the troops.

Understanding DeVotie also sheds important light upon shifting race relations in the church precipitated by war. Since many white Georgians on the home-front feared slave unrest while most white able-bodied men were away at war, they sought to implement increasingly strict statewide slave policies. DeVotie certainly did not begin to embrace abolition or even initiate systematic racial equality in the Baptist denomination. Yet, his church and the Georgia Baptist Convention actually took several small but important steps to reform their approach to slave members and grant them greater spiritual freedom.

Lastly, DeVotie's response after the hostilities ceased shows how church leaders who threw in their lot with secessionists felt the disappointment of military defeat but quickly returned to their pre-war focus on spreading the Christian message and blessing the community. In DeVotie's case, this took the form of directing the establishment of public schools. In all of

this DeVotie not only serves as a lens on Baptist life and pastoral ministry during the war but he was also personally developing as a pastor in the crucible of the Civil War.

At the time when DeVotie arrived from Alabama, Columbus had a population of about 7,000 with a growing manufacturing economy. Although still a relatively new town, Columbus's industrial infrastructure stood in stark contrast to the agrarian economy DeVotie had witnessed in Marion. Founded as a frontier fort in the early nineteenth century, by mid-century it was second only to Richmond for industrial capacity in the Deep South. Located along the Chattahoochee River, the town benefited from easy shipping access to southwest Georgia and southeast Alabama, as well as the Gulf of Mexico. Although much of Georgia still remained unsettled, it was no longer a frontier and the state had already become the pinnacle of the cotton-producing South. Indeed, the Georgia DeVotie entered in 1856 had grown to approximately one million residents with an expanding network of railroads directly linking its major cities, industry and agriculture.²

Georgia had also become a center of evangelical Christianity. DeVotie stepped into a setting where the Christian expression of faith was shaped almost entirely by either Baptists or Methodists. About 90 percent of Georgia church members aligned with one of these two denominations. The Baptists in Georgia had grown from 879 churches in 1850, to 1141 in 1860, meaning that for this decade an average of one new Baptist church started every other week. Nevertheless many Georgians who had not embraced Christianity remained outside the reach of both Baptists and Methodists.³

² Thomas Conn Bryan, *Confederate Georgia*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009), 28 and 102.

³ Bryan, 230.

Shortly after a handful of Methodists established their first congregation in Columbus in 1828, Ephesus Baptist Church began in 1829.⁴ This congregation took the name of First Baptist Church of Columbus, in 1833. The original members consisted of four white men, seven white women and a slave, Joseph.⁵ Rev. John Cooper and Rev. Anderson Smith participated in the “presbytery,” a group of nearby established and respected Baptist church leaders who oversaw and validated the establishment of a new church. Two of the founding members, Thirza and Margaret Gray, survived to see the 1860 dedication of the new sanctuary under DeVotie. DeVotie’s 14-year tenure looks particularly lengthy when compared to those who served in the early years of the church; the first three pastors lasted only one year each. The ministry success that merited him the enduring allegiance of the congregation also earned him widespread praise. In an early history of the church penned by a congregant, DeVotie was hailed as “a man of destiny... whose name in our church annals must ever be inscribed in letters of light.”⁶ Certainly as the revivals DeVotie led in Columbus just prior to the Civil War brought numerous converts into the church, the congregation’s influence expanded and he proved once again to be particularly gifted at increasing the Baptist presence wherever he served.⁷

At the same time as this local church was growing, the regional Baptist association, also called Columbus, expanded. The Baptist pastors of the area established it in 1829 with 12 churches and by 1831 they counted 25 churches. Until this point, the Columbus Association,

⁴ Barber 46-47. “In 1828, the Methodist presence in Columbus became permanent when the South Carolina Methodist Conference assigned James Stockdale as the preacher to the Columbus mission.”

⁵ Porter, 5. The members’ names were Richard Gray, Robert Jones, John G. Hitchcock, William A Hitchcock, Sara B. Jones, Elizabeth Wharton, Ann Cook, Fanny Reese, Margaret Gray, Thirza Gray, Elizabeth Hitchcock, and Joseph.

⁶ Porter, 11, 13; *The Charleston Mercury*, Apr 27, 1859, Issue 50. Regarding Baptists in Georgia an editorial stated, “They have certainly flourished in this portion of the Lord’s vineyard. In this city, within the past few years, under the ministrations of the Rev. J. H. DeVotie, the accessions of the membership have been so large as to render their present House of Worship insufficient for the congregation.”; *Christian Index*, Dec 16, 1862.

⁷ *Georgia Weekly Telegraph and Georgia Journal & Messenger*, Jun 14, 1870, Issue 43. When DeVotie resigned from the Columbus church in 1869, the church rejected his initial resignation, voting to renew their association with him as pastor. He declined to stay but clearly the majority of the congregation valued him greatly.

demonstrating Hardshell leanings, held reservations about the Georgia Baptist Convention's "broad missionary, educational and benevolent policy."⁸ The Hardshells among the association feared the spiritual corruption that might come from any hint of centralization and they carried their Calvinism to the point of apathy about human ministry initiatives. These convictions led them to eventually form their own associations and denomination. In 1838 the majority in the Columbus Association who opposed Hardshell beliefs prevailed and formally aligned with the Georgia Baptist Convention, which although not uniform in belief, certainly did not favor the Anti-mission perspective. Given DeVotie's lifelong commitment to denominational organization and infrastructure, it is not surprising to see his hearty support of this alignment, evidenced by his Columbus church serving as host for the 1859 Georgia Baptist Convention meeting. In 1865 the convention was again scheduled for Columbus, but due to the Union occupation it was cancelled and no meeting was held that year.⁹

Thus, DeVotie entered the 1860s as a pastor, located in an expanding southern industrial city, leading an influential Baptist congregation amidst a healthy association of churches. In this context, as the tide of sectionalism rose across the South and in Georgia, DeVotie redirected his ministry. When the political scene in Georgia shifted in favor of war, community leaders like DeVotie translated their views on sectionalism into views on secession. Shortly after DeVotie's arrival in Georgia, Governor Joseph E. Brown was elected, replacing Hershel V. Johnson. Brown remained the leader of the state through the duration of the Civil War and his policies both reflected and directed life in Confederate Georgia. In the late 1850s Brown displayed his passion for mounting southern sectionalism with pronouncements against abolition and efforts to

⁸ Porter, 69-70.

⁹ Porter, 71; *Daily Morning News*, Savannah, Georgia, Apr 15, 1859; *The Daily News and Herald*, Apr 24, 1867, Issue 88. The Georgia Baptist Convention was held again in 1867 in Columbus.

block the sale of northern products in his state. Upon the announcement of Lincoln's election he called for a state convention to consider secession.¹⁰

However, unlike their fiery neighbors in South Carolina, many Georgians remained ambivalent about secession. Alexander Stephens,¹¹ Benjamin Hill,¹² and even the previous governor, Johnson, initially advocated remaining in the Union and safeguarding southern principles from that position. Others supported secession, but only as a sort of high stakes negotiating technique hoping to force the North to respond to their bluff, but not intending to remain outside the Union.¹³ South Carolina, Florida, Mississippi, and Alabama all seceded before Georgia and although delegates at the Georgia convention approved secession, a significant minority initially voted against it.

As a regional leader in such a large Baptist association and as the torchbearer of one of Columbus's most influential churches, DeVotie was poised to play a significant role as popular support for secession and military conflict rose. In general, Georgia pastors wielded a significant amount of influence. They provided moral guidance and shaped the mindset of their congregants through their preaching ministry. As war loomed, Georgians sought direction from ministers not only in spiritual matters but political and social as well.¹⁴ While it is unlikely DeVotie on his own could have swayed any significant percentage of the Georgia population to reject secession, he did not even attempt to do so.

If DeVotie's New York upbringing had ever instilled any Unionist or abolitionist sympathies, by the middle of the nineteenth century they had completely dissipated. He heartily

¹⁰ Bryan, 12-13.

¹¹ Stephens served as a United States Congressman from Georgia in the 1840s and 1850s. He later became the Vice President of the Confederacy.

¹² During the 1850s, Hill served as a Georgia State Representative and Senator. He also ran for Governor of Georgia.

¹³ Bryan, 2.

¹⁴ Bryan, 230.

backed sectionalism, as did most of his fellow Baptist clergy in the South. His own memoirs revealed his support of the Confederacy. He reflected back and stated plainly, “I was a secessionist [*sic*], and cast my vote that way at the election.”¹⁵ This was not a new stance for DeVotie. A full decade before he came to Georgia, the “Alabama Resolutions,” were approved at the 1844 Alabama Baptist State Convention, which met that year at DeVotie’s church, Siloam in Marion. Basil Manly authored these affirmations through which Baptists in Alabama sought to thwart the efforts of northern abolitionist Baptists who opposed approval of slaveholders as missionaries.¹⁶ The document became a rallying point for other Baptists in the South. In 1845 DeVotie had taken another step, serving among the 14 delegates sent by Alabama Baptists to the meeting in Augusta, Georgia, where the schism of the Baptist church into southern and northern denominations had occurred. Far more than merely an ecclesiastical squabble, this denominational separation made way for the political separation soon to come.¹⁷ In addition to defending the practice of slavery DeVotie also participated in it, owning slaves in both Alabama and Georgia.¹⁸

Like other community leaders, many pastors generally desired to resolve the sectional conflict without secession and war, but once state leaders approved secession very few pastors resisted the establishment of the Confederacy and most preached vigorously for the

¹⁵ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 123.

¹⁶ “Alabama Resolutions,” Alabama Baptist State Convention Annuals, 1844, 8, Special Collection, Samford University Library, Birmingham, Alabama. They state in part, “Resolved, That our duty at this crisis requires us to demand from the proper authorities in all those bodies to whose funds we have contributed, or with whom we have in any way been connected, the distinct, explicit, avowal that slaveholders are eligible, and entitled, equally with non-slaveholders, to all the privileges and immunities of their several unions; and especially to receive any agency, mission, or other appointment, which may run within the scope of their operation or duties.”

¹⁷ Mitchell Snay, *Gospel of Disunion: Religion and Separatism in the Antebellum South*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 4-15.

¹⁸ 1850 U.S. Federal Census, Marion, Perry, Alabama, Enumeration District ?, sheet 287, dwelling 89, family 96, J. H. DeVotie household; National Archives. This census record lists two adult and four children as DeVotie’s slaves ; 1860 U.S. Federal Census, Columbus, Muscogean, Georgia, Enumeration District ?, sheet 6, dwelling 48, family 48, James H. DeVotie household; National Archives M653. This census record lists three adult and six children as DeVotie’s slaves.

righteousness of its cause. Baptists, including DeVotie, were no exception to this rule. DeVotie recorded several sermons addressing the issue of secession. Speaking to his congregation, apparently gathered for special prayer on the eve of hostilities, he did not mince words:

We assemble to inquire of God about no common distress. It is of war, war with those who have claimed us as their brethren. They have lifted up their heel against us. Our enemy boasting of an army of 175,000 breathing out threatening and slaughter, has dared to invade our territory. In proud defiance, Our fathers, husbands, brothers, and sons, have met them face to face, to resist their purposes of rapine, subjugation, and blood, and drive them back from the soil which their presence pollutes.¹⁹

Although DeVotie had recently endured the passing of his son, Noble, he made sure to gather with the host assembled at the Southern Baptist Convention in May of 1861. It was held in Savannah, Georgia, and consisted of almost half Georgians. During the meeting a vote in support of the Confederacy was taken with unanimous consent.²⁰ Although DeVotie's statements and actions leave no doubt as to his stance on the issue, it would also be easy to overstate the case and portray DeVotie as a war monger who incessantly stirred up sectional conflict. In fact, among some 600 sermons recorded in his sermon journals only six explicitly deal with this paramount issue in southern political and social life.

The Alabama Baptists also met around the same time and made no bones about their support for secession. They first expressed their intention, "While possessing no authority to pledge or bind the churches or religious bodies we represent, and expressly disclaiming any wish in any form to do so – we are constrained as men, as citizens, as Christians, to give full place in our hearts to love of country." Next, they acknowledged the limited role of their assembly in both ecclesiastical and political matters, "Standing aloof for the most part from political parties and contests, our retired and quiet position does not exclude the profound conviction...that the

¹⁹ James H. DeVotie Sermons, No. 326, James P. Boyce Library, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky.

²⁰ *Proceedings of the Southern Baptist Convention Held in Savannah, Georgia, May 10, 11, 12, 13, 1861*, (Richmond: MacFarlane & Fergusson, Printers, 1861), 65; Bryan, 232.

union of states in this confederacy has failed...to answer the purposes for which it was created.” They did not shy away from identifying the crux of the contention, “From the administration of the Federal Government as things are – especially with reference to our peculiar property recognized by the constitution – we can no longer hope for justice, protection or safety.” And finally they declared their level of commitment to preserving their rights: “We are not willing to surrender them even at the risk of life and all we hold most dear...we hold ourselves subject to the call of proper authority in defense of the sovereignty and independence of the State of Alabama, and of her right as a sovereignty to withdraw from this Union;...And in this declaration, we heartily, deliberately, unanimously and solemnly unite.”²¹ Reflecting on the strength of his personal support for the Confederacy at the end of the Civil War DeVotie wrote, “I thought our cause was just, and am satisfied that if we had succeeded, our people would have been equally honoured [*sic*] with heroes, and patriots of the revolution which broke the cords of English oppression in 1776, but we failed, and are rebels.”²²

In the same month that Georgia Baptists voted to support the Confederacy, Governor Brown called for troops to prepare for war and men statewide responded immediately. Towns across the state sent off many young men and by the fall approximately 25,000 in Georgia were enlisted. Not just young men but older men signed on, from among the wealthy and the poor, from all walks of life and professions. In the next year, the number of troops in the Confederate Army from Georgia reached 75,000. The life of DeVotie’s church and town changed almost overnight with the establishment of the Confederacy and subsequent enlistment of most able-bodied white men.

²¹ Minutes of Alabama Baptist State Convention, 1861, Special Collection, Samford University Library, Birmingham, Alabama.

²² DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 123.

DeVotie had previously served in Marion, which became a hub for numerous Southern Baptist ministry initiatives and he was now living in what became a significant Confederate military-industrial center. Although Georgia possessed some manufacturing capacity elsewhere, it was largely located in Columbus. With the outset of war, companies nearby DeVotie's church rapidly retooled their machinery to produce armaments. The DeWitt Company and Moses and Hall Company in Columbus began producing swords and rifles respectively. As the war progressed, the Columbus Iron Works Company and Haiman and Brother helped produce everything from cannon to axes to munitions. Textile facilities transitioned to producing military blankets and clothing. From the very start of the war, the eastern Georgia coast fell under Union control leaving Columbus and the Chattahoochee as one of the South's only protected shipping ports with access to the sea.²³

When the war started, although pastors received exemption from conscription many enlisted as chaplains and served those preparing for the battlefield. If pastors opted not to serve as chaplains, they often still supported the war by supervising medical efforts, helping provide basic supplies for the troops, or overseeing distribution of religious literature to the soldiers.²⁴ Leaders in both North and South found themselves ill prepared to train, deploy, and supply the tens of thousands of men who would fight in the war so, not surprisingly, both armies were initially poorly supplied with chaplains as well. As the churches and the armies lagged behind meeting the spiritual needs of the fighting men, not only were many non-believers left to face the threat of death in battle without hearing any salvation message, but the faithful who enlisted were also left without spiritual support. Although at later points in the war, army camps in both North and South became sites of significant spiritual revival, early in the war the collection of many

²³ Bryan, 24 and 28.

²⁴ Bryan, 234.

young men away from the moral supports of home, family, and church led some astray. The lack of chaplains may have exacerbated this kind of spiritual decline. However, at least in the early part of the Civil War, troops having yet to face the death toll of battle showed little spiritual interest.²⁵

The political build-up to the war pushed DeVotie and other southern pastors like him to develop and express ecclesiastical opinions about matters of military and government import. With the armies gathered and fighting initiated, they also had to make decisions about pastoral support for the troops. Some pastors, like DeVotie, professed hesitation to serve as a chaplain because of demanding needs at their home church or out of concern about being employed by the state as a Gospel minister. DeVotie clearly struggled with the tension between his vocal support for military conflict, and his beliefs about the proper manner in which a pastor should pursue the chaplaincy. DeVotie explained his conviction, “My view was, that every regiment should have the privilege of electing, and sustaining its own chaplain aided by their friends at home.”²⁶ However, often pastors simply were unwilling to deal with the meager income and uncomfortable lifestyle of a chaplain.²⁷ This may have been the case for DeVotie but if so, he did not acknowledge it. Those who did serve as chaplains generally had a reputation for remaining far back from the front lines of the conflict. This was true for DeVotie, but some like his pastoral colleague from Alabama, Rev. Isaac Taylor Tichenor, drew praise for regularly joining the fight and inspiring the men in battle.²⁸ In any case, although DeVotie was almost 50

²⁵ George C. Rable, *God's Almost Chosen Peoples: A Religious History of the American Civil War*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 90. “During the first two years of the war, soldier attendance at often infrequent religious services remained shockingly low.”

²⁶ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 128.

²⁷ Rable, 108. He noted that in 1862 there were 437 chaplains in the Federal army expected to pastor 676 regiments. Federal chaplain compensation was \$1,200 per year.

²⁸ Rable, 116.

years old at the start of the war and had only recently lost his son, Noble, he still served intermittently as a chaplain.²⁹

As a chaplain DeVotie ministered primarily to The Columbus Guards, a company established in 1834 by the state of Georgia. By 1860, they had already built a reputation for skillful fighting during the Indian War in Florida and the Mexican War of 1848. They were deployed in April of 1861 to Savannah and eventually served on the battlefields of Virginia attached to Brigadier General Robert Toombs' Georgia Brigade.³⁰ DeVotie ministered to them while they were in Savannah and also recorded preaching for a gathering of soldiers at Tybee Island.³¹ A letter from a Colonel Semmes, printed in both the *Columbus Sun* and *South-Western Baptist* praised DeVotie's chaplain ministry, "I have seen little Sunday service that has interested me since Mr. DeVotie left....I have often sighed for his return. There was something about him that won...the confidence and love of the soldiers....There was a winning style in his very manner as he reverently expounded the sacred text."³²

In some army camps, the soldiers DeVotie served likely erected makeshift chapels for worship facilities. More often, religious services simply had to be carried out amidst the regular

²⁹ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 128-129. "A few weeks after the war commenced [*sic*] I received a commission as chaplain in the Confederate army, which I declined, because, I did not believe that the government funds should be used to support the gospel ministry in the army. And upon baptist principle that all connection between church, and state was wrong, and that no government has the right to tax the people to support any church." DeVotie was not alone in initially declining to serve, since the Georgia Baptist Convention passed a resolution in 1864 opposing government funded chaplaincies. In his memoirs, DeVotie pasted a copy of a letter about his chaplaincy in the Columbus Guard and also an official chaplaincy appointment from CSA War Department; Bell Irvin Wiley, "'Holy Joes' of the Sixties: A Study of Civil War Chaplains," *Huntingdon Library Quarterly* 16.3 (May 1953): 287-290.

³⁰ Toombs served as both a United States Representative and Senator from Georgia during the 1840s and 1850s. He was also briefly Secretary of State for the Confederacy before resigning and joining the army.

³¹ *South-Western Baptist*, Jun 8 1861. Included a note from Tybee Island dated May 27, 1861 – no author – This affirms DeVotie is with troops, "giving us very excellent and eloquent discourse."; Drew Gilpin Faust, "Christian Soldiers: The Meaning of Revivalism in the Confederate Army," *The Journal of Southern History* 53.1 (Feb 1987): 63-90.

³² *South-Western Baptist*, Dec 5, 1861.

activity of fellow soldiers. Designated “sacred” space was often hard to come by.³³ DeVotie’s years of experience with preaching in the chaotic environment of Baptist camp meetings undoubtedly prepared him for this element of chaplain ministry. His commitment to Bible and tract society efforts and experience leading them would have also carried over to his service as a chaplain. Just as Baptists utilized Bible and tract distribution during peacetime, they now focused such efforts on the men in uniform. As an aid to reaching men who often had little Christian background, the Baptist denomination produced a widely distributed booklet, “Soldier’s Friend,” which conveyed the basic Christian message of salvation from sin through faith in Christ.

As the war progressed, DeVotie celebrated the spiritual awakening that came to many men, especially in the southern camps. Beginning with intensity in the fall of 1862, these revivals continued to some degree until the war’s end and reportedly impacted tens of thousands of men.³⁴ Both large and small gatherings of troops were held in many locations across the South, but one of the largest spiritual revivals in the Confederate Army took place in Georgia, at Dalton. The widespread influence of the Gospel message proclaimed through the revival speakers was reflected in the correspondence of individual soldiers, as well as denominational reports and newspaper articles. The lives of southern military men undoubtedly changed in numerous ways during the war, one of which, for many, was a transformation of religious conviction.³⁵

³³ Rable, 126.

³⁴ Rable, 207. “During the war and ever since, the question of numbers has proved quite difficult. Estimates of between 100,000 and 200,000 Union converts – something less than 10 percent of the total enlistments – are little more than educated guesses. How many of these had already joined a church at home is impossible to determine, and many church members would not be included in these totals. Even if the numbers had a more solid basis, though, they reveal nothing about the intensity or persistence of faith.”

³⁵ Rable, 208.

DeVotie not only stretched his pastoral abilities and recalibrated his ministry approach to address the needs of the battlefield. He also modified his ministry on the home-front to accommodate the needs of the war. Indeed, sending pastors as chaplains was not the only way evangelicals believed they could support the soldiers. Those who remained involved in First Baptist Church of Columbus during the war years met daily for prayer, often together with those from other churches. DeVotie described the subject of their intercession, “Prayer was offered for our friends, our cause, and that peace might early be vouchsafed to the contending parties. That our God’s will might be done, and we enabled to cheerfully accept his decision.”³⁶ DeVotie, like other pastors in both North and South also called for fasting among believers on the home-front to show humility of spirit and dependence on the Lord for His working.

The conditions of daily life in Columbus during the war were superior to the upper South where fighting regularly raged. Nevertheless, those left behind in the church DeVotie pastored felt the impact of war significantly, especially the women. Since women in evangelical churches frequently outnumbered men during the antebellum period, DeVotie was not unaccustomed to providing pastoral care to females. But during the wartime years they would have made up a significant majority in his church. Helping meet the material needs and encouraging these women took the place of DeVotie’s pre-war priorities of building institutions and elevating the pastoral role.

Women across Georgia endured a variety of wartime difficulties. Some lost husbands, fathers, sons or other relatives in the battle. Others received these family members back from the war damaged physically or mentally. For most Georgia women nearby fighting was sporadic, culminating near the end of the war. When it did come the physical devastation of homes and

³⁶ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 152; *South-Western Baptist*, Apr 25, 1861. On the occasion of hostilities against Charleston, an article recorded that DeVotie helped lead a multi-denominational service and prayed “breathing the true spirit of piety and Christian patriotism.”

community buildings often combined with theft and rioting. On top of this, during the course of the war, food and supplies were frequently hard to come by. Ladies often went without even simple necessities in order to send what they could to the front. The women of the churches in Columbus joined with each other as a body of support locally and even contributed through benevolence to the wellbeing of the southern soldiers.³⁷

With the encouragement of local pastors like DeVotie, in the midst of their difficult wartime situation the women of Columbus took action. Women's church and community groups raised funds through selling household items. They gathered clothing, food, and medicine to send to the troops and the "Ladies' Gunboat Association" of Georgia even raised enough to build a small but functional vessel to patrol the Georgia coast. At the very start of the war, some young women in Columbus joined others in the state who left home to serve as nurses for the troops. They shared their mission in the Columbus newspaper, "During these perilous times we, the *unengaged* young ladies of Columbus, feel it only our duty to offer our humble services in the anticipated engagements, as Florence Nightingales to the brave companies who have so nobly marched from our city to the defense of our country...Our company being now organized, we number twenty. If our services are accepted, we are at any moment ready to march to the post of duty."³⁸ Some single ladies were free to volunteer in this manner. However, in the absence of fighting-aged fathers, and with increased burdens placed upon them, some mothers apparently struggled just to manage their children. These young people literally landed on the steps of DeVotie's church. According to a Columbus newspaper, the young people of the town

³⁷ Bryan, 174.

³⁸ *Columbus Daily Sun*, Apr 27, 1861.

sometimes gathered unsupervised in church buildings, “they indulged in conversation, smoked pipes or cigars, chewed tobacco, and even expectorated on the carpets and the steps.”³⁹

In addition to an increased ministry of prayer on the home-front and accommodating his pastoral approach to support the women of Columbus during the war, DeVotie also applied his preaching abilities in new ways. The war had not progressed very long before DeVotie felt led to use his preaching gifts to point his fellow Baptists to the hope of peace. As the loss of life to the men of his community and across the state of Georgia grew apparent, he included the military situation of the South in a sermon to the Georgia Baptist Convention in LaGrange, Georgia, April 1862. He opened by acknowledging, “We did not think that such a dreadful storm of passion and rage was in store for us as we now see threatening our land.” DeVotie then contrasted the hope for military victory with the ultimate hope of spiritual victory attained through the sacrifice of Christ: “The day of triumph will come, not by the might of Beaugard, or by that of millions of armed men; but by the message of love proclaimed by faithful ministers of peace. It will not come by oceans of blood flowing from human hearts, in all the wild tumult of battle, but by the sacrifice of the Redeemer, moving men to peace and love.” Although he and many fellow Baptist pastors had only a year earlier condoned war, and perhaps urged it, he now painted a picture of peace: “What an eloquent spectacle it is to see Churchbells moulded [*sic*] into cannon; but nobler and grander far will be the scene when all the furnaces of earth shall be employed in moulding [*sic*] cannon into Church bells...when no longer will nations learn war, when from every vale and hamlet the church-bell calls to the house of prayer devout worshippers – while over earth’s remotest bounds the great Messiah reigns.”⁴⁰

³⁹ *Columbus Daily Times*, Feb 1, 1864.

⁴⁰ *The Evangelical Pulpit*, 1.4 (Jun 1862): 89.

DeVotie's wartime ministry on the home-front was also shaped by the ongoing question of ministry to the southern slave population. Although Columbus certainly differed from the rural plantation regions of Georgia, during the war regular rumors of slave attacks upon whites fueled a culture of racial fear. Men too old to effectively serve in the regular army, and boys too young, joined the Columbus Volunteers, the home guard for the city. They prepared themselves as a last line of defense against Union attack but also as a police force for the population in general, in the absence of many heads of household and in light of Georgia's approximately 500,000 slaves. In the majority of counties slaves outnumbered white residents, even before many white men left for war.⁴¹

Amidst this racial fear one of the spiritual developments on the home-front which DeVotie helped direct was a renewed effort to minister to slaves. During the war white Christians chose several ways to loosen some of the restrictions placed on slaves. Churches actually pushed for the relaxation of codes limiting slaves from learning to read and write.⁴² Baptists in particular sought the repeal of laws forbidding black pastors from preaching. The Georgia Association of Baptists also urged the upholding of marriage rights among slaves in 1864.⁴³ In 1862, the black portion of First Baptist Church of Columbus had grown to such an extent that DeVotie and the lay leaders of his church appointed the first black pastor, specifically to shepherd that part of the flock.⁴⁴

In the final year of the fighting, the gap between home-front and battlefield began to close for those in Columbus. Certainly May 4, 1864, proved an ominous day for all in Georgia as Sherman crossed into the state and began his attack. DeVotie and his congregation joined

⁴¹ Bryan, 124.

⁴² Bryan, 242

⁴³ Bryan, 243.

⁴⁴ Judith Grant, *Columbus, Georgia*, (Charleston: Arcadia, Publishing, 2000), 13.

with many in their hopes that the Kennesaw Mountain victories by General Johnston's Army of Tennessee would continue. Outmanned two to one, Johnston was only able to slow Sherman's approach. This first major sweep of Federal forces into Georgia did not reach Columbus. Union troops came south toward Macon but were outmaneuvered and surrendered, giving short-lived false hope to the South. Yet Federal forces had already become notorious for the devastation wreaked on the area, an omen of things to come for much of the Georgia countryside and for Columbus.⁴⁵

Subsequent to the Battle of Nashville in late 1864, Union General James H. Wilson was ordered to march down into Selma and Montgomery, Alabama, and then over to Columbus, Georgia, aiming to disrupt Confederate supply centers and supply lines. In March of 1865, Wilson began his mission and on April 2, he faced Confederate forces led by Nathan Bedford Forrest at Selma. Wilson's army pushed through initial losses and captured Selma on the same day that U. S. Grant captured Richmond. With communication lines disrupted, Wilson's Army continued through Montgomery and on to Georgia, despite Lee's surrender to Grant on April 9.⁴⁶

Wilson reached Columbus in mid-April, bringing the battlefield to DeVotie's home-front. On April 16, the citizens of Columbus received word to evacuate, as Major General Cobb prepared to defend the city with just 3,500 reserve unit men. Wilson's force numbered around 13,000. Confederate forces defended the city through the night until April 17, when Wilson's forces crossed the northern bridge into what remained of the heavily shelled town and took it over. All materials in Columbus which might be used for Confederate supplies were destroyed.⁴⁷

DeVotie's recollection of the turmoil paints a picture not only of what he endured personally, but the setting in which he had to minister. He confessed a "dispairing [*sic*] sense of

⁴⁵ Bryan, 156-159.

⁴⁶ Bryan, 173.

⁴⁷ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 125-126.

being powerless in the hands of an army of bitter enemies.”⁴⁸ DeVotie remembered the damage to both local structures and community psyche, “The booming of cannon, the rattle of small arms, and fearful yells, and shouts of enraged men as charges were made, and repelled. How vivid the recollection of the subsiding noise of combat, and the hurrying past our friends exclaiming all is lost....Then firing in the streets, the rapid tromp of cavalry, and that despairing sense of being powerless in the hands of an army of bitter enemies.” The threats DeVotie feared and faced came not only from the Union forces, but domestic dangers culminating for him on “that dreadful, dreadful, night in which nearly every house in the city was visited by bands of robbers, and the dread uncertainty of our fate in the morning.”⁴⁹

With a more humorous tone he shared of his attempt to conceal “arms” from the invading Union troops. Lacking any safe hiding place for his old shotgun, he lowered it in a well bucket and then cut the well rope. When the thirsty Union soldiers arrived they repaired the well rope and, with DeVotie nervously standing on the front porch, rolled the bucket up, surprised to find the soaked gun pointing up at them. The Union officer questioned DeVotie about it and then returned DeVotie’s weapon.⁵⁰

As Federal troops moved across Georgia they often required pastors in the cities they occupied to voice allegiance to the Union in order to resume church services.⁵¹ Throughout the Civil War, the congregation of First Baptist Church, Columbus, maintained uninterrupted services. DeVotie makes no mention of facing such a decision, perhaps because the war had essentially concluded by the time it would have been necessary. The First Baptist Church building itself survived the artillery damage. Yet, the loss of male members to battle and the

⁴⁸ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 125-126.

⁴⁹ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 124.

⁵⁰ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 125-126.

⁵¹ Bryan, 242.

departure of former slaves to black churches left the congregation diminished from more than 400 members before the war to still less than 350 members even several years after.⁵²

The Civil War took a great toll on the South, including those in Columbus who experienced bombardment and invasion in the very last days of the conflict. As dramatic as the upheaval of the war was for DeVotie and his church members, perhaps just as intriguing is the rejuvenation of the congregation after the war, even after DeVotie departed Columbus in 1870. A significant revival in the mid-1870s brought the membership to 426.⁵³ The church also launched several “daughter” churches, new Baptist churches in other areas of town begun with a handful of members from the “mother” church. A “factory mission church” began in the late 1870s and around the same time property which had been donated to First Baptist Church was deeded to Shady Grove Baptist Church (African). The First Baptist Church, Columbus, also began to participate more fully in a growing movement in the evangelical church toward world mission, helping send A.D. Phillips as a Baptist missionary to Africa.⁵⁴

As the Civil War drew to a close, DeVotie readjusted as well, giving his energies to one of his lifelong causes, public education. The conditions produced by the war opened the door to fulfilling the work he had attempted so many years earlier in Alabama. For DeVotie the goal was not a secular system but one where the local churches would be able to extend their influence by helping direct the educational needs of those who could not afford other academic options. He served as first president of the board of trustees for the Columbus public school system.⁵⁵ For DeVotie, this effort was as much about mercy and charity, as institution building. He recorded, “The multitude of children who lost their first friends by the war or who were by

⁵² Porter, 11-14.

⁵³ Porter, 15.

⁵⁴ Porter, 7, 16, 72.

⁵⁵ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 71.

changed circumstances, by loss of property, who had no means of even learning reading and writing, led many to the conviction that a system of public graded schools should be organized [*sic*] at least in our cities.”⁵⁶ The “Eagle Factory” helped with the community effort, which would presumably benefit children of the workers.

At the end of the war, the school enrolled 250 with five teachers. Not surprisingly, DeVotie had developed a plan for the post-war years, complete with “an eligible lot secured, lumber purchased and a beautiful well-arranged edifice” designed. Eventually, the community did take the next step and DeVotie noted, “When the present system of graded public schools was adopted in Columbus, the city government requested nine of us, two others being afterward added, to take charge of the public schools, which were to be supported by the city. I was again elected President of the board, and held the office until my removal.” He expressed his joy in the effort, stating, “I never think upon those labors and the success which attended those efforts of the Board without a high degree of pleasure.”⁵⁷ DeVotie would also serve on the public school board during his time in Griffin, Georgia.⁵⁸

DeVotie’s ministry to those on the home-front and those headed for the battlefield provides a useful vantage point to view the dynamics pastors in the Deep South navigated during the war. Leading up to the Civil War DeVotie continued his successful ministry endeavors in his new Georgia ministry setting. As the 1860s began, DeVotie strongly supported the Confederacy and participated in official pronouncements made by Baptists advocating secession. When the war began to take its toll on him, Columbus, and the South, he personally remembered the blessing of peace and reminded his fellow Baptists of the same. Like other southern evangelical

⁵⁶ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 154.

⁵⁷ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 155-156. He noted other contributors, Rhodes Brown, Wm. W. Young and Dr. Woodruff.

⁵⁸ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 212. Pasted article highlights DeVotie’s service on the Griffin Board of Education.

pastors, he re-sculpted his ministry priorities, and developed new skills for leading his congregation in wartime prayers. At the same time he also supported women as they struggled through the war years, and sought to bless the southern troops. He also aimed to address the needs of the battlefield by undertaking chaplain duties on an intermittent basis, clearly impacting soldiers to whom he ministered. The battlefield eventually overran the home-front in Columbus at the wars end, bringing turmoil in its wake. This was a traumatic time for DeVotie personally and for his flock. But, almost as dramatic as DeVotie's descriptions of those turbulent days, was the rapid response he led to the needs of the community, particularly in the area of providing public education.

As the smoke of war cleared, the Baptist churches in the South not only experienced the transition into Reconstruction and then Redemption, but also witnessed the separation of almost all black Christians into their own churches. Over the course of the decades prior to the war, DeVotie ministered to hundreds of newly converted slaves providing through his ministry a lens into the role of white southern pastors in relation to their black congregants. As the war ended and exclusively black congregations formed, several of the ministry initiatives championed by DeVotie were also implemented in the black church. During this same period, DeVotie entered into what was simultaneously the most difficult and most influential period of his life. His suffering, which began with the loss of Noble, mounted with the loss of his wife and other children throughout the 1870s and 1880s. Yet, beginning in 1877 he rose to the pinnacle of his ministry career, leading the collective mission efforts of all Baptists in the state of Georgia, as Corresponding Secretary for the entire Georgia Baptist Convention.

CHAPTER 7

DYNAMICS OF INTERRACIAL MINISTRY

In light of his numerous ministry endeavors, DeVotie can be studied both as a leader of and a lens into Baptist institution building, social elevation, pastoral professionalization, resistance to Hardshell insularity, and wartime modes of ministry. However, with regard to forming the spirituality of slaves in his congregations and influencing the direction of the black church after the Civil War, his role as leader is less easily demonstrated. Nevertheless, he is useful for providing a valuable picture of pastoral ministry in the interracial Baptist churches of the South through the end of the Civil War and for identifying ministry models that black Baptists may have garnered from their participation in interracial churches led by DeVotie.

From 1834 to the end of the Civil War, DeVotie served as pastor at prominent racially mixed churches in Montgomery, Tuscaloosa, and Marion in Alabama, and in Columbus, Georgia.¹ During this period, slave membership in the Baptist churches of the South increased rapidly, outpacing the growth of white membership in some churches. This proved true for several of the churches DeVotie led. As such his ministry provides a helpful lens into how some evangelical ministers in the South performed their role in relation to the black members of their church. In particular DeVotie yields a glimpse into how proslavery white pastors navigated the tension between their racial convictions and their sense of pastoral calling to both races.

¹ Barber, 51. Focusing on the region around Columbus, he noted the presence of black members from the very early days of the Baptist churches in the South. "Milly, 'the property of Mr. Garrard,' was a founding member of LaGrange Baptist Church and George, 'a man of color,' was a founding member of Flat Shoals Baptist Church in Troup County. Another slave, a woman named Temperance, joined six other women and six men as founding members of Bethel Baptist Church, the first Baptist church in rural Muscogee County."

Furthermore, despite the evident blindness of DeVotie and other white southern pastors like him, toward the evils of slavery, the integrated churches in the antebellum period nevertheless served as incubators for what would become the most significant organization in the black community in the postwar years, the black church. Black pastors and their congregations, who had to overcome significant obstacles to see the black church reach its influential role, acted as the central agents in this growth. Clarence Wagner, who in 1980 recorded a history of the black Baptist churches in Georgia, argued from his vantage point as a black pastor, “Our churches represent the grass-roots of our total society. It cannot be said too frequently, nor must we be ashamed to say it, everything accomplished in America by Blacks, must be attributed to the Black church and Black pastor.”² In addition to the influence of black Christians, DeVotie and his white Baptist peers provided a model which black Christians observed during their bondage. In the years of emancipation immediately following the Civil War, parallels can be seen between the ministry patterns which DeVotie trumpeted and those pursued by the black Baptist churches of Alabama and Georgia.

The spread of the gospel among slaves and the role of white pastors in the 1800s is best understood with at least some reference to studies of African religious movements in colonial America. Although Christianity only grew minimally among Africans in the colonies, some Africans, both slave and free, received the faith in both North and South, especially during the First Great Awakening in the 1730s and 1740s. Historians continue to debate the degree to which a uniquely African spiritual heritage survived the passage of Africans to America and carried over into African American Christianity. Some have contended that African spiritual heritage remained strong through all of these transitions. Certainly the longer a particular slave

² Clarence M. Wagner, *Profiles of Black Georgia Baptists: 206 Years of Georgia Baptist and 100 Years of National Baptist History*, (Atlanta: Bennett Brothers Printing Company, 1980), 24.

had lived in the colonies, amidst the influence of European and American Christian culture, the greater the likelihood of assimilation. In the South, the influence of Christian spirituality may have been weakened on larger plantations by the presence of enough slaves to constitute a small distinct African community that could collectively maintain elements of African heritage.

The answers to these questions have bearing on the overall study of African American spirituality during and after the Second Great Awakening. The Christian faith, which southern blacks under slavery formulated, was undoubtedly marked to some degree by previous spiritual and cultural notions. However, the scope of my study is narrowly focused on the participation of slaves in DeVotie's churches and the possible ways his initiatives influenced future black spirituality. Furthermore my research is directed toward what can be learned from DeVotie about how white, proslavery pastors developed their pastoral role amidst congregations with substantial slave membership and the nature of their relationship to the slaves in their flocks. Thus, DeVotie provides a biographical perspective on key questions: Under what conditions did Christianity take firm root among southern blacks? What role did white and black leaders play? How did white pastors balance their racial views with their conviction to fulfill their ministerial calling with all church members? What models of ministry might blacks have garnered from DeVotie and his white peers? What indications, if any, are there that these factors may have played a part in the future trajectory of the black church?³

Although white Baptists demonstrated an almost complete failure to welcome blacks into their churches on equal footing after the Civil War, this failure actually served as a key impetus to propel blacks out of the white congregations and establish their all-black congregations.

³ Montgomery, 2-4. He presents the conflict between those who see African Americans in the nineteenth century as primarily American, and those who see them as still carrying many elements of African heritage, spiritually and otherwise. He concluded that "Africans adhered to their traditional beliefs for as long as they could and then adapted some of them to the reality of their changing circumstances. They discarded customs and beliefs only when they became irrelevant or were forbidden by their new masters."

Collectively, these congregations would prove instrumental in providing hope for the black community suffering under Jim Crow. The black church of the late nineteenth century served as a charitable support to those in need, as a cultural center, as place of safety, as a promoter of educational efforts, and even as a sponsor for black business ventures.⁴ The Alabama Missionary [Colored] Baptist State Convention eventually encompassed the vast majority, not just of black Baptists, but of black Christians in Alabama. Likewise in 1870 black Baptists in Georgia established their own convention, which subsequently led to the General Missionary Baptist Convention and its smaller counterpart, the New Era Baptist Convention. These churches exerted great influence and therefore any factors that may have shaped them warrant historical attention.⁵

Some brief background on race relations in the American churches is helpful to understand the role DeVotie played. In the middle of the nineteenth century some northern Baptists began to speak forcefully against the wholesale compromise Baptists in the South had made with the institution of slavery. Certainly most white Baptists in the South had lost sight of how the biblical teaching on the image of God in all of humanity might affect racial equality in the church and society. However, the pattern of white Christians relating to black Christians on unequal terms was not new to American soil or unique to the South. The perspective that even free black Christians did not deserve full equality in the church dated back to the formative colonial years. Such views stretched to the seventeenth century in New England as well as the South. When the First Great Awakening brought increasing numbers of blacks as well as many

⁴ Fallin, ix; Montgomery, xi. "The church has occupied a central position in the community through much of the span of African-American history. That has been true because religion has been a major force in the lives of African Americans, but the church has been far more than a religious institution. It has served many social, political, and economic functions as well."

⁵ Fallin, 4. He records that in 1820 there were approximately 42,000 slaves in Alabama. By 1850, more than 342,000, and by 1860, 437,000, versus 526,000 whites.

whites into colonial churches, believers of both races made initial attempts at interracial worship. However whites in both North and South soon demanded separate seating. In the late eighteenth century this prejudice and inequality in the churches of Philadelphia and New York led to the formation of separate black congregations in those cities, which subsequently resulted in new black denominations. Even though northern churches in the nineteenth century generally made little progress toward racial equality in their church bodies, some began to advocate for emancipation as part of the growing abolition movement.⁶

In the South, during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries Baptists still remained a fringe spiritual and social group. Having not attained any lofty cultural status, they had little to lose by including blacks in their churches and even affording some measure of equality among believers. At that time blacks and whites generally practiced baptism jointly in the same rivers, participated in communion together, and shared equally as members of the church. Early white Baptist leaders in the South like Hosea Holcombe spoke publicly in opposition to slavery. Though perhaps not a gesture to full racial equality, Holcombe, who ministered in Alabama, gave the slaves he inherited from his mother's estate to his half-brother, believing that he should not own slaves. Prior to the cotton boom and Nat Turner's rebellion, this type of sentiment was not unheard of in the South.⁷ Similarly, Lee Compere, who had advocated abolitionist views, served as the pastor of the First Baptist Church in Montgomery a decade before DeVotie arrived. In fact, his perspective on slavery did not prevent Alabama Baptists from electing him president of the state convention.⁸

Yet, by the 1840s few Baptists argued against slavery and most accepted slavery as a necessary practice to sustain the southern economy. Baptists were not alone in this conformity to

⁶ Montgomery, 5.

⁷ Fallin, 10.

⁸ Flynt, 43; Fallin, 10.

southern acceptance of human bondage. The Methodists in the South followed a parallel path of accommodating to slavery in order to reach white southerners.⁹ Whatever measure of egalitarianism had existed previously in the churches was gradually replaced with a systematic support of slavery, separated gatherings where possible, and structured monitoring of black spirituality by white members. Yet, mission efforts to plantation slaves who might be physically far removed from a nearby congregation increased, as did black membership in nearly every Baptist church.¹⁰

At the same time white Baptists in the South were acquiescing to the practice of slavery, evangelicals in the North continued their advocacy for abolition. As abolitionists questioned the sincerity of faith for those supporting a slaveholding society, DeVotie and other southern evangelicals responded with their own accusation that abolitionists were in error for questioning the Bible's acceptance of the practice. Southern evangelical proponents of slavery even argued for the positive good of the institution. They reasoned that slaves who had come from pantheistic religious heritage in Africa could now enjoy the benefits of salvation in this life and be guaranteed eternal life in Christ.¹¹

In both Alabama and Georgia, from the 1830s to the end of the Civil War, DeVotie navigated the tension between his proslavery stance and his call as a shepherd to the interracial churches he pastored. He owned slaves, participated in the 1845 schism from the northern

⁹ Barber, 52. "Planters feared the egalitarian message of the gospel and opposed mission work among their slaves. In response, many southern Methodists tempered their harsh antislavery language, and sought to expand their influence in the region. The Methodist General Conference removed restrictions against slaveholding, but retained the prohibition against slave trading by members."

¹⁰ Barber, 58 and 61.

¹¹ Barber, 89. "Southerners embraced a Reformed, literal hermeneutic that provided an 'immense implicit authority.'...This theology informed the practical belief that believers are required to follow the commands of the Bible in every aspect of life, so southern evangelicals built a strong case that the support of slavery could be found explicitly in the Bible. When evangelical and non-evangelical abolitionists insisted on applying the spirit of the Bible, not the letter of the law, to work against the institution of slavery, southerners criticized such heretical approaches and conclusions."

Baptists, opposed abolition, supported the Confederacy, and, like the vast majority of southern pastors made no earnest attempt after the Civil War to integrate his churches or denomination.¹² If DeVotie ever preached a systematic defense of slavery no record remains among his over 600 recorded sermons. Yet, he certainly supported the practice personally and publically. Like many other southern pastors he demonstrated what could be labeled a paternalistic attitude toward enslaved church members, caring about their spiritual well-being but not translating this care into any abolitionist sentiment. Within the context of slavery, DeVotie and other white Baptist leaders often conscientiously shepherded the significant portion of their congregations who were black. In this way, DeVotie certainly typified white Baptist leaders in the South who at times unintentionally or at best with mixed motives invested pastorally in slaves who they viewed as inferior human beings.

As such, DeVotie led the “second wave” of Baptist leaders in Alabama and Georgia who, unlike their predecessors in the early 1800s, chose to conform to the southern cultural norms concerning race and slavery which hardened after the 1830s. With increasing white fear of insurrection and increasing profitability of slavery most Baptists in the 1840s and 1850s departed from whatever convictions their predecessors had and fully accepted slavery. Some like Rev. Basil Manly, DeVotie’s Alabama peer, even defended it with forcefulness. For DeVotie, supporting slavery also coincided with the compromises needed to attain professional, elevated social status in the South. Although his Baptist predecessors in the South initially opposed slavery, DeVotie and most other antebellum southern pastors knew that turning a deaf ear to

¹² 1850 U.S. Federal Census, Marion, Perry, Alabama, Enumeration District ?, sheet 287, dwelling 89, family 96, J. H. DeVotie household; National Archives. This census record lists two adult and four children as DeVotie’s slaves ; 1860 U.S. Federal Census, Columbus, Muscogan, Georgia, Enumeration District ?, sheet 6, dwelling 48, family 48, James H. DeVotie household; National Archives M653. This census record lists three adult and six children as DeVotie’s slaves; Note also, the Methodist denomination split along sectional lines in 1844 and the Presbyterians in 1861.

abolitionist ideals was essential to raising the status of their churches. More than that, DeVotie and his ministerial peers stood to gain in personal influence and potentially in personal wealth, as they rode on the coattails of affluent slaveholding members.¹³

As DeVotie aligned himself with southern sectionalism, it influenced some of his closest ministry relationships. His longtime friend Milo Jewett, a professor at Howard College who also grew up in the North, left the South in 1855. Although at the time Jewett did not acknowledge sectionalism and slavery as his reasons for leaving Howard, after returning north he made comments suggesting precisely such a motivation. Jewett's remarks were received as criticism by DeVotie and other Alabama Baptist leaders who had a high respect for Jewett, but disagreed with him concerning slavery.¹⁴

With an awareness of DeVotie's beliefs about slavery, it is intriguing to observe how Christianity took root among blacks to whom he ministered and how he melded his views on slavery together with his pastoral calling to shepherd all under his care. The vast majority of black Christians in the South before the Civil War initially met under white church supervision as slave sub-congregations.¹⁵ If slaves chose to participate in Christian worship, and even join a church, they almost always connected where their white master worshipped.¹⁶ In some instances enslaved black Christians also met on their own as unofficial congregations, either secretly or

¹³ Rable, 17.

¹⁴ Flynt, 110; Milo P. Jewett Collection, Special Collection, Samford University Library, Birmingham, Alabama; See also <http://vcencyclopedia.vassar.edu/presidents/milo-p-jewett.html>. Longtime Judson College president, Dr. David Potts reported that Jewett questioned the practice of slavery and this was why he returned north.

¹⁵ Wagner, 24. He described the different scenarios by which blacks came to be a part of Christian churches in the South. "There are four origins of all of these churches listed. Some were organized by black preachers and members won to Christ through their persuasion. Others were organized by white missionaries or pastors of white churches who guided them in selecting a black pastor. Another group resulted from blacks joining the church of their master or mistress, with the black membership eventually outgrowing the white membership, but a white minister was obtained. The fourth group was born during and after the Civil War, when slaves were unwanted in the white church, since there were no longer legal ties between them and their masters. The churches felt they at least owed them to organize a church rather than completely abandon them."

¹⁶ Spain, 45. "By 1845 practically all slave church members belonged to the same churches as their masters. Very few of them exercised all the rights and privileges which white members enjoyed, however."

with the permission of their slave master.¹⁷ Although whites feared secret gatherings would result in insurrection, for the majority of these gatherings there is little evidence that slaves aimed at anything other than freely expressing themselves in unsupervised worship.

Part of the task evangelical ministers of interracial congregations faced was determining how much of the spiritual care for slave members could be delegated out to church leaders who were slaves. DeVotie and fellow white Baptists in Alabama and Georgia wrestled with defining the boundaries of developing black leadership for their interracial congregations. In the 1820s, the Tuscaloosa church where DeVotie later served actually sent a black man as a delegate to the association meetings. Eventually the association rejected him but the black portion of the Tuscaloosa congregation continued to grow and in the 1840s whites from the church appointed several black men to serve that portion of the church.¹⁸

In a few isolated cases white church leaders even officially licensed black preachers whom they determined to possess high character and skill. Caesar Blackwell served as one of Alabama's most noteworthy. The Alabama Association went so far as to purchase Blackwell from his master. He then worked under the direction of a missionary of that association who owned Blackwell's wife and first child. Both black and white Christians sought out Blackwell for his widely recognized preaching ability.¹⁹

By the time Blackwell was ministering in Alabama, slave congregations had already been meeting separately for decades in Georgia. Some congregations like Savannah's First African Baptist Church and Augusta's Springfield Baptist Church originated in the eighteenth century. These congregations always remained under the watchful eye of white church leaders but grew

¹⁷ Flynt, 102-103; Edward R. Crowther, "Independent Black Baptist Congregations in Antebellum Alabama," *The Journal of Negro History* 72.3/4, (Summer - Autumn, 1987).

¹⁸ Porch, 29-33; Flynt, 45.

¹⁹ Flynt, 45-46.

very large and were permitted some autonomy over worship style.²⁰ In some situations black church leaders and churches received this kind of support and maintained this type of autonomy right up to the Civil War. But in most southern states, legislatures passed laws intended to protect against insurrection, which in essence limited spiritual gatherings for blacks. For instance, in 1832 it became illegal in Alabama for blacks to gather as a group outside of their master's property and limits were placed on the education of slaves.

In churches where black slaves worshipped amidst a racially mixed congregation, they were typically relegated to a balcony or back-row section. Only in rare situations could they vote, but they could generally testify in church discipline cases. White church leaders typically made no allowance for black church members to worship in the more expressive manner usually preferred by blacks. Churches often listed blacks separately from whites in church membership rolls or sometimes not at all. Whites also used the churches as a platform to reinforce racial control and white pastors often reminded slaves about the importance of obedience and loyalty to their owners.²¹ Despite these apparent hindrances and discouragements for blacks, their church participation grew, filling houses of worship across the South with Christian slaves.

When DeVotie stepped into Baptist leadership in the South during the early 1830s, he ministered weekly amidst the pervading presence of slavery in his racially mixed congregations. The churches that DeVotie shepherded prior to and during the Civil War exhibited a variety of antebellum Baptist racial arrangements. The Montgomery church, which DeVotie served briefly in the mid-1830s had, by the mid-1840s, 411 members, only 96 of whom were white.²² In the Tuscaloosa church where DeVotie ministered from 1837 to 1839, many slaves had also become members and the white church leaders allowed them some control over their own ministries.

²⁰ Fallin, 12.

²¹ Fallin, 12, 15.

²² Flynt, 100-101.

The impact of Baptist outreach to slaves in and around Columbus significantly influenced DeVotie's ministry there and the arrangements made to accommodate the growing number of Christian slaves. By 1845 the black Baptists, together with black Methodists in Columbus, already made up more than 25 percent of the city's black population.²³ At mid-century, while DeVotie served in Columbus, both the Baptist and Methodist churches experienced huge additions of slave members. For instance, even though only seven of the original members of St. Luke Methodist Church in that town were slaves, in just three years they numbered 97, among a congregation of 288. Although a revival had accelerated growth in both denominations, this type of expansion was not unheard of in the Georgia and Alabama Baptist churches.²⁴

This rapid addition of slave converts helps explain the significant steps First Baptist Church of Columbus took early in its history of designating a separate building for each of the "congregations" within the congregation. DeVotie led this church from 1856 to 1870. The separate facility on the main church property for the black members had been in use by them since 1841. Although part of the motivation for providing separate worship space under white supervision for slaves was likely to allow the slaves some measure of liberty to shape their own worship services, undoubtedly white church members also became uncomfortable with having to worship in the same space as a large number of slave Christians. In the late 1850s, under DeVotie's direction white members of the Columbus congregation helped fund a separate replacement structure for slave worshippers on the church campus. While this building and a new structure for the white portion of the congregation were both being built, the "congregations" returned to an arrangement they had not known since 1841 of sharing the same

²³ Barber, 124.

²⁴ Barber, 80-81. Flynt, 44. Up until 1844, the Baptist church in Wetumpka, just north of Montgomery, enjoyed integrated services. After that time a group of black leaders was granted permission to oversee a separate black congregation within the total congregation.

building but at different meeting times. This type of facility sharing, with races separated in some manner but meeting in the same building, was the norm in less affluent churches with significant black membership in Alabama and Georgia.

Prior to the Civil War, in the First Baptist Church of Columbus the supervision of the slave members took the form of a white minister on the staff who also supervised the black contingent of the congregation. Daniel Reese served in this capacity soon after the congregation began meeting separately in 1841. Another white man, James Whitten, followed Reese beginning in the late 1840s and continuing into the 1850s.²⁵ While DeVotie also preached to the black part of the congregation, the assigned pastor handled the bulk of the pastoral responsibilities for it. The title of “head” or “senior” pastor did not appear to be used in Baptist circles at the time. Yet, DeVotie certainly filled this role by directing the efforts of Whitten and later, the first appointed black pastor, Rev. Harry Watson. In 1862 while Columbus still remained firmly under Confederate control, Watson became the first black pastor of the black portion of the congregation, which began calling itself the African Baptist Church.²⁶ During Reconstruction, this church would rise to prominence among the black Baptist churches, serving as the site of the General Missionary Baptist Convention.

In addition to orchestrating meeting arrangements and spiritual care for slave church members, DeVotie and his ministerial peers also had to navigate the legality of their approach to pastoring slaves. Although DeVotie’s actions and those of his fellow white Georgia Baptists regarding slave spirituality during the middle of the Civil War were never revolutionary, they did

²⁵ Barber, 116.

²⁶ Grant, 13. The historical plaque at the current building site for this congregation states that the plaque was put in place “By the Historic Chattahoochee Commission, and First African Baptist Church, 1994”. It reads, “The initial congregation of this church was formed by slaves who had attended Ephesus Baptist Church (later First Baptist), since its organization on February 14, 1829. When a new church was built in 1840 the slaves worshipped in the older building. White ministers served the African Baptist Church until 1862 when Rev. Harry Watson became the first black minister.”

demonstrate resistance to the actions of the state, when those actions impinged on the freedom of the church. In DeVotie's perspective, slave church members did not have a right to equal treatment in the church and certainly did not have a claim to equal civil rights, but at the same time the state should not unnecessarily impinge on the church's ministry to slaves. An 1833 Georgia state law had required three ordained white ministers to legally certify the licensing of any black pastor to preach. However, during the Civil War the state tightened the regulation so that any preaching by black pastors was effectively outlawed.

Pushed by this extreme restriction, Baptists across the state renewed at least a measure of their former passion for church and state separation, requesting that the state remove this hindrance to what they saw as a legitimate religious freedom. The state did so in April of 1863, but DeVotie and his church leaders had already proceeded in January, while the law was still in effect, to appoint and ordain three black deacons tasked with overseeing the black congregation. The deacons, Thomas Hicks, Robert Bethun, and John Dawson, still had to meet the requirement of submitting their conference meeting minutes to the white leadership of First Baptist Church of Columbus and several white members were assigned to attend those meetings. Although DeVotie supported the war, when wartime legislation infringed on the rights of the church he pushed back and even acted against current law. Even though DeVotie attempted in these ways to foster the spiritual development of slaves under his care and even resist some state laws, throughout the antebellum period he supported the tradition of slave members remaining formally under the supervision of the white church leaders.²⁷

In addition to defending the right of the church to freely minister to slaves, DeVotie connected pastorally with slave church members. Seeking to build black members up in the

²⁷ Barber, 157 and 168.

faith, he baptized, instructed, counseled, encouraged and buried.²⁸ The *Alabama Baptist*, which DeVotie had for years operated and for a short time personally financed, recognized his particular attention to the slaves in his congregation in Marion, Alabama, stating, “his labors among the colored portion of our church have been pre-eminently blessed; that portion of our church seeming to have been the peculiar object of his regard...to an extent surpassed by but few churches in the South.”²⁹ DeVotie expressed his relationship to the slaves in his Tuscaloosa congregation by observing that they sometimes tried to impart a monetary gift to him for his ministry to them. He apparently refused except for when he was leaving for Marion. In that instance, he admitted, “When parting from those there they wept over me, and compelled me to break my rule and receive a small purse, as a token of their love. I had baptized many of these a richer reward than any other which could have been bestowed.”³⁰ Concerning his ministry in Columbus, DeVotie recalled in his memoirs that the slaves, “always treated me with marked respect....[after the War] I advised them to form churches of their own, and aided them to organize, ordaining their deacons, and ministers.”³¹ DeVotie’s comments may have been laced with an overly rosy paternalism concerning his relationship with fellow black Baptists but they reveal that he clearly was interested in their spiritual growth and valued the part he saw himself as playing in their lives.

Although DeVotie desired to impact slaves through his pastoral leadership, it should be noted that some of the endeavors he pursued appeared to achieve very little for the benefit of slaves. In 1855, between his pastorates at Marion and Columbus, DeVotie served as the Secretary for the Domestic and Indian Board of the entire Southern Baptist denomination. The

²⁸ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 197-199. He lists the names of black pastors whom he baptized.

²⁹ *South-Western Baptist*, Sep 27, 1853. Resolutions of Siloam Baptist Church.

³⁰ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 69.

³¹ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 157; Edward Crowther, “Interracial Cooperative Missions among Blacks by Alabama’s Baptists, 1868-1882,” *The Journal of Negro History* 80.3 (Summer 1995): 131-139.

expressed intention of these efforts was to extend the Gospel message and establish churches among a variety of groups perceived to be lacking in Christian influence. This included Native Americans, non-English speaking immigrants, and blacks living in slavery. Despite Southern Baptist rhetoric to the contrary, ultimately only a handful of missionaries were supported at the denominational level. These men pursued their calling to reach black slaves, but could only make minimal impact among the millions of slaves in the South.

Leading one of the flagship churches in the Columbus Association, DeVotie did however see some success in his attempts to foster regional efforts to proselytize among slaves. Unlike some other associations in the South, Columbus did not have a designated missionary to slaves until 1857. However, in that year William Johnson took on this role and soon reported seventeen baptisms.³² As these slaves joined the local Baptist churches, including First Baptist of Columbus, they came under the influence of DeVotie's pastoral leadership. However, as the war progressed, DeVotie and other Baptist leaders shifted their outreach focus to evangelizing and supporting Confederate troops as chaplains. This meant less intentionality for the furthering of the slave missions, yet many slaves continued to join the Baptist churches and white leaders celebrated this success believing God would not allow them to win the war if they were not glorifying God in their evangelism of slaves. At the same time as some white Baptists and other southern evangelicals hoped to reform slavery into a just institution, slaves not only embraced spiritual emancipation from sin through Christ, but also hoped for a Union victory that they might be liberated physically as well.

DeVotie's oldest son, Noble, provides one example of how DeVotie's role as a pastor to the slaves in his congregations could be replicated through other white Baptist pastors. Noble followed in his father's footsteps in many ways, including pastoring in Alabama in a racially

³² Barber, 138.

mixed church, before dying at the beginning of the war. Noble's first and only pastorate, was the Baptist church in Selma, which had 70 white and 200 black members. In his biographical sketches of Noble, William C. Levere relayed what he had learned about Noble's preaching to black sub-congregations: "[Noble] DeVotie was a good preacher and his sermons, full of his own fire and energy, would at times bring the colored brethren to their feet and they would rush about the church shaking hands..."³³ In fact, Noble had developed his preaching skill during his seminary years by filling the pulpit for black sub-congregations.

As the war ended, the mass exodus of former slaves from white controlled churches transformed the face of southern religious life. If a common Christian confession was unable to sustain the unity of denominations prior to the Civil War, it was not surprisingly also unable to sustain racial union in the churches of the South after the Civil War. Whites in the churches made little effort to include blacks in leadership or decision-making roles. As Reconstruction progressed and civil rights laws came under increasing attack, black Christians in the South realized that a separate church community might be their only safe-haven. Already by 1870 the vast majority of blacks in every denomination had left to form their own churches controlled locally by black leadership and free to worship as they desired. Even if white church leaders hoped to retain these members and in some paternalistic way felt called to shepherd them, blacks insisted on either equality or autonomy.

The black Christians who had grown in the faith in part through the work of DeVotie and other white leaders quickly multiplied through the efforts of independent black pastors to extend their now independent black congregations. In Georgia, the Southern Baptist State Convention recorded a total of 27,734 slaves in the churches in 1860. As early as 1866 only 16,055 blacks remained, and by 1870 there were just 5,745. In 1860 there were only a few recognized separate

³³ Levere, *The Record*, 28.1 (Mar 1908): 44.

black churches. In 1870, there were 38,878 blacks spread across a growing number of black Georgia Baptist churches, climbing to approximately 206,000 by 1895.³⁴

Just as DeVotie had guided the process of helping further establish First African Baptist in Columbus at the beginning of the war, near the end of the conflict, he directed the launching of a second black congregation out of First Baptist, Columbus. DeVotie, along with Watson, the pastor of the First African Baptist, and another black pastor, initiated Shady Grove Baptist Church. This second black Baptist church in Columbus began around 1863 with only a handful of members and in 1867 still had only 26. They met in a building on the property of First Baptist, Columbus, presumably the same building which had housed First African Baptist before that congregation secured their own building. Although the congregation started slowly by 1870, 250 had joined.³⁵

Subsequent to the Civil War, southern blacks generally continued in their Christian faith, the majority of them in the Baptist affiliation. Although they had endured the oppression of slavery at the hand of those who claimed a Christian faith and who were often Baptist, the newly freed slaves showed little inclination to drift from their Christian affiliation even though it had come to them from proslavery whites. However, black Baptists had already begun developing their own form of worship prior to the Civil War and Emancipation. During Reconstruction, as their formal links to the white Baptists continued to erode, black Baptists accelerated the process of forming their own distinctive liturgies, songs, and prayers. Yet their efforts to build church institutions evidenced a degree of influence from their years worshipping in biracial churches.

³⁴ Spain, 50.

³⁵ Barber, 258. "The first official members were Boston Miles, Mary Moore, and Anthony Williams, the latter of whom would serve as the second pastor of Shady Grove and later pastor of LaGrange Colored Baptist Church. The church was named Shady Grove to commemorate its first place of worship and soon began meeting in a building owned by the white church."

A number of parallel lines can be drawn between the priorities DeVotie championed in order to establish, expand and entrench the antebellum interracial Baptist churches and the priorities of the newly developing independent black Baptists. Black Baptists joined associations, organized conventions, established publications, launched educational efforts, and built church buildings. Black pastors also sought to demonstrate their increasing social and economic status by receiving professional salaries. However, just as DeVotie had pursued all of his initiatives while still maintaining traditional Baptist beliefs and preaching with unction, black Baptist pastors did so as well.

For instance, although a handful of black Baptist churches sought complete autonomy, even from other black churches, most cherished the collective power of uniting with other congregations in accountability, fellowship, and mission. Between 1875 and 1900, black churches multiplied rapidly and at the same time perpetuated a commitment to connectivity that undoubtedly impressed even DeVotie. They formed 37 new associations in Alabama alone, an “unprecedented” pace.³⁶ These associations served as more than a simple show of cooperation. Nearly each one fashioned its own constitution and some type of statement of faith. Although the white Baptists exerted some degree of collective influence over one another through their associations, the black associations demonstrated a greater stringency, readily expelling noncompliant churches if necessary. In ways similar to white Baptists, black pastors and lay leaders also formed institutional structures to advance the faith. Between 1875 and 1900 black Baptists organized to create the publication *Baptist Leader*, the Sunday School Congress, and the Baptist Young People’s Union. They also launched a mission board.³⁷

³⁶ Fallin, 63-64.

³⁷ Fallin, 64-65.

Although poor black congregations could not match the expensive edifices erected by their white counterparts, they did build church buildings. Just as the size, type, and cost of church structures had increasingly become a symbol of success and prosperity among white Baptists, so too among black churches. However, for the black church physical facilities arguably carried even more weight since they also represented freedom from white control. Since most southern blacks labored in a sharecropping system that allowed them almost no means for economic advancement, the expense of constructing any sort of building often required a deeper level of personal sacrifice than their white Baptist peers. In rural areas the process could take a number of years. In the case of several mixed race congregations in the countryside around Columbus, the black congregations often began by leasing the basement space at the facility they had formerly shared with the white congregation. Eventually, as the black congregation could afford it, they purchased separate land and constructed a building.

Black Baptists in the cities often had a head start over their rural brethren if they were already meeting in a separate building. The congregation of First African Baptist remained part of First Baptist Columbus and under DeVotie's leadership during the Civil War, but they had contributed, along with white members, to purchase their new facility and had finished paying for it by 1862. Through the leadership of DeVotie and the finance committee of the white congregation in that same year the black congregation took on responsibility for its own financial matters and church discipline.³⁸ With this kind of preparation, it is not surprising that First

³⁸ Barber, 164-65. "In September 1862, the Finance Committee reported that the final bill on the black church had been received and that the debt had been extinguished, with a large proportion of the funds having been contributed by the black members. It was also in September 1862 that First Columbus formed a committee to examine the relationship between First Columbus and its two missions – the Factory Mission and the African Church. The committee reported the expediency of allowing the members of the black church to handle their own disciplinary and financial business, but always under the supervision and approval of the white membership in conference. The committee also decided that the minutes of the conferences of the Colored Church should be sent to the white church for inspection and reporting."

African Baptist became its own church on its own property rapidly, transitioning just a few months after the war ended in 1865.

Paralleling the development of the professional pastoral role they may have observed through DeVotie and his socially elevated white pastoral peers, black pastors sought similar professional pastoral status as they were able. Given the socioeconomic situation of most black church members immediately after the Civil War, initially salaries for black Pastors remained low relative to white pastors. In Alabama, in 1881, the highest paid black pastor received \$125 per year. This changed rapidly as blacks experienced improved economic standing so that by 1897 pastors of larger black churches could make \$500 and some even made over \$1000.³⁹ Nevertheless, most black pastors remained bi-vocational of necessity, working a secular job for their primary income and pursuing ministry on the side.

The black Baptist churches also may have mirrored the vision DeVotie had for religious institutions of education. In some ways they pursued this element of institution building with even greater vigor than the white churches. Some slave owners had persisted in providing basic education for their slaves despite laws prohibiting or limiting such practices. Indeed several Baptist associations and churches in Georgia also chose to step across this line, if not for the purpose of helping uplift blacks socially and economically, at least for their spiritual advancement through Bible reading. But in any event most black southerners at the time of their emancipation were, according to historian of the black church, Clarence Wagner, “unlearned, unlettered, uncultured.”⁴⁰ Recognizing how important basic education would be for preparing former slaves for successful life in freedom, black church leaders charged forward with

³⁹ Fallin, 72-73.

⁴⁰ Wagner, 48-49.

numerous educational initiatives. In particular they established public schools for children as well as theological institutes for equipping pastors.

In Georgia, black Baptists began the Augusta Institute in 1867. In 1879 the school relocated to Atlanta and changed its name to Atlanta Baptist Seminary. By the end of the century class offerings had expanded to include liberal arts education as well as theological preparation so it became Atlanta Baptist College before choosing its current name in 1913, as Morehouse College. DeVotie was among 12 men, including five from Georgia, who petitioned for a charter to organize the seminary when it moved to Atlanta.⁴¹ He also corresponded regularly with William Jefferson White, the mulatto Baptist pastor from Atlanta, who founded this higher educational entity.

As DeVotie had charted a course of progressive institutional development while maintaining traditional evangelical beliefs, a similar pattern appeared in black Baptists in Georgia and Alabama. They held to the full authority and inspiration of the Bible and proclaimed the necessity of salvation for eternal life through Jesus alone. Yet, they comprehended different social and community responsibilities for the church than those of white Baptists. At the end of the nineteenth century some white evangelicals began to fear that the message of eternal salvation and call to individual conversion would be subsumed by social justice efforts and ministries of mercy. These white Christians were concerned about losing the eternal message of salvation by expending too much time and energy on ministries to alleviate suffering in this life. The black church perceived less conflict in pursuing both the ministry of delivering God's Word and performing God's deeds.

⁴¹ Benjamin Griffith Brawley, *History of Morehouse College: Written on the Authority of the Board of Trustees*, (Atlanta: Morehouse College, 1917), 163.

Black Baptist churches continued to organize the general structure of their worship services with the liturgy familiar to them from their participation in biracial congregations. But they branched out doxologically, capitalizing on the freedom to worship with a higher degree of outward emotional expression. Although erudition among pastors remained valuable among black believers, the pastor also was expected to lead with obvious energy and expression. The interaction of call and response between pastor and congregation and even impromptu shouts from the congregation were familiar in the weekly worship of black Baptists. Although DeVotie and other white Baptist leaders saw expressions of this type as mere emotionalism and as a potential pollutant to careful doctrinal living, in some ways this was simply an extension of the “unction” so valued in white southern churches. Few in the black church perceived any danger.⁴²

Black Baptist pastors also may have reflected the priorities of DeVotie and other nineteenth century white evangelical leaders by striving to secure for the church the central role in shaping southern society. The white Baptist churches had transitioned from a cultural fringe movement in the early nineteenth century to a central influence of southern life in the middle of the century. Black Baptists in Georgia and Alabama not only aimed to maintain their standing as an acceptable religious entity, but also sought to become the central and normative institution of the black community. Many black political, business and community leaders who emerged during Reconstruction came from the black Baptist church. With the collapse of Reconstruction and rise of Jim Crow, political and business doors slammed closed, but the doors of church influence remained open. Although the church already held a prominent role in the black community, its influence and power expanded in the 1870s since it was one of the only self-governing black institutions. The community came to look to the church and its leaders not only

⁴² Fallin, 10.

for moral direction, but also for political opinion and ministries of mercy to the downtrodden. The church ultimately became one of the few bright spots for black life during the economic, political, and social oppression of Jim Crow South.

Subsequent to the racial split of the Baptist churches in the south in the late 1860s, the degree of ongoing interaction between black and white church bodies and their leadership was redefined. Some white pastors, like H. E. Taliaferro, once editor of the *South-Western Baptist*, pastored black churches after the Civil War. Taliaferro served the black congregation in Mt. Meigs, Alabama, until 1872.⁴³ However, pastors serving across racial lines proved a rare exception to the general pattern of complete racial separation. At points, black and white clergy did attempt to connect. When the black Baptist convention happened to be held in same city as the white convention, black church leaders requested DeVotie to address their group. In 1873 when both conventions were held in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, blacks sought advice on some projects from their white peers.⁴⁴ DeVotie also spoke as part of the 1888 centennial celebration of black Georgia Baptists.⁴⁵

Black and white Baptists in antebellum Alabama and Georgia never stood on equal footing in the church. But they did sometimes rub shoulders very closely, even if only on Sunday mornings. Glancing over the shoulder of DeVotie provides a close-up look at those formative years, which though terribly marred by slavery and racism, may have impacted the future expansion of both white and black Baptists across the South. The same vantage point also demonstrates the dynamics of interracial churches and the complexity of the role that white pastors played.

⁴³ Fallin, 52.

⁴⁴ Fallin, 74.

⁴⁵ Emanuel King Love, *History of the First African Baptist Church, from Its Organization, January 10th, 1788, to July 1st, 1888: Including the Centennial Celebration, Addresses, Sermons, Etc.* (Savannah: Morning News Print, 1888), 197.

In the late 1870s, as the smoke settled from ecclesiastical and racial separation, DeVotie assumed a role in the twilight of his life that would be the culmination of all his organizational and mission efforts. For 14 years as the Secretary of the Georgia Baptist Home Missions Board, he represented the efforts of the majority of white Southern Baptists to start new churches in areas of growth or need and to help supply pastors for struggling congregations. In this capacity each year he oversaw 20 to 30 “missionaries,” men supported in some way through denominational giving. The records of his correspondence reveal significant efforts to maintain involvement with black churches. DeVotie helped through one of his life-long passions, Bible distribution, to solicit Bibles and other print resources from northern ministries to support several black pastors who remained affiliated with the mission board. More importantly he helped direct financial support for these men. And he, along with several other white Baptist leaders, taught “institutes” to train African American pastors in theology.⁴⁶ But he would not step into this culminating role of his life’s work, before he walked through a period of tremendous personal suffering and loss. This period had begun with the shocking loss of Noble at the start of the Civil War, but would culminate in the 1870s and 1880s with the loss of his wife and all of his children from his first and second marriages, save one.

⁴⁶ *Weekly Georgia Telegraph*, Nov 5, 1869, Issue 17.

CHAPTER 8

SUFFERING SHEPHERD TO THE SUFFERING SOUTH

Beginning in the 1830s, continuing during the Civil War, and culminating in the 1880s, DeVotie endured agonizing personal loss. Over these decades he watched all but one of his 11 children die and his first wife pass away. Amidst this level of loss, unusual even for the nineteenth century, his constancy as a shepherd to his churches and steady leadership in his denomination is noteworthy for its own sake. The deaths certainly took their toll on DeVotie, making him more introspective in his senior years, and forcing a deepening of his belief in a sovereign, loving God. In this way he changed, growing and developing in his faith. Yet just as intriguing is how he weathered the storms, keeping his firm commitment to his Lord.

Moreover, during and subsequent to the Civil War, when so many in the South suffered loss of persons, property, and pride, DeVotie's own legacy of tragedy became a source of his power and popularity. The painful realities of his own life kept him intimately connected with pastoral needs of individual believers in the churches he led. The struggles he faced not only endeared him to his congregations but also shielded him from being received as merely an aloof organizer or elite professional cleric as he implemented his vision to build institutions and elevate the status of the Baptist denomination.

For some, facing such pain would have precipitated a retreat into a stagnant life, a depressive emotional withdrawal. Instead, DeVotie's experience of disorder and helplessness, stemming from his inability to protect his children from death, fueled his zeal to organize

southern Baptists and create permanent institutional structures. As the hope of a human family legacy faded with the gut-wrenching passing of one child after another, DeVotie sought more and more to leave behind the offspring of an established, expanded and entrenched Southern Baptist denomination.

DeVotie's accomplishments for the Baptist faith during the second half of his ministry years stand out in their own right for their impact on the spiritual trajectory of Alabama and Georgia. Yet, his ability to press through the emotional devastation he faced, sustained by his earnest faith, magnifies his compelling stature. The loss of three sons in infancy during his first marriage was undoubtedly painful but not uncommon given the infant mortality rates of the time.¹ Yet, he never forgot these losses and years later still listed James Vernon and James Harvey together with one unnamed child among his other family members.² For DeVotie, the most public and perhaps most wrenching loss was that of his oldest son to survive infancy, Noble. But he also witnessed the passing of the other children from his first marriage, Howard, Jewett, and Lizzie, none of whom married and all of whom died before they reached 30 years of age. DeVotie's first wife, Christian Margaret, was spared seeing the demise of Jewett and Lizzie since she passed away in 1872. His second wife, Georgia, would survive him, as would their first daughter, named after her mother. But his other three daughters from his second marriage, Mary Anna, Lucia Lillian, and Lewis Pyron, would be taken by death as well. Mary Anna lived nine years, and the other two died just shy of their first birthday. Sadly, the very structure of DeVotie's memoirs bears painful testimony to his losses. He began writing them around 1870,

¹ Haines, Michael. "Fertility and Mortality in the United States," March 19, 2008, <http://eh.net/encyclopedia/article/haines.demography>; DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 3. Referring to his ancestors, and before he lost any immediately family besides Noble and two infant sons, DeVotie ironically stated, "They have transmitted no hereditary taints of disease to their posterity, either physical or mental, the results of vicious or intemperate indulgences."

² DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 2, 336. One unnamed son was born in 1836. James Vernon was born Nov 20, 1842 and died in 1843. James Harvey was born Oct 6, 1844 and died in 1845.

as letters to his daughter, Lizzie, thinking he might be nearing the end of his life. Since she and the first three daughters of his second marriage ended up dying before he did, he was forced to address the latter pages to his only remaining daughter, Georgia.

Studying the suffering DeVotie faced and responded to not only deepens understanding of his character and leadership, but also provides perspective on how some southerners processed death and suffering. This would be a significant area of historical inquiry for any period but is particularly important for comprehending the sociology and spirituality of southern life after the Civil War. As Drew Faust, in This Republic of Suffering, stated, “Men and women approach death in ways shaped by history, by culture, by conditions that vary over time and across space. Even though ‘we all have our dead,’ and even though we all die, we do so differently from generation to generation and from place to place.”³ Much of DeVotie’s suffering came during or soon after the war, a time when all Americans, but especially southerners, encountered unprecedented loss. Faust estimated the total losses of the Civil War at 620,000, and noted that this sum was equal to the combined national total from all other American Wars, excluding Vietnam.⁴

The situation for the South proved particularly severe. One fifth of military-aged men died by end of the conflict and Confederate soldiers were three times more likely to die than Union soldiers.⁵ The death toll through artillery shelling of towns, starvation caused by interrupted supply lines, and guerrilla warfare was high among civilians as well. The battlefield devastation forced all Americans, and southerners in particular, to reevaluate their expectations for life itself. With such widespread loss striking nearly every family in the South the reality of

³ Faust, xi.

⁴ Faust, xi-xii.

⁵ Faust, xi.

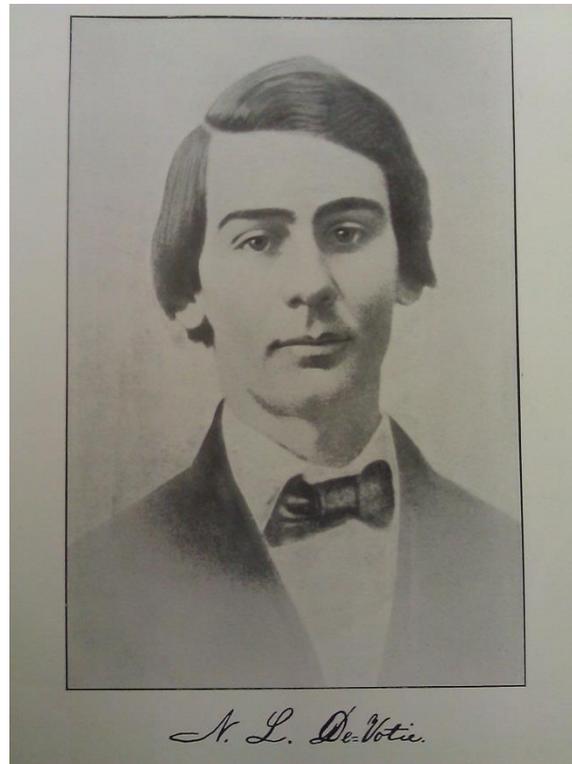
death came to be “the most widely shared of the war’s experiences.”⁶ As the people of the South reinterpreted the nature of life and death, DeVotie spoke as a recognized spiritual figure, delivering a message from a recognized spiritual text. Yet he also preached as one who personally recognized the pain of death and whose faith deepened through his losses.

DeVotie, like other southerners in the early months of 1861, had to have at least pondered the losses that might soon come as troops in North and South prepared to fight. But he could not have predicted how soon death would strike and how close to his heart. By 1861, Noble, who had followed in his father’s pastoral footsteps, had already achieved notoriety as the valedictorian of his class at the University of Alabama, founder of the Sigma Alpha Epsilon (SAE) fraternity, and graduate of the Princeton Theological Seminary.⁷ William C. Levere was an SAE member at Northwestern University who wrote a three volume history of the fraternal organization, and became a prominent national leader in SAE. He extolled Noble almost a half-century after his death: “His life is the story of a youth of rare intellectual attainments, of splendid moral worth and of noble achievement. Its close, darkened with disaster, and crushing out a career vivid with promise, lends to it the somber shade of tragedy.” In poetic form that DeVotie would have admired, Levere continued, “His life was like a day whose dawn is radiant with hope and which shines in beauty as the hours of early morning pass, but which, when the fullness of noon is still far away, loses all its brightness in the dark shadow of thick enveloping

⁶ Faust, xiii.

⁷ Noble DeVotie Diary, January 1. Sigma Alpha Epsilon Archives, Evanston, Illinois. “I preached for Pa, both morning and night. It was natural to be in his pulpit and speak to his congregation. The memories of past days and seasons with them came to my mind with great vividness. In the afternoon the church held its regular conference, and a pleasant season it was....After my night sermon which was short, I went to hear the minister in charge of the new Methodist church, Rev. ?? Key, who gave us a good sermon. Thus ended this first day and first Sabbath and year 1860. I trust that resolutions of greater diligence and faithfulness in my Master’s service, formed on it may be acted out and result in great good under the direction and blessing.”

clouds.”⁸ Noble had only recently assumed his first pastorate in Selma when he died in an accident on a wharf in Mobile at age 23, while just beginning to serve as a chaplain with Confederate troops from Selma.⁹ As such he was one of the first casualties from Alabama in the Civil War.



Some years prior, DeVotie wrote to Noble expressing his heart and hopes: “You know how dear to me your happiness is. I could make every sacrifice of earthly pleasure if necessary to secure the best interests of my dear children for time and eternity. My greatest earthly bliss

⁸ Levere, *The Record*, 26.3 (Sep 1906): 245. At least 14 chapters of SAE had been founded by the time of Noble’s death.

⁹ Jewett DeVotie Journal, 7, Sigma Alpha Epsilon Archives, Evanston, Illinois. “Accounts differ about the manner in which he fell. Some say that he fell being blinded by the light in attempting to walk across the right angle between the walk and wharf, others, that in making way for a gentleman and lady to pass he stepped too far back near this angle and fell, some that he stumbled over rocks and fell.” Noble was born Jan 24, 1838.

now will be to see my children Christians, useful and happy.”¹⁰ Noble sought diligently to aspire to his father’s hopes, making his death all the more painful to DeVotie.¹¹ Noble’s youngest brother to survive infancy, Jewett, was named after DeVotie’s longstanding friend and fellow Baptist leader, Milo P. Jewett. Jewett DeVotie recorded in his journal the moment when the family, then living in Columbus, Georgia, received the devastating news about Noble’s death:

...father, mother, myself and Lizzie were seated around the fire at home pleasantly conversing when a knock was heard at the door. Lizzie went to the door and found there a young man who wished to see father alone. He went out and the door was shut...and in a short time I thought I heard father groan. I immediately rushed there and found him suffering untold agony...My fears were aroused for Howard who was studying medicine in Philadelphia, Pa., when father told me ‘Noble is in heaven.’ Mother’s anguish and the silent, touching agony of my father cannot be described.¹²

Years later, DeVotie recalled the moment he received the tragic news, “I had just received his last letter, and held it in my hands while conversing with the family about him,...when a knock called me to the door to hear from the likes of the *Tellegraph* [*sic*] operator. Your son is dead...I found myself utterly unprepared for this mysterious providence, the blow was more than I could bear at the moment. My heart was crushed.”¹³ DeVotie’s faith did not render him immune to the pain of loss. He felt it acutely but learned to find comfort in his Lord.

Just six weeks earlier Noble had departed his regular pastoral duties at the Baptist church in Selma, arriving at Fort Morgan to serve as chaplain to the “Independent Blues” and “Governor’s Guards” of Selma. Soon thereafter, he was appointed chaplain of the whole fort

¹⁰ Letter from James DeVotie to Noble DeVotie, writing from Columbus, Mississippi, Nov 14, 1853, Sigma Alpha Epsilon Archives, Evanston, Illinois.

¹¹ Noble DeVotie Diary, January 8. “I prayed then and I pray now that I may never be chargeable with a sin so dark as that I need and desire more evidence, more un mistakeable [*sic*] proofs of my union with Jesus and his constant presence and grace. But he has in his word promised these to any who will ask them. I believe his promise and trust him for my salvation and guidance.”

¹² Jewett DeVotie Journal, 1.

¹³ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 143; *South-Western Baptist*, Feb 21, 1860. Recorded Noble’s death.

and given the rank of lieutenant.¹⁴ He drowned Tuesday night, February 12, barely a month after Alabama elected to secede from the Union. Given his prominence as a pastor in Selma, an honors graduate of University of Alabama, the son of one of Alabama's most notable Baptist leaders, and one of the first chaplains among the Alabama troops, Noble's death drew statewide attention. The death itself involved a mixture of uncertain events and what many saw as providential Christological symbolism, with the body washing ashore three days after death. Jewett, though not yet 20 years old, served as the family's envoy to investigate the events and retrieve the body. Jewett's agreement to serve in this role is interesting because his older brother had not always been easy on him. Just a little over a year earlier, Noble penned a strong rebuke to Jewett concerning his academic setbacks at the University of Alabama:

You have grievously wronged pa. You are crushing the life out of him....Your conscience condemns you for it. Were I in your place I should never give sleep to my eyes til I had wiped out all the effects of my past conduct and implored the forgiveness of a grossly injured parent, and given him assurances of reformation and not only assurance but a real reformation....For my youthful indiscretions and want of affection I have paid most dearly in my lonely hours when far from home.¹⁵

During his trip Jewett recorded what he learned of the accident. When the ship "Dick Keys" was preparing to leave the wharf near the fort someone yelled that a man was overboard. A few moments later another call came that the victim was an officer in the Governor's Guards. Jewett had also ascertained that the body had floated off with arms in the air, but motionless. A man named Malton threw a rope onto the upraised hands, but to no avail. When a boat launched to reach Noble it capsized and by the time the boat was righted, his body had drifted away. Jewett concluded his recollection of the report given to him, "The roll of the Governors Guards

¹⁴ Jewett DeVotie Journal, 5. Concerning Noble's role at the Fort, "Cater [a member of Governor's Guards] told me that when Noble first came to the Fort, some of the men opposed it, thinking he would be too much on the puritanical order, and would thereby restrict their freedom, but soon after his arrival, by his courteous and friendly manners, freedom and kindness, he gained the good will of every man in the Fort."

¹⁵ Noble DeVotie Diary, Feb 1859, Sigma Alpha Epsilon Archives, Evanston, Illinois.

was called and Noble was found missing. His hat, shawl and handkerchief were afterwards found floating in the water.”¹⁶

On the bitter journey from Columbus to Mobile, DeVotie had accompanied Jewett as far as Montgomery to the house of a relative but, apparently incapacitated with grief, was unable to go on. Longtime DeVotie family friend and fellow Baptist leader, I. T. Tichenor, accompanied Jewett to Mobile. Jewett described his meditations along the journey, “I found myself often wondering whether or not I was dreaming, afflicted by some frightful vision, the awakening from which would be untold happiness – whether anything was real, and we but creatures of imagination, and all external things but creations of the brain and the prayers would often come ‘Would to God it were a dream, blessed would be its departure.’”¹⁷ The Christian confidence in the heavenly resurrection of the dead did not prevent Jewett from hoping that the painful reality of death was just a passing nightmare.

Jewett’s ponderings during his journey not only display his personal mentality, but as an extension of the DeVotie family’s beliefs also offer insight into their faith during tragedy. He waxed poetic, gazing at the ocean from his steamer just prior to arriving at Fort Morgan: “I looked towards the east, and Jupiter was proudly mounting the heavens beautiful and brilliant, as if fresh from the hands of Jehovah. Its cheerful beams dispelled the dark fancies which brooded over my soul, and the spirit of my brother seemed around me, far more happy than when on earth, gladdening my mind by its happy influence, and I could almost imagine I could see him amid the celestial choirs which throngs the courts of heaven.” Jewett took encouragement from his belief that Noble now enjoyed the happiness of heaven. Continuing to process the reality of his brother’s death through his Christian understanding of the afterlife, Jewett “seemed to hear a

¹⁶ Jewett DeVotie Journal, 3-4.

¹⁷ Jewett DeVotie Journal, 3.

voice saying, ‘That which you have loved on earth dwells not now within that body which sleeps neath Mobile’s waters, the body was only a shell which contained the jewel, that which made the body pure, and lustrous, and holy, has gone to God who gave it. The casket is on earth, but the diamond has left it. Thy brother now rests on his Saviours [*sic*] bosom – and is an angel in the skies.’¹⁸

To Jewett also fell the task of viewing the body when it washed ashore several days later. Again his heart for his lost brother and the framework of his faith appear: “We went and there surrounded by military men, hair swept back from his forehead, lying on a table, and dressed in black clothes was the remains of him who was our pride, the idol of my parents hearts, and the hope of the whole family.” Jewett’s fond memory of Noble pushed away any negative recollections, “I gazed long upon him who had ever been the truest and best brother, the most dutiful of sons, the humble christian, and the faithful untiring minister.” As he visually assessed the dead body, he noted how completely death had overcome his brother’s various features: “That eye which hardly ever yet met mine without a kind smile, was now dull and sightless, that form so late erect and buoyant was now cold and lifeless, those lips so late proclaiming the unsearchable riches of the Gospel were now mute and voiceless, and the spirit which inhabited that slender frame and rendered it noble and beautiful has gone – departed to the realms of bliss – there to dwell with his God forever more.”¹⁹

The public and those with a military connection to Noble also responded to the loss, but in a way that embedded Noble’s death into the military fervor of the early Civil War months. Almost without realizing it, Alabamians in general, and soldiers in particular were walking

¹⁸ Jewett DeVotie Journal, 4-5.

¹⁹ Jewett DeVotie Journal, 8. This was not the only expression from Jewett. He added, “That which we have almost worshiped has gone to God who gave it, and nothing belongs to us save memory and hope – the recollection of the past, and the joys of a reunion in the future. Gone thou art, my brother, but by Gods help we will meet you on the distant shore – in the land of bliss among the homes of the angels!”

through a dress rehearsal of reverence for the many fallen comrades to follow. Even the very beginning of the journey to return Noble's corpse to Columbus drew great attention and being not yet deployed or engaged in military action the soldiers present at Fort Morgan gave all possible martial ceremony to their fallen comrade. An escort of thirty men accompanied the body from the fort to Mobile. Twenty of these were detailed to accompany the body to the place designated for burial. They followed the hearse as pall bearers and the Mobile 'Continental' and 'Mobile Cadets,' the one having about forty, and the other about sixty men headed by a brass band, led the way to the boat.²⁰

After the procession ceremonies in Mobile, Jewett, Tichenor, and representatives from the Selma church escorted Noble's remains via ship to Columbus. In both Selma and Montgomery the ship stopped so family and friends could come aboard to pay respects. Arriving in Columbus, Jewett again chronicled the public outpouring of grief, "Of the remaining scene why need I speak – of cries of my little sister, of the tears of sympathizing friends, of my brother's sorrow, of mother's grief and father's speechless agony."²¹ DeVotie's longtime ministry colleague, Basil Manly, delivered the funeral sermon. Jewett recorded DeVotie's involvement as well, "Father in broken accents and breaking heart for a minute addressed the vast crowd impressing the lesson of obedience upon the young, and resigning his son without a murmur to the God who gave him." Lastly Jewett remembered, "Three volleys of muskets were fired over his grave, then with saddened hearts at the soft hour of twilight we left our dead to

²⁰ Jewett DeVotie Journal, 10. "Never have I felt before the acute sense of loneliness that I experienced on this occasion – the deep regular tramp of the soldiers, the hearse clothed with the habilaments of mourning, the funeral march of the band, and the crowds of strangers upon the pavement – and I the only one in the city from whom alone the dead could claim sympathy. All added additional force to the complete, awful dull sense of isolation."

²¹ Jewett DeVotie Journal, 10.

sweetly slumber until the resurrection morn. Gently rest my brother. Thy life was short but glorious...The rainbow spans the sky but for awhile, yet what more beautiful can be seen.”²²

Although the loss of Noble devastated DeVotie, it provided a context for a continued restoration of his relationship with his occasional Alabama rival, Basil Manly. As with the rejuvenation of DeVotie’s friendship with Jesse Hartwell, physical separation had helped DeVotie and Manly. DeVotie had drawn the ire of Hartwell during his time at Furman Seminary, where Hartwell was a professor. The result was DeVotie’s premature departure from the seminary, but the two later worked closely together for various Baptist ministries in Alabama. Manly had criticized DeVotie when the two were both in Tuscaloosa and then opposed DeVotie’s efforts to develop Howard College. They had already reconciled to some degree when DeVotie was still in Alabama. However, the friendship which had developed between Basil’s son, Charles, and Noble, contributed as well. As a result, Manly not only preached the funeral sermon for Noble but was also invited by DeVotie to preach the opening message that same year for the new church building constructed during DeVotie’s Columbus pastorate. Although these men had once been at odds, DeVotie regularly praised Manly in his memoirs.²³

Even though Noble’s passing was prominent, it was only the beginning of the landslide of loss DeVotie faced over the next three decades. On December 14, 1865, DeVotie and his

²² Jewett DeVotie Journal, 11-13. Later Jewett went to sort out Noble’s affairs and found two wills, one dispersing \$1,000 of a \$5,000 life insurance policy to Lizzie, his sister, and the rest, after debts paid, to Emma Haggerty his fiancé “a lady whom I have never seen, but who for good reasons I judge never entertained much affection for Noble. She has not apparently manifested the least sorrow for the dead.”

²³ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 71 and 121. A Note is pasted out of chronology perhaps aiming to show the “undiminished love” DeVotie received from Basil Manly, from Augusta, Georgia, dated May 11, 1863. Manly wrote, “The subscriber, learning that the bearer, the Rev. James H. DeVotie, is about to visit certain parts of South Carolina, where he may not be personally known to visit his son who is in the army, gladly takes occasion to assure all who may know the writer and not the bearer of this, of the entire trust-worthiness of Brother DeVotie, in every relation. In circles where he is known, The Rev. Mr. DeVotie needs no man’s commendation. To those who know the writer, it is sufficient to say that Bro. DeVotie is worthy to be received with any degree of cordiality and confidence that such may be willing to accord to the writer himself.”

family faced “our second great bereavement.”²⁴ Howard, their second oldest son, became suddenly ill and four days later was dead. Born in Tuscaloosa in 1839, he was educated at Howard College and then Furman University, before finishing at Mercer University. He studied medicine in Philadelphia and then, with the Civil War approaching and anti-southern sentiment rising in northern cities, moved to New Orleans, where he graduated medical school. After passing his medical exams in Charleston, South Carolina, he received a commission in the Confederate Army as an assistant surgeon and served for the remainder of the war in military hospitals. Although Howard exhibited health struggles at the end of the war, the family did not suspect anything seriously wrong.²⁵

DeVotie clearly grieved that Howard did not maintain his church involvement in his adult years. Yet he took encouragement from his son’s profession of faith made in 1855 and his baptism at Hopewell Church, during the brief period when DeVotie preached there after he left Siloam in Marion. DeVotie also rejoiced amidst heartbreak because, “In his last hours he spoke of his Precious Saviour, and gave us reason to hope that he sleeps in Jesus.” This indication of Christian conversion, even if on a deathbed, meant a great deal to a family who believed those who had not embraced Jesus for salvation had little hope of escaping hell. Thus, for DeVotie and the family, Howard’s last words were a “stroke of the divine hand rendered a large supply of grace necessary to hold up our smitten hearts.” DeVotie, finding solace in the Lord, explained, “These losses have thrown a shadow over everything in this world, but our thoughts, and affections have...to heaven where our loved children are gone, and now drink of the rivers of God’s pleasures.”²⁶

²⁴ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 175.

²⁵ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 176.

²⁶ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 176-177.

The loss of three sons in infancy and two in adulthood was made more bearable for DeVotie by the constant presence of his wife whom he called Margaret. But on Oct 21, 1872, DeVotie lost her as well. He recounted, “My expectation has ever been that I would be summoned before her, but Our Heavenly Father has ordered otherwise. She sleeps in Jesus. I must remain for a time, but my pilgrimage will close ere long. The way is lonely without her company.”²⁷ Like the other losses DeVotie faced, this one tested DeVotie’s belief in God’s loving sovereignty as he grappled with what God had “ordered.” Part of how he coped was to reflect on the blessing of the time they had been allotted together. They had enjoyed 38 years of marriage and DeVotie noted the bond they shared: “With mutual joys and sorrows, tears, and smiles. She was distressed when I was in trouble, glad when I was successful and happy.” He specifically cherished her investment in the spiritual wellbeing of his children as he extolled her: “No mother ever loved her children with a more holy or more intense affection. For their prosperity, happiness and usefulness in time, she exerted herself with self consuming devotion and for their Eternal Salvation she plead at the Mercy Seat, with him who giveth life.”²⁸

Those under DeVotie’s ministry who had ever suffered the loss of a child already knew they had an understanding leader in DeVotie. Now, DeVotie would be able to connect deeply with those who had lost a spouse as well. Her passing also allowed DeVotie to further explain his grasp of the afterlife, a source of hope to him, which he would share to bring encouragement to those around him saddened with the decease of cherished family or friends. He believed she was with their other family in heaven: “Even now she doubtless with some of them, enjoys the

²⁷ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 230.

²⁸ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 230-231. DeVotie also described his first wife as “ever sacrificing self for the good of her beloved family and to promote the prosperity of the home circle. Her persevering industry, economy, and judgment in pecuniary matters enabled us to rear and educate our children and maintain a position of gentility in the society where our lot has been cast.”

blessedness which she sought. May those who survive her in the fullness of the time appointed meet those who have gone before. There to reform the family circle to part no more.”²⁹



For DeVotie, it seems the very act of writing about the death of loved ones proved cathartic. This would be the case even if his memoirs were nothing more than general notations about his life. However, they were recorded as letters to his daughters, first Lizzie, and then Georgia. Thus, part of the way he appears to have processed his losses was by writing to his children about them and in that writing both honoring the deceased family member and seeking to exhort the living family member with honorable qualities to be emulated. DeVotie’s cathartic and didactic aim comes forth in his rejoicing in what he heartily believed to be Margaret’s new spiritual state, “Now made perfect all weaknesses removed, all errors corrected, all sin washed away in the blood of the Lamb. Equal unto the angels, she stands justified in Jesus’

²⁹ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 231.

righteousness; clothed in the white robe which the redeemed wear. No tongue can describe the dignity glory and beauty, of our beloved, as she appears in the heavenly places, surrounded by the immortal shining ones who appeared in glory before her.”³⁰ He even drew comfort from her expression on her deathbed, speaking of it as a sign of her destiny, “How strange that change of her countenance was. The Spirit had scarcely left the clay before her face assumed an appearance of many years younger than when well, so peaceful, calm and beautiful.... Was it the heaven begun in the soul before its separation from the tenement of clay, which left such traces upon those features when it took its glad flight?”³¹ For DeVotie his confidence in her eternal destiny was confirmed conclusively by her words before her passing: “She was heard to say a number of times during her short illness, ‘My precious Saviour’ ‘My precious Saviour.’”³²

In the context of this bereavement, DeVotie described the way his faith increasingly shaped his hope. Referring to the third chapter of First Thessalonians, he instructed, “We are not permitted to mourn as those who have no hope because the death and resurrection of Jesus, together with his promised second coming gives assurance, that those who sleep in Jesus will come with him, and then bodies will be raised from their graves, and the mortal shall put on immortality.” In the same paragraph he pointed to the events surrounding the raising of Lazarus from the dead, “May grace be given us, that our tears may flow in a gentle measure, and our weeping be kindred to that at Bethany, when ‘Jesus Wept’ tears which dim not the eye of faith, nor quench the flame of love.” This defined his goal for the grieving process personally and served as a source of his own formation. But he also harnessed his conviction about these matters as a source for shaping many to whom he ministered in loss. Ultimately DeVotie saw even this loss as a tool in the Lord’s hands to transform him. He pleaded, “O thou our covenant

³⁰ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 231-233.

³¹ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 232-233.

³² DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 233.

God. Father Son and Holy Spirit, comfort and aid our feeble hearts. Sanctify this bereavement to our souls [*sic*] eternal welfare that we may glorify thee on earth and enjoy thee more forever in heaven. Thy will be done.”³³

Just a little more than a year later, on December 23, 1873, DeVotie married Georgia. She would survive DeVotie and for the first three years of their marriage DeVotie enjoyed reprieve from his previous decade of struggle. Then tragedy struck again. Born July 25, 1849, Elizabeth “Lizzie” Anne held a special place in DeVotie’s life as his only daughter and youngest child from his first marriage to live beyond infancy. As mentioned above, the majority of DeVotie’s memoirs were addressed by him to her, not just as a history of his life, but as a reference point for her life. She passed away in 1876. The way DeVotie’s losses connected with fellow Baptists, near and far, is evidenced by what the *South-Western Baptist* stated at the time: “A gracious God has seen fit to afflict the family often of late.... We in common with all others who know and love this good man, feel our hearts saddened at this his last grievous affliction.”³⁴

Sadly, the losses continued. DeVotie’s son Jewett, born in 1841, who played such an instrumental role during the time of Noble’s death, eventually studied two years at the University of Alabama, then Columbian College in Washington, D.C. Lastly, he attended Mercer University, graduating in 1860. In 1861 he joined the Columbus Guards, a military unit from Georgia, but after attempting to serve was honorably discharged because of ongoing health problems. In 1863, he became an editor for the *Columbus Daily Enquirer* newspaper. He continued in this capacity through the merger of this paper with the *Columbus Daily Sun* in 1874. In 1875, he assumed the role of editor-in-chief. According to an editorial in the paper, Jewett

³³ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 234.

³⁴ *South-Western Baptist*, Apr 6, 1876 and Feb 28, 1860. D.P. Bestor, whose son was nearby during Noble’s accident wrote a public letter of condolence, stating, “What can I say to your bereaved family? How suddenly is the cup of happiness dashed to the ground. How necessary the consolations of religion.”

pursued all of these duties in the daily condition of an “invalid,” noting that “severe attacks of sickness have repeatedly confined him to his room for several days at a time.”³⁵ Although DeVotie had lived many years aware of Jewett’s chronic sickly condition, he felt the sting of Jewett’s passing April 4, 1881. DeVotie continued to wrestle with God’s loving sovereignty but also now expressed an understandably powerful sense of loneliness: “Alas now they are all gone. I have outlived all of the precious family inexpressibly dear to my heart....Jewett whom I expected to survive me has suddenly been summoned away from the earth and I am alone.” DeVotie even felt Jewett had predicted this loneliness, “He said to me once, ‘I would not be surprised if you live to see us all in the grave.’ Viewed from an earthly standpoint this bereavement is overwhelming. How sad to stand in the cemetery inclosure of the family by the grave of the last one, with no relative to weep with me.” Yet, with continued resilience of faith, DeVotie expressed, “But it is not from an earthly standpoint from which my heart contemplates this seeming desolation. From Pisgah top I see the promised land....They sleep in Jesus. Their flesh rests in hope.” He aimed to accept God’s plan in these losses as he was convinced he had to, “It has been good for them, and for me or he would not have taken them away...I would not call them back from their mansions of Eternal rest and holiness in the skies. It would be cruel, selfish, criminal in on to summon them to be with me...I can go to them, they cannot return to me and the time of my departure cannot be far away.”³⁶

Apparently despite the affirmations of belief recorded in his journal at the time of Noble’s death, Jewett had remained circumspect concerning a formal commitment to the Christ and to the local church. In light of Jewett’s public newspaper role and DeVotie’s public religious role, the spiritual matters of the DeVoties appeared for the whole community to read.

³⁵ *Columbus Daily Enquirer-Sun*, Apr 5, 1881.

³⁶ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 409-410.

The assumption of the unidentified writer was that the community should know the spiritual status of the deceased, both due to his role as editor and as the son of a man who had been a noted religious leader in Columbus for many years. The editorial at the time of his death recorded about Jewett:

In his wide search after knowledge and intellectual exercise, Mr. Devotie had wrestled with the masters in every line and on every side of religious discussion, and had been known in the course of his life to give utterance to views at variance with those commonly entertained by pious people. As he had never made a formal profession of religion, considerable solicitude was felt by some of his christian friends to know what might be his spiritual frame at this critical moment. Nor was their desire unrewarded; for with calmness, distinctness and emphasis, he expressed his sense of gratitude to God for all his mercies, and a fervent hope that ‘God had for Christ’s sake forgiven his sins.’³⁷

DeVotie might have hoped that with a new, relatively young wife and with already having endured so much suffering under what he continued to believe was God’s sovereign and loving purpose, that his final years might be marked by a happier prospect for his progeny. Initially this appeared to be the case and the arrival of newborn children clearly helped renew and sustain DeVotie’s joy. Georgia, born Sept 24, 1875, would survive him. And he had great hopes for Mary Anna, born in 1879. He expressed thanksgiving at her birth, “Some events of our lives ought to be permanently recorded because of their importance, and on account of the special manifestations of the Divine favor by which they are attended...It has pleased our heavenly Father to commit to our keeping another immortal being...whom we will name Mary Anna DeVotie...”³⁸ He was allowed just under a decade with this child.

Not yet aware what the fate of Mary Anna would be, or that of his fourth child of this second marriage, DeVotie expressed his hope at the birth of his third daughter, Lucia Lillian, born July 2, 1881: “Before her advent, many prayers had been offered for the child to be sanctified, and brought into being to glorify God and enjoy Him forever – that life should not be

³⁷ *Columbus Daily Inquirer-Sun*, Apr 5, 1881.

³⁸ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 2, 336.

bestowed to live in sin...Lord remember these prayers and grant that this babe may be blessed and be a blessing...Early we pray that thou wilt draw her to thyself, renew her heart, and through Jesus unite her to him, the Resurrection and the Life.”³⁹ Continuing to work out his belief in a sovereign, loving God, DeVotie prayed, “If thou shouldst spare her long or take her soon, or to whatever thou mayest call her, may we ever realize thy wisdom and love and say Thy will in all things evermore be done.”⁴⁰ She died June 16, 1882, eliciting DeVotie’s painful account, “Our bright and beautiful Lucia Lillian left us for her heavenly home. We gave her back into Jesus’ arms knowing that she will sweetly rest on our Redeemer’s breast. ‘The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away and blessed be the name of the Lord.’”⁴¹

Around this time DeVotie’s style of expression in his memoirs began to shift. Rather than writing primarily about various life events, he became more poetic. He used this form both to emote during losses and to celebrate key events like wedding anniversaries. In the case of Lillian’s passing, he penned this a poem, “Not one year past, when Jesus came, Our loaned Lillian to claim; Resigned we laid her on his breast, Sweet place of everlasting rest. Strange mystery, Why this visit made! So short the enchanting vision stayed. Bow aching hearts submission, bow. Our child is God’s bright angel now.”⁴² In sadly similar fashion Lewis Pyron DeVotie was born April 14, 1886 and died May 6, 1887. DeVotie continued to feel the impact of these losses but also maintained his faith in the face of them.

Just as DeVotie provides a lens into how Baptists in Alabama and Georgia responded to the loss of human life, he also sheds light on the impact of material devastation. When the Confederacy collapsed, like many other southerners, DeVotie watched his entire life savings

³⁹ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 2, 325-326.

⁴⁰ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 2, 326.

⁴¹ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 2, 336.

⁴² DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 2, 336.

evaporate and mourned, “I remain but those for whom those toils, and sacrifices were endured mostly, with all the funds, have passed away.” Clearly saddened by God’s removal of his carefully acquired financial reserve, DeVotie nevertheless saw the loss as a call to continue diligent labor: “While we see the vanity, and uncertainty of earthly things; yet we are under obligation to exert ourselves, and in submission to Gods pleasure, make such provision for the future as Christianity approves, and providential circumstances may suggest.”⁴³

Apparently this propelled DeVotie to seek the welfare of others in need more earnestly. His own material losses translated to heartfelt pastoral concern for others around him who suffered differently but also deeply, both during and immediately after the war. He recalled, “Two winters, the wives of soldiers, and their families, suffered greatly for wood, which with these funds I tried to supply. When the collapse of the war came, many who had lived in affluence were left in perfect destitution. They could tell whether they found a sympathizing friend in your Father.”⁴⁴ DeVotie had demonstrated a heart for the downtrodden during the antebellum period when the monetary contributions of his affluent church members had provided personal prosperity for him. In the tumultuous economic months that followed the Civil War he did not have the same financial backing from church members he had once enjoyed but he continued his ministry to the poor.

Georgians also underwent significant emotional trauma that required fortitude on DeVotie’s part to overcome in order to help sustain his parishioners. DeVotie documented the suffering of the last days of the war in Columbus: “Nor was the succeeding day and night less devoid of horrors. The sacking of Broad Street the burning of the factory, foundries, rail road depots, cotton warehouses, workshops, the bursting of thousands of burning shells not one fourth

⁴³ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 205. DeVotie had saved \$15,000 in an investment fund that had \$1,200 at end of the War.

⁴⁴ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 131.

a mile from us. And when the army had departed, the undeterred dread of a rearguard of avengers, and thieving spoilers.” He continued, “With most of our men prisoners, and marched away with their conqueror, the agony of suspense was intolerable. I could not spend two more such days, and three nights for a world.”⁴⁵ In the perception of DeVotie, this was not the end of the struggle, which according to him, lasted “six long years of tyrannical oppressive reconstruction and dishonest administration by thieving robbing officials.”⁴⁶

DeVotie’s shepherding of the suffering South also came forth in his commitment to meet practical needs in the months and years following the war. Having used his fund-raising skills just before the war to erect a new Baptist church in Columbus subsequent to the war he turned his efforts to overseeing programs for the needy people of the city. After Wilson’s raid of Columbus, DeVotie implored others in “more favored regions” to give, pleading, “These are your true sufferers – silent, uncomplaining sufferers. Home, elegances, schools, nature’s protectors, all gone. Their’s is a speechless agony. God will bless those who minister to these afflicted ones.” DeVotie appealed to the emotions of potential donors, positing, “I have reason to believe that numbers have perished lately (not of this last class) for want of proper food and clothing – three children from one family, from 10 to 15 years old. The farmers have not made half crops, and the sufferings of the people must be severe this winter. I fear far beyond our power here to relieve.”⁴⁷

Building upon his success in soliciting funds, demonstrated so clearly during his ministry in Alabama, DeVotie became known as the “Prince of Beggars” in Georgia. One observer described him as a “skilled general” when he spoke for Baptist causes.⁴⁸ Concerning the

⁴⁵ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 124-125.

⁴⁶ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 127-128.

⁴⁷ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 132.

⁴⁸ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 89; *Atlanta Constitution*, May 20, 1881.

devastation, DeVotie addressed supporters in Kentucky, “Everything was burned, throwing these multitudes of women and children out of employment, in almost utter destitution. The factories are being rebuilt, but many months must pass before they can afford compensating labor. Our merchants were robbed, our cotton burned, and the rich and benevolent rendered measurably powerless to afford assistance to the suffering.” DeVotie confessed the inability of the local churches to muster help, “We have not had time nor opportunity to recover from these disasters; and a sad state of affairs exists here at present. The benevolent are trying to do something, but the amount of destitution and suffering which stare us in the face this winter is disheartening.” He continued, “If our friends appropriate anything for this field, I will attend to the distribution, aided by the most pious and trustworthy of our people,” apparently banking on his reputation as a respected Gospel minister and careful manager of church funds.⁴⁹

DeVotie not only responded to the need around him by using his fundraising skills to see physical needs met. He also continued to employ his pastoral gifts to meet emotional and spiritual struggles. Spending roughly half of his ministry years shepherding a southern population wracked with the pain of Civil War loss, DeVotie constantly proclaimed both God’s goodness and sovereignty. What Levere called the “facing of all weathers” also shaped DeVotie’s daily pastoral duties. He explained how he reoriented his approach to his systematic visits to each household in his congregation annually:

In the early part of my ministry my pastoral visits were less beneficial I think than in later years. While I visited with regularly and often, and thus impressed all the members that I felt a deep interest for them, and kept up a pleasant acquaintance yet my conversation was much upon common every day topics and less spiritual than of late years. The change consists mainly, in shorter calls, seldom exceeding half an hour, religious conversation in the main, though not exclusive of a cheerful interchange of views concerning passing events, always closing with prayer. Many of my visits were made after tea in the evening in order to find all the family at home. These visits were longer,

⁴⁹ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 132; *Western Recorder*, Nov 2, 1866.

and usually were very pleasant, the precious children being participants. I tried to visit each member four times a year, in case of sickness frequently.⁵⁰

DeVotie not only met people on a personal level of pastoral care, but also ministered to mind and soul through his regular preaching ministry. Indeed, he was regularly in demand to preach funerals.⁵¹ DeVotie's sermon journals reveal a newfound emphasis on suffering and hope even expressed in sermons that would not seem readily applicable to the topic. In a sermon titled "Creation Beautiful" DeVotie noted the dominion of God in creating the world and people. He tied this to suffering: "The unseemly [is] advancing to perfectness. In providence, the tear of today prepares a gush of joy tomorrow. Jacobs exclamation over his sorrow 'All these things are too hard for me.' Was preparatory to the restoration of his son Joseph and expressions of content."⁵² In the same sermon, DeVotie drew from a passage from Ecclesiastes on the meaninglessness of earthly life and stated, "Man's glory is unsafe even in the grave." DeVotie then urged his hearers to find happiness in this life in God and to apply themselves to doing good in whatever ways they could. In light of DeVotie's own example of pressing through suffering, messages of this sort undoubtedly powerfully encouraged those who knew both their family members and their southern cause had been lost to find hope in God, pressing ahead with their daily tasks.

Those in his congregation certainly knew their own deep losses and recognized in his experience one who could meet them in their suffering. Others noted the same, even those who only knew DeVotie from a distance. Levere, who had become acquainted with the DeVotie family through writing about Noble, observed that DeVotie was "a man whose face could hardly

⁵⁰ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 211.

⁵¹ *South-Western Baptist*, Nov 29, 1860. DeVotie demonstrated his effectiveness in preaching on many occasions including funerals. Concerning the funeral of J. E. Dawson in Columbus, the article stated, DeVotie delivered "an appropriate and very affecting discourse"; *South-Western Baptist*, Jun 28, 1860.

⁵² DeVotie Sermon Journals, Vol 1, 19-20, Special Collection, Samford University Library.

fail to impress one with its native power. In his old age it became like the side of a rugged mountain, seared and scared with the facing of all weathers, but withal attractive and winning.”⁵³ The “searing and scaring” began to change DeVotie personally, even before he faced the full avalanche of losses during his second marriage. His memoirs leading up to the early 1870s emphasized his tally of important personal accomplishments. He seemed even to record them with pride, though he diligently acknowledged God’s ultimate hand in all. After this point, DeVotie arrived at a deeper place of humility. “How solemn the thought. The Lord have mercy upon me in that day. If ambition or the love of applause has been the aim...then how sad may be the ruin.”⁵⁴ Prior to his losses, DeVotie understood the need to seek humility and guard against pride of accomplishment. Yet as each loss struck its blow, he began to actually experience how much he was not in control and was entirely dependent on God’s working.

The severity of suffering in DeVotie’s life is not only significant for the story it reveals of his personal fortitude, for what it reveals about how evangelical southerners faced death, and for how it propelled DeVotie to minister in fresh ways to suffering Baptists in Alabama and Georgia. DeVotie’s losses also made him a tragic figure who was thereby shielded to some degree from those who might want to criticize his ministry initiatives. Any opponents seeking to forcefully resist DeVotie’s plans faced the difficulty of appearing to push against a man already beaten down by family losses. DeVotie’s suffering proved an added support to the sometimes controversial centralization efforts he pursued by fostering a deep emotional connection between him and his hearers. Especially given the highly democratic polity of the Baptist church, this deep connection with congregations allowed DeVotie to continue his efforts at institution building and professionalization somewhat immune to challengers or nay-sayers. The powerful

⁵³ Levere, *The Record*, 26.3 (Sep 1906): 249.

⁵⁴ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 198.

combination comes forth in the following taken from a weekly secular newspaper, documenting Baptist leaders:

He is a man of commanding powers, towering in the pulpit and unsurpassed as a platform speaker and for ability on the floor of the House. When he undertakes to carry a point, that point will be carried. He is a man of inimitable tact, of delicate and exquisite humor, of a bounding warmth of heart, and of boundless generosity of spirit and charity of feeling. . . He possesses one of those genuinely pious hearts that melts beneath gospel influence and affects to tears those who may be heeding his pathetic appeals.⁵⁵

Lastly, DeVotie's losses, when channeled into his need to show what he called "usefulness" in his life, actually drove him to further ministry productivity in the final decades of his life. The decimation of his family legacy might have left him emotionally paralyzed and clinically depressed. DeVotie certainly conveyed a sense of helplessness with regard to the Lord's will for his progeny. However, because of his enduring vision to "beautify" the world through his ministry efforts, and his continually deepening belief in God's loving sovereignty, he redirected his desire for his own family prosperity into his highly productive ministry life.

DeVotie's desire for legacy also informs the interpretation of his recorded lists of churches and missionaries. For instance, he recorded how many were baptized, and who from a particular church entered pastoral ministry. Although the meticulous notes he makes in his memoirs about the membership at each church do seem a bit self-congratulatory, they also were a way for DeVotie to remind himself that he was leaving behind a growing family of God, even if he left behind almost no biological family. This desire for a lasting legacy is seen most clearly in his work as the Corresponding Secretary for the Georgia Baptist Missions Board. Through his regular mentoring of between 20 and 30 missionary pastors across the state, he was able to find the fulfillment of ministry "offspring" in the numerous new churches which were begun.

⁵⁵ "Distinguished Ministers in the Southern Baptist Convention," *Weekly Georgia Telegraph*, (Macon, GA) May 14, 1869, Issue 26.

In the midst of his suffering, DeVotie transitioned out of pastoral ministry in 1877, to his new mission board role, and began what ended up being his final 14 years of life and ministry. In these pinnacle years of “usefulness” in expanding Baptist ministries in the South, DeVotie overcame his setbacks to direct, mentor, and resource missionaries to Georgia. These men planted new churches, seeking to saturate the entire state with the Baptist faith. The majority of them were white men, reaching white southerners, but a number were black pastors. For DeVotie, these years were the culmination of his work to establish, expand and entrench the Baptist church in Alabama and Georgia.

CHAPTER 9

MOBILIZING AND MULTIPLYING THROUGH MISSIONS

In 1870, DeVotie's second extended pastorate came to an end and he moved from Columbus, Georgia to Griffin, Georgia. He was remembered by the church in Columbus as "a man of destiny" and one "whose name in our church annals must ever be inscribed in letters of light."¹ DeVotie led the church in Griffin for seven years, continuing to carry out many of the same ministry initiatives indicative of his first 40 years in ministry. It was during his pastorate in Griffin that DeVotie experienced much family suffering and transition, losing his first wife, remarrying, having another child, and losing his adult daughter from his first marriage. These were also the years when DeVotie began recording his memoirs, which he continued adding to until his death in 1891.

In 1877, DeVotie left First Baptist Church of Griffin and would not serve as a pastor of a local church again. In that year he was selected by his peers to become the first Corresponding Secretary of the newly formed State Mission Board of the Georgia Baptist Convention.² For DeVotie this was not an entirely new enterprise, since during his Marion pastoral ministry he labored as one of the trustees of the Southern Baptist Convention's Domestic Mission Board, and for six months, as its Corresponding Secretary. However, in his position with the Georgia board,

¹ Porter, 11-12. This church history also records the story of Dr. Louie DeVotie Newton, a Baptist pastor in Georgia. Newton's parents gave him the middle name "DeVotie" out of their respect for DeVotie, after hearing him speak at their church.

² *History of First Baptist Church, Griffin, Georgia: 1841-1882*. Special Collection, Samford University, 11; *Georgia Weekly Telegraph and Georgia Journal & Messenger*, Jul 24, 1877, Issue 1 and May 12, 1874, Issue 40. DeVotie continued his rise to prominence among Baptist leaders in the 1870s and even served as one of four Vice Presidents of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1874.

DeVotie's lifelong efforts to establish and expand Baptist institutions in the South reached a high point.³ Over the next 14 years, he continued expending himself for the Baptist faith by mobilizing numerous missionaries within the state of Georgia. They planted new churches and pastored struggling congregations. Through the efforts of these missionaries he multiplied his own influence many fold. In order to provide for the work of the missionaries he had to overcome remaining hesitation among Baptists about the validity and efficacy of denominational mission boards.

His "letterbooks" of correspondence with missionaries reveal his role in resourcing, in overseeing, and in encouraging these men. In this capacity he also continued to interact with black Baptists. The black missionaries supported by the predominantly white Georgia Baptist Convention generally made up two or three among the 20 to 30 missionaries DeVotie oversaw. Frequently they also received support from one of the northern Baptist mission boards and usually aligned with one of the newly formed black Baptist conventions. Although his denomination waned in willingness to offer support to the newly forming separate black churches, DeVotie pressed hard for them to do so right up to his death in 1891. DeVotie's endeavors with the board also display his passion to continue the evangelistic outreach emphasis of earlier Baptists. Even though many Baptists were becoming complacent now that Baptists had grown to such large numbers in the South, DeVotie pressed forward.

For most Baptist boards the corresponding secretary carried out his weekly tasks under the oversight of the trustees and president. The corresponding secretary drew financial support for himself and the missionaries from benevolent churches and individuals. The president typically led the board and a treasurer might be appointed for accountability with financial

³ Porter, 14. He stated that for DeVotie becoming the Corresponding Secretary for the Georgia State Mission Board was the "crowning climax of his illustrious life."

resources, but the corresponding secretary generally served as the primary employee directing the logistics and activities of the organization. In the case of the Georgia Mission Board, DeVotie traveled to promote missions, raised money for missions, appointed missionaries who generally were starting new churches in Georgia, and oversaw the work of both black and white missionaries.

Baptist missions as an organized denominational effort rather than simply the pursuit of individual churches emerged in America during DeVotie's lifetime and proved to be both a productive enterprise and a contentious issue for Baptists. Baptist mission efforts on a national scale in America began in 1814 with the formation of the Triennial Convention which met in Philadelphia and drew attendees from several states, primarily in the Northeast. At the time, Baptists across the country were cautious about how to work together for missions, but they also saw the need to reach the world and the nation collaboratively with their message. Some favored the "society" approach, which consisted of individual Baptists joining together for a particular cause. Others preferred the "convention" format where churches typically sent delegates as representatives. In neither case did Baptists desire to establish any church hierarchy or ruling body over the local congregations. However, the convention method lent itself to more centralization. The Triennial, so named for the timing of its general meetings, actually functioned as a society, but bore the title of convention.

The history of the Triennial provides important background for DeVotie's efforts because in its early years, some of its leaders aimed to establish an institutional structure not only for foreign missions, but also for domestic missions, educational efforts, and publications. Luther Rice in particular, who had worked with Adoniram Judson, the foremost foreign Baptist missionary of the early 1800s, believed the convention should not only support foreign work, but

also build a denominational college and deploy domestic missionaries. However, when the educational venture sputtered and funds for foreign missions stalled, the convention rapidly curtailed its domestic work. Because it was founded foremost as a foreign missions agency, the convention's functions were refocused on overseas work. By the end of the 1820s, as northerners grew increasingly leery of ceding too much influence to slaveholding Baptists in the South, they sought to consolidate power for the convention in the Northeast. The struggle to develop and control the Triennial is illustrative of Baptist attitudes, not just about foreign missions or sectionalism, but about national cooperation to establish Baptist institutions.

As a result, many Baptists who supported some form of mission agency approach, redirected their efforts in the first half of the nineteenth century away from forming a robust national convention. At the same time the Hardshell Baptists also stood opposed to the Triennial, and even the state conventions. The Hardshell objection stemmed not from a concern for world missions over against national missions or even sectionalism, but from opposition to any significant organizational structure outside the local church. During the 1850s the Landmark Baptists also frequently opposed the work of conventions and societies because both sometimes cooperated with non-Landmark Baptists and even with other denominations. For those, like DeVotie, who labored for the formation and expansion of mission boards, the goal was to maintain the evangelistic zeal typical of the Second Great Awakening while pursuing outreach through the organized efforts of all the churches, nationally or in a particular state.⁴ Forty years after DeVotie began to press through the resistance of Hardshell and Landmark Baptists in Alabama to advance his early institutional initiatives, he faced a lessened but similar antagonism to his leadership of the organized Georgia mission efforts. DeVotie could scarcely have been

⁴ Gardner, "Baptists in Georgia: 1733-2010," <http://libraries.mercer.edu/tarver/archives/media/History.pdf>, Jun 29, 2010 "The founding of the State Mission Board and the employment of a professional leader, J. H. DeVotie, in 1877 proved to be significant as a means of rejuvenating broader Baptist ministries."

more active in building the local church, but unlike those opposing him, saw no significant incongruity with spearheading missions agencies as well. Had the Hardshell perspective on missions agencies prevailed across the South as it did in some regions or had the failures of the Triennial been allowed to poison the missions agency well the shape of Baptist influence and ministry might have been dramatically curtailed.⁵

From his early years as a believer DeVotie recognized the importance of mission efforts and contemplated his own role in the work: “When first converted, the foreign mission work appeared peculiarly desirable, and afterwards my desires inclined that way, but time has demonstrated that my work was at home.” DeVotie had such a high perception of the value of mission work that he wrote about it to his daughter in his memoirs. DeVotie apparently felt the need to justify why he had not chosen to join the growing foreign missionary movement among evangelicals in the nineteenth century, “Yet I have felt it to be no second class duty, to exert every influence, and give liberally, to send the living missionary and the translated word, to the heathen; while the home destitution was equally important to be cultivated by the home missionary, and the supply of the people with the Scriptures.”⁶

Serving as corresponding secretary in Georgia was not the first time DeVotie worked integrally in a denominational mission effort. During his years in Marion, the Domestic Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention located their main office for the entire South in Marion, on the Siloam Baptist Church property. Southern Baptists established this board in 1845 when the Southern Baptist Convention first met. The convention tasked the board with reaching the frontier, evangelizing slaves, and building up struggling churches. DeVotie served as the president for this board during the mid-1800s. The board appointed their first missionaries in

⁵ Wyatt-Brown, 510, 512.

⁶ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 89.

1846 and by 1848 had a missionary to slaves. In 1855 the convention voted to merge the Indian Mission into the Domestic Board and in 1873 did the same with the Sunday School Board. In 1874 the Southern Baptist Convention renamed this conglomerate the Home Mission Board. Eventually, in 1882, the board relocated to Atlanta. I.T. Tichenor served at the end of the century as the head of this board. Although the board initially struggled to survive, let alone prosper, he recorded that the board had, in its course of existence engaged the work of over 2600 missionaries and contributed to the adding of 67,000 new members to the Southern Baptist Convention.⁷

DeVotie served as a stabilizing influence when the success of the Domestic Board seemed questionable right from its outset. Given the prominence and favorable standing of Basil Manly across the Baptist denomination, the selection of him in 1845 as the first president looked like a promising start. But he resigned after the board's first meeting likely due to his assessment that gaining significant financial support for the endeavor would be trying. Likewise, J.L. Reynolds, who was the first corresponding secretary for the board, Daniel Perrin Bestor, Sr., the second corresponding secretary, and even the first treasurer, Thomas Chilton, all served only briefly. As with other areas of Baptist collaboration and institution building, the fear of centralization and preference for grass roots initiatives presented a huge hurdle for denominational mission organizations. D. P. Bestor wrote "I have learned by visiting many, and by extensive correspondence, that our brethren prefer carrying on their domestic missionary operations, through their Associations and State Conventions. They approve, invariably, of our Southern organization; but I cannot persuade them to act efficiently in its support."⁸ Bestor's

⁷ Rutledge, 41-42.

⁸ *Proceedings of the First Triennial Meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention Held in Richmond, Virginia, June 10, 11, 12, 13, 1846.* Richmond: H. K. Ellyson, 171 Main Street, 1846, 29-30.

assessment may have been accurate, but DeVotie gathered several of his Marion ministry peers and the board was able to continue its work.

The early work of the Domestic Mission Board, based in Marion, not only exemplified DeVotie's early passion for missions, but also again displayed how men transplanted from the North worked together to help drive the efforts of Baptists in the South. At the same time they were spearheading Baptist educational efforts in the South, Milo P. Jewett served as first Recording Secretary on the Domestic Mission Board and Jesse Hartwell was the second President. Russell Holman, who took over as Corresponding Secretary after Bestor, was a native of Massachusetts who had also relocated to the South. DeVotie served as president from 1849 to 1857, after which he departed Marion for Columbus.

Throughout his ministry DeVotie exerted himself in support of organized missions work. He regularly preached sermons about missions as a guest at other churches, association gatherings, convention meetings, and revival services.⁹ He had also already learned how to manage missions funding during his involvement with the Domestic Mission Board in Marion. Always careful to encourage financial supporters, DeVotie even showed his fundraising savvy by publishing a note to an anonymous giver in the *Alabama Baptist*. He wrote, "For several years...I have received through the post-office...a Fifty Dollar bill....This unknown contributor signs himself, 'A friend of Missions.' I hereby acknowledge the receipt...from this source.... 'He that seeth in secret shall reward openly.'"¹⁰

⁹ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 122. "I suppose the interest which is manifested upon the subject of missions the reasons [*sic*] my request appointment to preach the missionary sermon before My Association, The Cahaba 46.48.52.53 Columbus 59.62.67 Ala Bap Conv 34.41.56 Ga Bap. 6?"; *South-Western Baptist*, Aug 23, 1860. DeVotie preached on missions; *The Charleston Mercury*, May 12, 1859, Issue 50. An article on the Southern Baptist Convention meeting stated that DeVotie reported to those gathered and "zealously urges the cause of domestic missions, and points out various fields where great destitution exists. More men are needed, so as to swell the number of missionaries by the hundreds."

¹⁰ *Alabama Baptist*, Mar 2, 1849.

His record of successful efforts in this regard, when combined with his recognized denominational leadership, diligent work ethic, and administrative capacity, made him an ideal candidate to fill the role of Corresponding Secretary for the Georgia Mission Board in 1877. His widespread contact with various Georgia Baptists allowed him the position and the position also allowed him to further spread his influence. His work involved regularly connecting in person with as many of the supported missionaries as possible. As Corresponding Secretary, DeVotie travelled extensively to churches and association meetings across Georgia promoting the cause. He apparently even received complimentary rail passes to help facilitate his frequent travel. However, much of his ministry, as his title suggests, also transpired from his desk, with pen and paper. For instance, just in the period from September 1878 to July 1879, he penned at least 147 letters to colleagues, supporters, and missionaries. These letters, joined with DeVotie's memoirs, paint a vivid picture of how he understood missions. They also show how he directed the efforts of his agency in Georgia through struggles not only to fund the work but also to collaborate with northern Christians and black church leaders.¹¹

He believed the institution of the mission board served a crucial purpose. Referring to the "agents" who worked as fund raisers for these boards, he contended, "'Tis useless to think of dispensing with agents – they are essential to the existence and progress of all missionary enterprises of a general character."¹² For DeVotie, neither the mission board nor society created an assault on the local congregation but merely allowed the local congregation to have the most effective impact upon a target region, by pooling resources, developing outreach strategy, and centralizing organizational tasks. To DeVotie, this was not only an acceptable way to carry out

¹¹ James H. DeVotie Letterbooks, Special Collection, Samford University Library, Birmingham, Alabama, Apr 19, 1879 to M. E. Cooper. DeVotie noted "I am often away from the Mission room 10 days or more..."; Letterbooks, Sep 22, 1878 to Rev. B.F. Riley. The Letterbooks are copies of correspondence DeVotie conducted in his capacity as Corresponding Secretary for the Georgia Mission Board.

¹² *South-Western Baptist*, Feb 19, 1857 and Aug 10, 1854.

the work of God's kingdom, it was the ideal way. For this reason he expended his final years and the full leadership capital acquired over his successful ministry to see the Georgia Mission Board prosper. Having served during his ministry career as pastor to several developing churches, he now ensured the placement of ministers in the varied mission churches scattered across Georgia. His correspondence with these missionary pastors reveals the simple evangelical priorities DeVotie had always cherished and in the final years of his life advanced through an increasingly extensive denominational structure.

State mission work proved yet another challenging battlefield in DeVotie's struggle to develop the Southern Baptist churches through building denominational institutions. In the past missionaries had been employed under the supervision of the state convention. However, the Baptists in Georgia had not at that time established any official board and they made only limited progress to work together for establishing new churches. Part of the difficulty came at the local level and part at the national level. Although the state convention placed and supported missionaries, the Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention also deployed missionaries. Occasionally, a local association might have their own missionary as well. The establishment of the Georgia State Mission Board included a clear statement of its intention. In 1879 the state convention adopted a motion declaring, "That we respectfully request the Southern Baptist Convention to instruct both Home and Foreign Mission Boards...to work through our State Mission Board." At this same time the state board also urged all pastors to regularly raise funds for this joint effort to advance the Gospel in the state.¹³

DeVotie's considerable fund-raising, leadership, and administrative gifts were particularly tested by national financial setbacks. During his tenure he found himself in an uphill

¹³ Minutes, Georgia Baptist Convention 1878, 1879, Archives, Tarver Library, Mercer University, Macon Georgia; James Adams Lester, *A History of the Georgia Baptist Convention, 1822-1972*, (Nashville: Curley Printing Company, 1972), 226-227.

fundraising battle to support a rather controversial new effort in the midst of a faltering economy. In the immediate post-Civil War years the nation experienced a significant economic boom driven by increased industrial production and international trade. However, by the time DeVotie assumed his role as Corresponding Secretary, the national economy had stagnated in the “Long Depression,” an economic decline in Europe and America which began with the Panic of 1873. The United States remained in a depression until early 1879, but did not realize full recovery until the mid-1890s.¹⁴ Practically, this economic decline worked against DeVotie’s efforts to mobilize Southern Baptist support for missions in Georgia because it stifled the economic prosperity of supporters. Without necessary funds, DeVotie labored painstakingly to sustain the active missionaries. Regular shortfalls made it all the more difficult to recruit new missionaries since few guarantees of support could be offered.

DeVotie represented the board by distributing funds to help support pastors whose churches were not yet developed enough to pay a pastor or churches which had fallen on hard times. These arrangements were often tenuous, depending on the fluctuations of the annual giving to the state mission board. So, while this outside support certainly allowed churches to develop where they might not have otherwise, the pastors receiving the funds had to be willing to step out in faith that the new church they worked to establish would grow in its giving and outside support would continue until the church could provide fully for the pastor. DeVotie explained a typical arrangement in a letter to Rev. A. C. Ward, informing him that his salary would be \$500 per year, half to be paid by the board and half by the Brunswick church where Ward served.¹⁵ At times, such as the summer of 1879, funds fell so low that DeVotie was prohibited from adding new missionaries even though they were needed. To Rev. J. H. Corley,

¹⁴ Rendigs Fels, "The Long-Wave Depression, 1873-97," *The Review of Economics and Statistics* 31.1 (1949): 69–73.

¹⁵ Letterbooks, Sep 6, 1878 to Rev. A.C. Ward.

DeVotie wrote, “I long to be able to help you but find myself crippled. No funds in hand and but little coming at present.”¹⁶ Corley was a white pastor who ministered in several capacities including shepherding a black Baptist congregation for several years after the end of the Civil War.¹⁷

DeVotie’s vision for Baptist growth continued to include the elevation of Baptist pastors to full-time professional ministers. However, there was a notable upside for the numerous Baptist pastors who were bi-vocational, working a farm or other occupation by day and then fulfilling their pastoral duties in a part-time capacity for free or minimum income. They generally received steady provision from their secular work which was not often the case when relying on church giving for their support, especially in rural or low income settings. Thus, the pastors serving as missionaries who left their homes and occupations to reach a new community put much at risk. In a letter to one such man, D. H. Moore, DeVotie, demonstrated his concern and also the challenge of keeping such men on the “field” given inconsistent funding. DeVotie wrote, “You will risk losing it all if you continue work. Can’t you get help from some of those churches who asked that you might be kept in the field?...Let me know if you venture to continue and risk the loss.”¹⁸ As an implementer of mission institutions, DeVotie knew that his efforts depended on the readiness of the Baptists to work in cooperation financially. In 1879 he wrote, “We can only do what the Baptists of Ga enable us to do.”¹⁹

The ability to determine the disbursement of funds, especially in lean years, gave DeVotie a great deal of influence over the missionaries. Knowing that DeVotie controlled the purse strings would likely have made the missionaries hesitant to challenge his oversight or his

¹⁶ Letterbooks, Jun 20, 1879 to Rev. J. H. Corley.

¹⁷ Barber, 235-239.

¹⁸ Letterbooks, Jan 25 1879 to D. H. Moore.

¹⁹ Letterbooks, Jun 20, 1879 to Rev. C.H. Stilwell.

ministry initiatives. However, the missionary pastors also submitted to DeVotie as part of a structured missionary system. They were nominated by the local association but as DeVotie stated “responsible to us and under our control.”²⁰ DeVotie carried out his oversight role by writing regularly to the missionaries asking them to report to him concerning their ministry progress and any financial concerns.²¹ Although missionaries were by definition enthusiastic to serve, they nevertheless had tough choices to make and were not immune to weighing the hardships of various ministry arenas. DeVotie often helped direct them in their decisions. As D. G. Daniell contemplated relocation in 1879, DeVotie wrote, “Your labor as evangelist in NE Georgia would be about as heavy as your work is now & in winter the weather you know is far more inclement. You have left the subject with the Lord, where it belongs. He will point out the way.”²² Indeed, in cases when funding failed, as was the case with one particular missionary, DeVotie queried simply, “Shall we give it up or wait & work on. Last year was no failure. What do you say?”²³

Funding was essential to all elements of DeVotie’s vision for Baptist growth. As he had learned to press hard for money to establish colleges and erect church edifices in his earlier years, DeVotie now did so in a fulltime capacity to support missions. In 1878, he wrote Rev. B. F. Riley, pastor of a supporting church in Albany, Georgia. He finished his letter with, “Can’t your church send us a contribution we are needing now?”²⁴ Apparently at some points DeVotie used his own savings to sustain himself as secretary. In 1879 he wrote to Rev. J. J. Hyman, “I borrowed money last year upon my own responsibility to keep underway last year for three months at the beginning. I cannot risk it this year.” To one agent he wrote, “My loss is greater

²⁰ Letterbooks, Oct 24, 1878 to Rev. John J. Hyman.

²¹ Letterbooks, Apr 8, 1879 to Rev. A.C. Ward.

²² Letterbooks, Jun 20, 1879 to Rev. D.G. Daniell.

²³ Letterbooks, Jun 20, 1879 to Rev. J.J. Hyman.

²⁴ Letterbooks, Sep 22, 1878 to Rev. B.F. Riley.

than any of the missionaries but we agreed to share the loss if necessary when we accepted our commissions.”²⁵ To several missionaries, he offered a silver lining to the deficit cloud, suggesting they follow his own lead by considering their salary shortfalls a donation to missions.²⁶ At times DeVotie saw encouraging success in his solicitations for money and at other times he was obviously discouraged.

Writing simultaneously to three missionaries in 1879, DeVotie explained, “The Board has done all we can do yet I fear we will fail to pay the amount named in the commissions of our missionaries. If the churches do not give more and generally, our work must be proposed into narrower limits.” Part of the problem, according to DeVotie, stemmed from an incorrect assessment of the actual support base, “We probably overestimated the number of Baptists in the State...Large abatements must be made for antimissions, poor churches, freedmen.” Apparently the situation for these three men was particularly bleak since they had written an “unofficial” appeal to DeVotie, drawing forth this impassioned condolence, “You know I would make all this darkness of yours light if it was in my power. I could not sleep last night after reading your letter...I deeply sympathize with you and pray for you. I am in no bed of roses.” Looking at the denomination across the state, DeVotie estimated only 5000 active Baptists and yet, with visionary optimism, wrote “but that is large enough to work wonders.”²⁷

Just as in DeVotie’s other ministry capacities the support of church women proved invaluable, so with his efforts leading the state board. He wrote to Miss Hattie Dickson in 1879 regarding The Woman’s Missionary Society of Sardis Church, Talbot County. He offered praise, “If all our sisters would contribute their money & influence as you do, our cause would

²⁵ Letterbooks, May 12, 1879 to D.H. Moore.

²⁶ Letterbooks, May 12, 1879 to C.H. Stilwell, and to W.D. Atkinson.

²⁷ Letterbooks, Jan 29, 1879 to D.G. Daniel, W.D. Atkinson, and A.C. Ward.

advance rapidly and our missionaries be well sustained.”²⁸ In a missions report he noted the significance of women’s groups across the state. He explained, “Women’s Missionary Societies in the Baptist churches in Georgia are exerting a powerful influence in arousing the spirit of missions wherever they exist and in raising funds for missions. There are seventy-six societies in the state...Woman’s piety, energy and devotion to any work which she undertakes are sure to produce the desired result. The children would be carried along with them.”²⁹

Despite funding uncertainties, men still sought out positions with the board as missionary pastors. Evangelical missionary zeal and the rapid growth of the Baptist churches yielded a regular flow of candidates for ministry. In 1879, just two years into the work, DeVotie reported 23 missionaries under appointment and by 1884, 30 men were serving.³⁰ Often, but not always, these were young men looking for a place to test and apply their pastoral gifts or with a specific vision to see a church develop in a nearby community. Although opportunities abounded to expand the church, limited resources necessitated a process of selection for those who might serve. DeVotie wrote Mr. Barrow regarding Barrow’s request to see Joseph Wynn working as an agent. He explained to Barrow, “The funds in prospect for State Missions will not justify our making any additional appointments.”³¹ He even had to decline those ready to work with the black population for lack of funds.³² DeVotie’s tasks also included denying men who wanted to serve but lacked the necessary qualifications. In 1878 he wrote to Rev. W. T. Park informing him that another man, Tucker, had been appointed in his place to serve in the Dade County Association, Georgia.³³

²⁸ Letterbooks, June 18, 1879 to Miss Hattie Dickson.

²⁹ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 2, 25-26; *Christian Index*, Nov 18, 1886. DeVotie spoke at women’s mission society gatherings.

³⁰ Letterbooks, Feb 11, 1879 to Campbell and Feb 7, 1879 to W. J. Speairs.

³¹ Letterbooks, Jun 20, 1879 to Bro Barrow.

³² Letterbooks, Jun 11, 1879 to Rev. George Valentine.

³³ Letterbooks, Sep 22, 1878 to W.T. Park.

Near the end of the nineteenth century, in some areas of the country and particularly among less evangelical denominations mission efforts began to shift focus. With the emergence of the “social gospel,” ministries of mercy and service came to supersede the importance of teaching the basic Gospel message and saving souls. In contrast, DeVotie’s ongoing commitment to the priority of communicating the Gospel message through missions is evident from the emphasis on distributing Bibles through state missionaries. DeVotie intended to get the Bible, which conveyed the message of salvation, to Georgians through the Baptist missionaries. He was not content simply for Baptist missionaries to serve the poor or organize ministries of mercy to those in need. He wrote T. C. Tucker, a mission agent in Georgia, “Our missionaries are all required to engage in Bible distribution to increase their usefulness.”³⁴ DeVotie worked hard to secure inexpensive Bibles from northern publishers. They were intended to be sold to recoup costs, but DeVotie wrote to Rev. C. H. Stilwell in 1878, “If you find destitute persons or families who cannot pay, supply them with either kind [of Bible] as you may judge best.” In another letter, dated the same day, DeVotie informed Rev. F. D. Williams “I send you two bundles. Sell to those who are able to purchase, give to those who are not, keeping an exact account of copies given.”³⁵ Through the systematic and extensive distribution of Bibles and tracts, DeVotie aimed to reach the spiritually blind, and even those physically blind. In one communication he refers to “raised letter” braille Bibles.³⁶

For much of his tenure as Corresponding Secretary DeVotie walked a tightrope of seeking help from northern ministries, which he and other Southern Baptist leaders had sharply criticized before the war. Although in 1865 the Southern Baptist Convention had declined an

³⁴ Letterbooks, Jan 28, 1879 to T.C. Tucker.

³⁵ Letterbooks, Sep 23, 1878 to Rev. C.H. Stilwell, and to Rev. F.D. Williams. Oct 1, 1878 letter to J.C. Acworth lists “Bundle Bibles” “25 Helps for Children”, “25 Easy Lessons” and “25 Scripture Lessons”. June 20th, 1879 to B. M. Callaway. Another list of Bibles sent.

³⁶ Letterbooks, Jan 24, 1879 to D. Austin.

“olive branch” request from the American Baptist Home Mission Society to formally join together in missions endeavors, DeVotie and the Georgia Baptists depended on Bible societies based in the North to supply literature for their mission initiatives. As such, it proved imperative for DeVotie to reestablish and maintain connections which were greatly strained during the war. The conflicting agendas between the northern based evangelical organizations and the southern evangelical mission efforts made this no easy task. He wrote to Rev. D. Athnison concerning the careful handling of Bible funds, stating, “They greatly aid us in making our work successful.”³⁷ In another letter to Alex McLean who served as Secretary of the American Bible Society, DeVotie expressed what he perceived as their common evangelical priority, “We have but one object in view which is to make bibles as plentiful in Georgia as gold was in Jerusalem in Solomon’s time. I can never forget that during the war your society did not withhold God’s word from our suffering people.”³⁸ In addition to interaction with Alex McLean, DeVotie communicated with E. D. Fendall of the American Baptist Publication Society. Fendall had helped establish the Baptist Anti-Slavery Convention in 1842.³⁹ DeVotie connected these men and their organizations with the needs in the South. He sought help from these northern societies for all churches in the Georgia, but especially the black congregations. In one letter to McLean, DeVotie inquired on behalf of black pastor, J. W. Jones of Macedonia Baptist Church. The church had burned, and along with it their supply of bibles. DeVotie hoped McLean could help.⁴⁰

The missionary aims of DeVotie and his fellow Georgia Baptists were mixed with regard to the newly freed slaves and the various northern based denominations and agencies. By the

³⁷ Letterbooks, Jan 28, 1879 to Rev. D.W. Athnison. Jun 18th 1879 to Rev. G.W. Colquett, DeVotie stated plans to get “testaments” from Philadelphia.

³⁸Letterbooks, Jan 25, 1879 to Alex McLean.

³⁹ “A New Organization,” *Christian Reflector*, Aug 17, 1842.

⁴⁰ Letterbooks, Jan 25, 1879 to Alex McLean.

late 1870s and through the 1880s, when DeVotie directed the mission board, white southern Baptists had little hope to reunite with their southern black Baptist brethren: most blacks and whites were simply not interested in any such reunion. Instead, as whites established Jim Crow policies and laws to restrain black independence, they frequently pursued the same aims with regard to spiritual matters. In its least malicious form, the attitude of white southern Christians towards blacks was a “sanctified” paternalism, somewhat similar to racial relations in the church prior to the Civil War. Whites aimed to “help” black believers who, with their lack of education in general and spiritual training in particular, “needed” whites to make sure they were theologically on track. Under this approach, white southerners viewed themselves as neighborly aids to the black church in contrast with the outsider northern missionaries and denominations wooing the black churches to align with them. More disturbing was the intentional effort by white Christians to use spiritual connections and benefits to wield authority over the black church, now the central institution for black life in the South.⁴¹

As a result, the black churches were understandably cautious about ceding any of their freedoms to either southern or northern whites. Yet they also recognized their need for help from outside white organizations in the form of religious literature, church buildings, and theological training. Frequently they came to the disappointing realization that the northern organizations proved almost as paternalistic as the southern ones. In particular the northern organizations refused to turn over academic institutions, which they had helped found, to the full control of southern blacks.

⁴¹ Stowell, 6. “For many reasons, white southerners believed, the freedpeople should remain under the religious authority of their former masters. Emancipation did not release southern evangelicals from their duty to evangelize the black race as part of God’s providential plan for their elevation. The freedpeople were too ignorant to proclaim the pure Gospel of Christ or to establish and maintain ecclesiastical organizations. They were vulnerable prey to political ‘missionaries’ from the North, radicals who sought to incite them against their true friends, white southerners. Even more threatening was the possibility that ecclesiastical independence might lead to other forms of independence.”

Part of the difficulty black Baptists were encountering stemmed from the reuniting of northern and southern whites during this period. At the end of the nineteenth century, northern and southern whites came to see themselves as having more in common than in conflict. Although they had fought one another across bloody battle-lines in the 1860s, they now saw themselves needing to unite based on their common race, rather than their sectional difference. As they put their Civil War differences behind them, few whites in either region remained ready to promote full equality of blacks, not only politically, but ecclesiastically and spiritually.⁴²

By the late 1870s the various black Baptist congregations had not only departed from white controlled Baptist church bodies and formed their own local associations, but also began to form their own denomination. Statistics reveal the full extent of this transformation. In 1857, 23,720 slaves populated the interracial churches aligned with the Georgia Baptist Convention. That number decreased to 9,705 by 1870 and then to 1,906 within a few more years. The story was similar in DeVotie's backyard. The number of black Baptists in the the Columbus Baptist Association had risen to 1,387 at the height of the Civil War, but by 1870 all but 375 had officially transferred out.⁴³

The same massive, rapid transition was true in the case of black Methodists, too. They had left to form their own churches in a similar fashion to black Baptists. The African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME), the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church in America (CME), and the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (AMEZ) all began to shape the lives of black Methodists. The southern branch of that denomination, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South,

⁴² Edward J. Blum, *Reforging the White Republic: Race, Religion, and American Nationalism, 1865-1898*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), 2-19; David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory*, (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001), 381-397.

⁴³ Minutes, Columbus Baptist Association, 1857, 1870, Archives, Tarver Library, Mercer University, Macon, Georgia; Barber, 224. He noted that at the end of Reconstruction there were 80,700 in the, now predominantly white Georgia Baptist Convention.

had helped establish the CME in 1870. The AME dated back to the early 1800s, but lacked a heavy presence in the Deep South until the early 1900s. The same was true for the AMEZ. The northern, predominantly white, Methodist Episcopal Church also expressed a goal of reaching Southern blacks.⁴⁴ Like their Baptist counterparts, most black Methodists chose to align with black-run Methodist denominations.

Even as black Christians formally defined their own denominations distinct from both white Southern Baptists and white northern Baptists, these three groups continued to work together where they could. Several areas where whites offered support and blacks willingly received assistance fell under DeVotie's direct purview as Corresponding Secretary for the Georgia State Mission Board. The Board helped direct funds to support a handful of black mission agents. These black pastors helped develop, and sometimes start black congregations that might align with one of the black Baptist denominations or remain completely independent of any denominational ties. DeVotie not only helped by raising funds, but also solicited Christian literature from northern publication agencies specifically for black churches and hosted theological training institutes for black church leaders.⁴⁵ In an official letter to the Board of the American Home Missionary Society, DeVotie confirmed the arrangement for support of the work among the black population. The Georgia board was responsible for one-third of the salary for three black pastors and one white pastor, J. H. Corley, who worked with black churches at the time. The northern board was responsible for the other two-thirds. DeVotie reported 175 baptisms performed by these missionaries during the recent year and noted, "Their reports and work are completely satisfactory. Without the continuance of your cooperation we will be

⁴⁴ Barber, 183.

⁴⁵ *Weekly Georgia Telegraph*, Nov 5, 1869, Issue 17.

unable to continue the work. We anxiously wait for your reply. I know of no work more important pressing & promising.”⁴⁶

In 1878 DeVotie wrote Rev. B. Griffith, who served as the Corresponding Secretary of the American Baptists Publication Society, reminding him that the board supported three black missionaries in Georgia, but struggled to supply the schools begun by these missionaries with books.⁴⁷ In the same year, DeVotie wrote to Alex McLean, seeking to clarify whether a grant given was intended only to be used to supply Sabbath Schools for blacks. DeVotie informed McLean of the need for Bibles in both black and white homes. “I think from my observation and information rec’d that an average of every sixth white family in Ga is destitute.” Yet, DeVotie assured McLean that blacks were benefitted, “The Col’d people are ordering heavily and the 5 cent Testament will soon be sold out. They are in demand by thousands.” DeVotie pressed the issue further, “Will you not send me 500, 5 cent testaments on former terms?” The terms were that they would be given away, not sold, and only to the destitute.⁴⁸ In a later letter to McLean, DeVotie described a pattern of grassroots benevolence, white pastors purchasing Bibles to give to the Sabbath Schools and churches of nearby freedmen.⁴⁹

In his mission endeavors with the black church, DeVotie not only interacted with northern Bible society leaders, but also with northerners like S. S. Cutting, who served as the Secretary of the American Baptist Home Mission Society.⁵⁰ Cutting helped support and direct “institutes” in the South, designed to provide theological training for black pastors. Several of these came to function indefinitely almost as seminaries, but many were simply a series of seminars or a training conference lasting for a defined period of days or weeks. DeVotie

⁴⁶ Letterbooks, May 31, 1879 to Board of American Home Mission Society.

⁴⁷ Letterbooks, Oct 24, 1878 to Rev. B. Griffith.

⁴⁸ Letterbooks, Oct 13, 1878 to Alex McLean.

⁴⁹ Letterbooks, Jan 25, 1879 to Alex McLean.

⁵⁰ Letterbooks, Feb 7, 1879 to S.S. Cutting.

implored him, “We cannot go on successfully without help from the brethren from abroad with this department of our work. The Col’d people thus far have given us but little aid.”⁵¹ Despite some level of cooperation through Bible societies and theological institutes, the relationship between the Southern Baptists and the Baptists in the North remained strained in the post-Civil War years. The “Long Depression” not only affected southern mission efforts, but also drained northern mission coffers as well, prompting agencies to reconsider their desire to partner with the Southern Baptist Convention. Denominational lines were also hardening since several efforts to reunite Baptists across regional lines had failed in the 1860s and 1870s. In 1879 DeVotie wrote black pastor, Rev. C. H. Lyons, “I fear that the New York Board will discontinue their cooperation with this board....Perhaps we can carry you on if the Colored Baptists will aid us.”⁵² Shortly after, DeVotie wrote to Corley, “I fear the American Baptist Home Missionary Society will fail us.”⁵³

Amidst the struggles DeVotie encountered, and particularly in contrast to national Southern Baptist mission efforts, DeVotie’s pursuits in Georgia to support the black missions in the late 1870s were impressive. Rufus Spain studied the actions of the Southern Baptist Convention after the Civil War, pointing to the fact that, “In 1869 the report of the Domestic and Indian Mission Board contained only two sentences about the Negroes, while three times as much space was devoted to the Indians and five times as much to a presentation of the work among the Germans.”⁵⁴ The actual list of missionaries from that national board included just one

⁵¹ Letterbooks, May 22, 1879 to S.S. Cutting.

⁵² Letterbooks, June 20, 1879 to C.H. Lyons.

⁵³ Letterbooks, Jun 20, 1879 to Rev. J.H. Corley.

⁵⁴ Spain, 58.

to blacks, 22 to native whites and two to Indians. Yet DeVotie directed four missionaries to black churches, just in the state of Georgia.⁵⁵

In his capacity with the board, DeVotie interacted extensively with black church leaders. By working with black pastors and helping fund their work DeVotie made a substantial investment in the leadership of the black community. DeVotie recognized the importance of black pastors to the local black community and committed himself to maintaining involvement with these leaders wherever he could.⁵⁶ In other areas of race relations DeVotie had proven to be no paragon of virtue and essentially aligned with his white southern Baptist peers. But he apparently broke ranks in his mission capacity. In his regular reports to the Georgia Baptist Convention in the 1870s and 1880s, he called his brethren to not only remain engaged with the work to reach black southerners, but to increase their efforts. As many Southern Baptists grew weary of funding such efforts and desired to wash their hands of black Baptists, DeVotie pushed the opposite direction.

Occasionally, men like DeVotie were drawn into black Baptist issues as ongoing advisors to some of the black pastors who had only recently had been among the Southern Baptist congregations. Such was the case with E. K. Love, who was born near Marion, Alabama, in 1850 and began to preach in 1868. Love was part of the Siloam Baptist Church and grew in his young faith under DeVotie's shepherding of that interracial congregation. Love later rose to great achievements in the black church. He was, for a time, supported by the predominantly white Georgia Baptist Mission Board and in this capacity he worked to establish black churches

⁵⁵ *Proceedings of the Southern Baptist Convention Held in Macon, Georgia, May 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 1869*, (Baltimore: John F. Weishampel, Jr., Printer and Bookseller, 1869), 21-23.

⁵⁶ Montgomery, 307, 312. "Through the immediate postemancipation period, preachers were almost universally esteemed by the freed and the freeborn population alike and were recognized as the social and political leaders of the black community. They were the only group of leaders who crossed the lines between the political, religious, and social realms and who represented the status and economic elites on one hand and the masses of poor and illiterate freedmen on the other." By the beginning of the twentieth century over half the black pastors recorded in the Census of Religious Bodies were Baptist.

which were organizationally independent from the Georgia Baptist Convention. In 1888, Love described the impact of DeVotie on his life, “He is the first preacher I ever heard of in my life. He baptized my mother and father and most of my relatives. He seems as a grandfather to me. He is a ripe scholar and a safe theologian. That beloved, distinguished man is Dr. J. H. DeVotie.”⁵⁷



Emanuel King Love

Love eventually served as pastor at one of the South’s largest and oldest black Baptist churches, First African Baptist Church in Savannah, where he ministered from 1885 to his death in 1900. But prior to this he worked as a missionary with support from white Baptists among the black population of Georgia. DeVotie reported about him in 1879, “E. K. Love has been very successful lately. Has been blessed with an extensive revival. 60 or more have been baptized.”⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Love, 120.

⁵⁸ Letterbooks, May 22, 1879 to S.S. Cutting.

During this time he was accused of involvement in some questionable behavior of an unidentified sort. Evidently, DeVotie concluded the whole issue might have just been the result of slander on the part of envious fellow pastors. He wrote to Samuel Boykin, who was involved in an ecclesiastical investigation of Love, stating, “And [I] am much gratified to learn that he is proved to be innocent of the charges reported concerning him. Many of the ministers are envious of his success and are willing to see him put down.”⁵⁹ Like DeVotie, Love quickly emerged as a denominational leader who developed the institutional structure of the church. He served as the leader of the Baptist Foreign Mission Convention in the 1890s, labored as editor of several black newspapers, and helped found Savannah State College. He also endured a physical assault, along with several other black church leaders who were travelling on a train with him to visit the Southern Baptist Convention.⁶⁰

Regarding efforts to reach blacks, DeVotie wrote to Rev. William J. White, corresponding secretary for one of the mission boards of the black Baptists. White was a mulatto pastor who helped found what would become Morehouse College, served on the board of trustees at Spelman Seminary, and in the 1880s, labored as editor of the *Georgia Baptist* newspaper.⁶¹ DeVotie stated, “It will afford us great pleasure to cooperate with you and your Board in any way for the spiritual enlightenment of your people. We will write with you to commission the missionaries to the Freedmen in Georgia....Will you help us to keep them at work?”⁶² By this point E.K Love had resigned his commission as a missionary agent associated with the overwhelmingly white Georgia Baptist Mission Board. Eventually, as the American

⁵⁹ Letterbooks, Feb 6, 1879 to S. Boykin.

⁶⁰ “Church Gleanings,” *Christian Union*, Sep 19, 1889; E.K.L., “Our Colored Churches in Savannah,” *Christian Index*, May 13, 1886; “Religious Summary,” *Zion's Herald*, Apr 4, 1888.

⁶¹ A.W. Pegues. *Our Baptist Ministers and Schools*, (Springfield: Willey & Company, 1892), 319-321.

⁶² Letterbooks, Jun 24, 1879, to Rev. Wm J White. DeVotie also stated, “G. B. Mitchell & C.H. Lyons are good missionaries.”

Baptist Home Mission Society saw the need to redirect its limited resources to outreach in the expanding American West, that organization aimed to consolidate its educational efforts in the South.

The white Baptists of the South under men like DeVotie certainly failed to fully embrace their fellow black Baptists before, as well as after, the Civil War. Although in the years immediately after the war, blacks envisioned better things from northern white Baptists, it was not to be. The tension was most obvious in the area of education. As northern Baptists consolidated their post-war efforts in the South they shut down several of their continuous theological institutes dedicated to black education, and sought to subordinate the Atlanta Baptist Seminary, the only black-run and black-staffed institute, to white control. Eventually the majority of southern black Baptists reached a compromise with northern white Baptists about control of Atlanta Baptist Seminary. However, E. K. Love took a divergent stance, recognizing the handwriting on the wall for black equality. The white northern organizations were not actively oppressing the black community, but neither were they welcoming them as equal partners in their own theological education. E. K. Love's public refusal to compromise over this issue took place just over a year after DeVotie passed away.

Despite the arguments over educational control of black education, this was generally an area where southern blacks, northern Baptists, and Southern Baptists collaborated. This effort grew significant enough for Southern Baptists in Georgia to appoint a pastor to spearhead the education of black pastors. This not only benefitted the handful of black pastors who were connected with DeVotie through the mission board, but also equipped other black pastors in Georgia. Though it could be argued that for DeVotie, and other white leaders, this was just a

form of sanctified paternalism, or merely a pragmatic effort to expand denominational influence, black church leaders openly accepted the assistance.

In his role with the board, DeVotie supervised theological institutes for blacks. In 1881, 23 of these institutes were held, the goal being to bring the seminary and pastoral training that many white pastors had received to the benefit of black pastors who rarely were able to attend a traditional seminary, and in some cases were only partially literate. In 1884, DeVotie recorded:

The theological instruction of the colored ministers and deacons in Georgia, which received marked approbation and sanction of the Convention a year ago, has been prosecuted by Dr. W. H. McIntosh with ability zeal and success. He has held twenty-six institutes, which have been attended by three hundred and eight preachers and three hundred and six deacons, to whom he has delivered two hundred and sixty seven lectures...He has also preached forty-four sermons, attended their state convention and two of their Associations, travelling in the performance of this labor for 5,938 miles...It must be admitted that this missionary enterprise among the colored people is not surpassed in importance and promise of good by any other in which we are engaged, the continuance of which is greatly to be desired.⁶³

Apparently the Home Board of the entire Southern Baptist Convention supported the effort for a season. However, in this same report, DeVotie shared with disappointment that, “The Home Board has notified us of their discontinuance of co-operation in this department after the first of May.” Despite DeVotie’s zeal, the momentum for this effort waned by the mid-1890s.

The choice by fellow Baptists to select DeVotie’s to direct the state board stemmed from his previously established leadership record and notoriety among his peers. His role as a statewide leader, in turn, further increased his notoriety and allowed him influence with other noteworthy Baptist leaders. He worked closely with other established Baptist pastors, as well as those who would one day become denominational leaders. For instance, DeVotie interacted regularly with Samuel Boykin. Boykin had his hand in numerous Baptist efforts. He served as

⁶³ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 2, 25. Taken from a pasted Mission Board report from 1884.

Editor of “Kind Words,” the official Georgia Baptist Sunday School paper. In 1886, he labored as Secretary of the Georgia Baptist Historical Society and wrote an early history of the Georgia Baptists. DeVotie was never afraid to ask such men to wield their influence on behalf of mission work, writing Boykin, “I need money. Help!”⁶⁴ DeVotie also corresponded with numerous local pastors in all different places across Georgia. He wrote a typical letter in 1879 to W. H. Cooper, thanking him for the support of his church. Cooper served at Pine Bluff church, would pastor in Cuthbert, Georgia seven years, led revivals in East Dougherty, Newnan, and other places throughout the 1880s.⁶⁵

Men like R. J. Willingham also worked under DeVotie’s supervision as missionary pastors. Certainly not all of those who served in this capacity rose to national prominence. Many established a church with the support of the board and when the church became sufficiently able to sustain that pastor he might remain for his career. Willingham, however rose rapidly among Baptist ranks. He was recognized as one of the most influential communicators in Georgia by the late 1880s. Called by Sardis Baptist church in 1882, he supported the vision of men like DeVotie to lead Baptists to expand and entrench in the South. At the 1883 Georgia Baptist Convention he implored those gathered, “Our full power has not been exerted – only the little finger – not the muscled arm. Organization and instruction are needed.” He would later become the Secretary of the Southern Baptist Missionary Society and then in 1896 the Secretary of the entire Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board. He was pictured in 1897 among the key religious leaders in America, in Frank Leslie’s “The Religious Denominations of America.”⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Letterbooks, Jan 24, 1879 to S. Boykin; *Christian Index*, Dec 2, 1886; *Christian Index*, Jul 6, 1882.

⁶⁵ “Baptist Men and Things,” *Christian Index*, Jun 4, 1885; “Georgia Baptist News,” *Christian Index*, Aug 3, 1882; “Georgia Baptist News,” *Christian Index*, Sep 7, 1882.

⁶⁶ T.J. Morgan, “The Religious Denominations of America,” *Frank Leslie's Popular Monthly*, 64.6 (Dec 1897); “The Georgia Baptist Convention,” *Christian Index*, Apr 26, 1883; J.C. Hiden, “Southern Baptist Convention,” *The Watchman*, May 21, 1896.

DeVotie pasted the report to the Georgia Baptist Convention of his 1884 mission endeavors into the second volume of his memoirs. Just halfway through his 14-year tenure with the board, he noted all that had already been accomplished. Just as he had elsewhere delineated the results of his own ministry in particular churches, he now took joy in the tally of the multiplication of his efforts through all the missionaries, black and white: “13,235 sermons preached; 8,663 addresses made, 503 Sunday Schools organized; 54 churches constituted; 22,999 religious visits made; 256, 930 miles traveled; 15 houses of worship built...1775 professed believers baptized. The labor performed equals that of one man for 115 years. Many thousand books and Bibles have been distributed and a large amount of other work done not enumerated.”⁶⁷ DeVotie’s Georgia mission pursuits continued for another 7 years after this report, right up until his passing in 1891.

⁶⁷ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 2, 25-26. DeVotie’s efforts to build a framework into Baptist church life had begun when his ministry started in the 1830s and the Sabbath School was still a new innovation. As he neared the conclusion of this lengthy ministry and served in his mission capacity, he described a vision for how these ministries could combine for great impact. “Our Sabbath-schools present an all-important field for doing good which must not be neglected. Missionary workers for the future, and our missionaries for foreign lands, will be obtained from this source. Educate our young people in the habit of giving intelligently for missions in Sabbath-schools, and the next generation will be a grand army of missionaries.”

CONCLUSION

Early in his ministry James H. DeVotie described a moment when he received inspiration from a roadside flower to “be spiritually beautiful” and to “spiritually beautify” the world by living out the Kingdom of God and seeking to extend that Kingdom through the church. Around the same time as he wrote about “beautifying” he counseled those reading his memoirs that, “Continual activity, little by little makes a respectable total sum unto them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory, honour [*sic*], and immortality.” He also admonished, “A successful life is made up of a vast number of small actions approved of God. The gathering of the little dew drops makes the dark clouds and the drenching rains. The person who waits to become distinguished by one, great good deed, while neglecting the day of small things, will be likely to make an entire failure.”¹

Over the course of his lifetime, DeVotie achieved monumental accomplishments personally and for the development of Baptists in Alabama and Georgia. He increased the membership of the churches in which he served by the hundreds. This alone would have been an encouraging accomplishment for most pastors, but DeVotie also expanded Sabbath schools, launched a statewide Bible society, built Baptist associations and conventions, piloted the early efforts of Southern Baptist domestic missions, reestablished a denominational newspaper, initiated the Georgia Mission Board, and even helped form public schools. By his own testimony he did so through his determined regular exertion - preaching, leading, and organizing - day after day for 60 years of ministry.

¹ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 199-200.

In addition to preaching, leadership and organizational skills, he proved to be a remarkable fundraiser for expensive ministry efforts. He directed nearly all of his congregations to construct prominent facilities, most of which still stand today. He solicited substantial sums for the establishment of Judson College and Howard College and oversaw the growth of Mercer College and Morehouse College. However, even as a builder of large church worship and school facilities, he nevertheless believed, “The little diamond is worth more than the tall mountain.” DeVotie valued the quality of faith not just the quantity of achievements for the faith. As he built “mountains” through his ministry initiatives, he also sought to remember the “diamond” of true faith. In his memoirs he urged, “The cup of cold water because God has fixed its value, is worth more than the ostentatious donations of hundreds of thousands given without sacrifice to be seen of men.” He noted that “the widows two mites...made an example of acceptable giving.”² DeVotie attempted to display true faith throughout his ministry. He exhibited great care for one elderly South Carolina Sabbath school student who came to salvation. After the Civil War he pleaded with those in other states to send help for his community in Columbus, Georgia. In the 1880s, through the Georgia Baptist mission board, he carefully directed the funds needed to buy Bibles for those who could not afford one.

His incremental diligence, fundraising prowess, and “diamond” faith made an impact, propelling Baptists in Alabama and Georgia to transition from a fringe sect to an influential organized religion. However, he was certainly not without flaws in character or accomplishments. Over the course of his life, DeVotie seemed to mature in his handling of conflict and become a less frequent instigator of it, but his hard-driving personality certainly took a toll on relationships in his early ministry. Although he always purposed to keep the Kingdom

² DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 199.

of God in mind as his highest priority, he clearly desired increasing levels of compensation and expressed what seemed like selfish pride in the fact that churches pursued him.

DeVotie not only fell short in areas of personal character, but he also left behind a tainted legacy through the compromises he made to reach his goal of seeing the Baptist church establish, expand and entrench in Alabama and Georgia. Not all that he and his fellow southern nineteenth century Baptist leaders achieved can be said to have improved Baptists in the South. As Spain described in his At Ease in Zion, having developed themselves into the unofficial established church of the South, Baptists eventually became too comfortable with the extent to which they had brought the Kingdom of God to bear on Southern life.³ Under DeVotie's direction Baptists underwent massive membership expansion, development of numerous institutions, elevation in social status, and professionalization of pastoral work from the 1830s to the 1850s. These developments gave them a wider ability to influence the whole population of the South, but they also lost their bearings in some significant ways. They defended slavery, entangled themselves in politics to support the Confederacy, and accommodated their ministry to affluent southerners. Early in the nineteenth century in Alabama and Georgia, Baptists knew they were outsiders and still engaged those around them with the Biblical message, even where it was unpopular. By becoming insiders, men like DeVotie gained a large audience but the price they had to pay was relinquishing some ability to speak prophetically toward the culture. They became a part of the problem and thus were paralyzed in these areas to provide Kingdom solutions.⁴

³ Spain, xv. In the foreword Samuel Hill wrote, "The Baptist band of the Lord's faithful was not resting on its laurels, luxuriating in its size and wealth and powerful standing in its homeland. They were far from 'taking it easy.' But their society and culture were assumed to be a virtual blueprint of what God had in mind for a new Israel....They registered few impulses to challenge the Zion the Almighty had used them to fashion for the realization of his earthly kingdom. This is the respect in which they were at ease."

⁴ *Religious Herald*, Oct 19, 1865. An article in this edition reveals the ongoing attitude of some southerners regarding secession and slavery, "It [the war] has decided questions of power, but not of morality. [The war proved that secession could not] be maintained by force of arms – and that slavery could be abolished by military [power]....But the sword cannot determine moral questions. The bayonet may coerce, but it cannot

Part of this accommodation resulted from the highly democratic structure of the Baptist church, which meant that popular opinion among membership was more likely to quickly become required opinion among clergy hoping to keep their jobs. But it also stemmed from a decided shift in the position Baptists assumed relative to the state. With Baptists now representing a huge percentage of the population, concern faded regarding the days in Europe and in the American colonies when Baptists were a persecuted minority by the state-established church. Although even up until the Civil War, in places like Georgia, Baptists remained fearful of pastors being paid by the state as chaplains, in the years after the war Baptists accepted state funds for programs they led including public education and temperance organizations.⁵ Prior to the Civil War, DeVotie, like most other Baptist pastors in the South had generally followed the apolitical approach of voting in elections personally, but not engaging in partisan politics or seeking office.⁶ However, Baptists, led by the likes of DeVotie, suspended this stance for the purpose of promoting and defending secession. After the war, in general Baptist pastors returned to their previous emphasis on spiritual matters but due to their entanglement with sectional politics they had lost part of their prophetic voice.

Furthermore, the breaking of denominational unity could easily seem a secondary concern amidst the other detrimental decisions made by Baptists during the period of secession and war. However, for Christians, unity of the church body mattered. Unfortunately, DeVotie did little to seek restoration of a national denominational body after the Civil War. He was not alone in this reluctance to reunify, but as whites reconnected in the 1880s and 1890s around their common race and culture, across regional boundaries, surprisingly little effort was expended for

convince. All questions of right – of morality – are left precisely where they were before the war. Whether secession was a legitimate or revolutionary measure? Whether slavery right or wrong?...are grave questions, on which the issue of the war has shed no light.”

⁵ Spain, 33-35.

⁶ Spain, 43.

denominational reconciliation. The Southern Baptist Convention did take up the issue of denominational reunion with northern Baptists in 1867, 1868, 1869, and 1879, but ultimately resolved to only exchange fraternal delegates. As they had done so in 1845 with the schism from their brethren in the North, Baptists in the South continued to explain separation as necessary not only on the basis of ideological differences about the place of blacks in American society, but also on the basis of facilitating more targeted outreach to specific regions of the country.⁷

Beyond issues of church and state, denominational unity, and the underlying matter of race, DeVotie and other Baptist leaders offered little in the way of systemic societal solutions to the trials the South faced subsequent to the war. They developed mercy ministries to provide care for the poor but did little to press for changes in legislation to help the poor in the South. The work of establishing new churches and spreading the faith which DeVotie spearheaded through the Georgia Mission Board achieved impressive results. Yet it is also interesting to note what did not happen. Baptists proposed few if any solutions to the economic divide between wealthy and impoverished in the South. They advocated very little for more generous arrangements between employers and workers and they remained fearful that any government intervention in such matters might lead to socialism.

In the final years of DeVotie's ministry, the New South was developing industrially, but organized labor gained little traction in what was still a predominantly agricultural economy. Whereas in other parts of the country religious leaders advocated what they saw as more just allocation of resources, for most of the late nineteenth century the South remained in economic stagnation, making for ongoing need among the poor.⁸ Although some Baptists did argue for wage-based farming in place of the sharecropping system, their primary concern was the laziness

⁷ Spain, 25.

⁸ Spain, 127.

which sharecropping might produce. Once sharecropping became the norm, Baptist leaders did little to object. Of course most of the workers continued to be former slaves, so issues of prejudice and race were interwoven. However, many poor whites worked under the sharecropping system as well. Baptists did not seem to be able to respond to the reality that, although the ideal of the Protestant work ethic remained, in the economy of the New South the greatest gains did not necessarily come to the hardest worker. Instead, “the new age rewarded the cunning manipulator and unscrupulous monopolist.”⁹

Keeping in mind these substantial flaws in DeVotie’s desired “beautification” legacy, he nevertheless led the remarkable transformation of Baptists in Alabama and Georgia from 1830-1890, which brought them from an outsider minority movement to a place of spiritual dominance in these states. Although DeVotie manifested significant character flaws, he also showed remarkable vision and leadership. By the end of his ministry, Baptists in Alabama and Georgia remained a largely decentralized, congregationally governed denomination. But through DeVotie’s tireless leadership they had not only developed an array of collaborative ministry institutions but were sustaining them. They maintained denominational newspaper publications, bible societies, educational institutions, and of course their local associations and state conventions. They continued to advance missions at the state and even association level, but nationally as well, and increasingly internationally.¹⁰

For DeVotie the seed of this vision for institution building took root during his youth through the plethora of collaborative ministries which paralleled the work of the local churches

⁹ Spain, 136.

¹⁰ Tull, 157 and 165. “The centralization within the Southern Baptist Convention, which is never viewed as a governing body, resulted in a unified financial plan, a unified mission effort, six Convention seminaries, a single publishing house with uniform instruction materials, ‘official’ newspapers in most states, and so forth,” and, “Along with the Sunday School Board, the Home Mission Board was the denomination’s principle agency for church growth and the achievement of denominational self-consciousness.”

during the revival era in Oneida, New York. In Alabama and Georgia, others participated with him to achieve this vision including fellow pastors and wealthy financial supporters. Yet DeVotie proved to be the driving force. With his vision for the benefits of these collaborative institutions in mind, DeVotie repelled the insular mindset of Hardshell and Landmark Baptists. Had their approach prevailed, the story of the Baptist denomination in the South might have been quite different. DeVotie also demonstrated skillful church diplomacy by staying just one step ahead as a leader of Baptists and generally avoiding becoming a martyr by getting too many steps ahead. He was able to do so successfully because he honored and practiced several historic Baptist priorities, not simply as a diplomatic ploy but because he genuinely believed in them. Through theological orthodoxy, pursuing conversions, leading revivals, implementing church discipline, and preaching with unction, DeVotie stayed strongly tethered to the Baptist masses.

The downside of DeVotie's aim to elevate Baptist social status has already been identified, but the upside was expanded influence in the South. DeVotie embodied his own vision for Baptist pastors through his efforts to treat his calling as a profession. He started down this path personally by receiving formal seminary training. He advanced this effort by modeling the role of full-time pastor, who still preached with unction, but also with organization. Bi-vocational pastors still served many Baptist churches in Alabama and Georgia in the last decades of DeVotie's life, but across the region an increasing number of churches were emulating DeVotie's vision.¹¹

In addition to warranting historical interest for his transformational initiatives, DeVotie serves as a lens on important developments among nineteenth century Baptists in the South. In particular, he reveals how evangelical ministers faced the dynamics of sectionalism leading into the Civil War and how they ministered during the war to needs on the home-front as well as

¹¹ The 1887 Georgia Baptist Convention report showed at least 75 churches with weekly preaching.

battlefront. DeVotie also yields a vantage point for understanding the interracial nature of the antebellum Baptist churches. He shows how pastors held on to proslavery thinking while at the same time ministering with intentionality to slaves. In addition, DeVotie reveals ministry priorities which the black churches after the Civil War may have mirrored, helping to propel their rapid growth and powerful influence.

On top of his vision and leadership, DeVotie demonstrated remarkable personal fortitude. As the notations and poems in his memoirs revealed, he clearly suffered the loss of 10 of his 11 children greatly and was particularly pained to lose Noble and his first wife. Rather than succumbing under the weight of his losses, DeVotie harnessed them. He grew as a shepherd to the suffering South as he maintained his belief in a loving sovereign God through each loss. In addition his losses propelled him to ongoing exertion for Baptist causes even in his final years. Whereas his familial legacy was almost complete removed, the legacy of his Baptist denominational family could remain.

In the final years of his ministry, DeVotie served in a capacity that proved the ideal culmination to his lifelong endeavors to build the Baptist churches in the South. His fellow Georgia Baptist leaders selected him to direct Baptist mission efforts statewide as the first Corresponding Secretary for the Mission Board in Georgia. With a network of relationships across the South built during the previous decades of ministry, DeVotie applied his fundraising ability to solicit support to supply 20 to 30 missionaries who were at various times under his direction. Many of these men worked as local missionaries, launching new congregations in communities lacking Baptist influence. Others sought to recover struggling congregations. Several were black pastors who also received support and direction from their own denomination and northern Baptists. Concluding his life and ministry in this way, DeVotie participated in the

establishment of dozens of new churches. He also helped support the black Baptist church despite the growing reluctance of fellow Baptists to continue the effort. He regularly appealed to the Georgia Baptist Convention to continue the work both to reach whites and support the now independent black church.

On February 16, 1891, James H. DeVotie died in Griffin, Georgia, his home for the final 20 years of his life. Two telling events transpired in the months to follow. In May of 1891 the Southern Baptist Convention met in Birmingham, Alabama. DeVotie had attended nearly every meeting of this body since its formation in 1845. His absence and his stature elicited for him the unusual posthumous honor of being featured on the opening page of the published proceedings of the convention. On the page, a representation of the aged Baptist statesman was placed above the copied words “Yours Affectionately, J. H. DeVotie,” written in his script. Three headings followed after DeVotie’s name, “President Board Domestic Missions, 1851-1857,” “Vice-President of the Convention, 1874,” and “Zealous for Missions.”¹² This honor at a national level acknowledged DeVotie’s contribution to domestic mission work. It also highlighted his involvement in building the denomination itself, as a leader in the convention. Around the same time DeVotie’s impact drew local recognition as well. In March of 1891, 50 members of the First Baptist Church of Griffin, DeVotie’s last pastorate, constituted themselves as a new church. In 1889, DeVotie had personally purchased a lot for this potential congregation. On June 2, 1891, they took the name DeVotie Baptist Church and the church soon built a building.¹³ DeVotie would have likely appreciated the building of institutions represented by these gestures, both national and local. He may have also not minded the recognition. He had counseled in his memoirs that all noteworthy achievements flowed from small incremental efforts, “Little in the

¹² *Proceedings of the Southern Baptist Convention Held in Birmingham, Alabama, May 8-12, 1891*, (Atlanta: Franklin Publishing House), 1-2.

¹³ “Our History,” <http://www.devotie.com/pdf/history.pdf>, April 2014.

beginning but, mighty at the last.”¹⁴ His ministry initiatives right up to the time of his death revealed that he was never satisfied with the degree to which he had spearheaded Baptist influence. Yet his words revealed the hope that he had achieved something “mighty” in the fruit of his labors to establish, expand and entrench Baptists in Alabama and Georgia from 1830-1890.

¹⁴ DeVotie Memoirs, Vol 1, 199.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Manuscript Collections

First Baptist Church, Church Records, Columbus, Georgia.

James H. DeVotie Sermons

James P. Boyce Library, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky

Basil Manly Jr. Papers

Basil Manly Manuscript Sermons and Notes

James H. DeVotie Sermon Journals and Papers

James H. DeVotie Ledger Books

Mercer University, Special Collection, Tarver Library, Macon, Georgia

Columbus Association Records

Columbus First Baptist Church, Muscogee County

General Missionary Baptist Convention, African-American, Minutes

Georgia Baptist Convention Minutes

Griffin First Baptist Church, Spalding County

Landmark Baptists

Mercer University, Penfield, Greene County

Morehouse College, Atlanta, Fulton County

National Baptist Convention, African-American, Minutes

Primitive Baptists

Samford University Library, Special Collection, Birmingham, Alabama

Alabama Baptist Biography Files

Julia Ann Tarrant Barron Papers

James H. DeVotie Memoirs

James H. DeVotie Sermon Journals and Papers

Milo P. Jewett Collection

Basil Manly Papers

J.J.D. Renfroe Papers

Samuel Sherman Autobiography and Papers

I. T. Tichenor Papers

Alabama Black Baptist Convention and Association Records

Alabama Baptist State Convention Minutes and Annuals

Sigma Alpha Epsilon Archives, Evanston, Illinois

Noble DeVotie Diary and Papers

Jewett DeVotie Journal and Papers
The SAE Review

Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee
Foreign Mission Board Papers
Home Mission Board Papers

Church Histories

Allen, Lee N. *The First 150 Years: Montgomery's First Baptist Church*. Birmingham, Alabama: Oxmoor Press, 1979.

Boykin, Samuel. *History of Baptist Denomination in Georgia*. Atlanta, Georgia: Jas. P Harrison & Co., Printers and Publishers, 1881. Volume reproduced from an 1881 edition in The Baptist Historical Collection, Furman University Library, Greenville, South Carolina.

Goddard, John H. *History of the First Baptist Church of Griffin, Georgia, 1841-1977*. Atlanta, Georgia: Cherokee Publishing Company, 1978.

History of the First Baptist Church, Griffin, Georgia, 1841-1941: being an account in picture and prose of the struggles and triumphs of one hundred years. Griffin, Georgia: [s.n.], [1941?]. Special Collection, Samford University Library – MFB 87.

Love, Emanuel King. *History of the First African Baptist Church, from Its Organization, January 10th, 1788, to July 1st, 1888: Including the Centennial Celebration, Addresses, Sermons, Etc.* Savannah, Georgia: Morning News Print, 1888.

Lovelace, Julia Murfee. *A History of Siloam Baptist Church, Marion, Alabama*. Birmingham, Alabama: Birmingham Publishing Company, 1943.

Porch, Luther Quentin. *History of the First Baptist Church: Tuscaloosa, Alabama 1818-1968*. Tuscaloosa, Alabama: Drake Printers, 1968.

Porter, Frederick S. *The Origin and Growth of the First Baptist Church, Columbus Georgia*. Commercial Printers Inc., 1959.

Books

Baker, Robert Andrew. *Relations between Northern and Southern Baptists*. Fort Worth, Texas, s. n. p, 1954x.

Baker, Robert Andrew. *The Southern Baptist Convention and Its People, 1607-1972*.

- Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1974.
- Barnes, William Wright. *The Southern Baptist Convention 1845-1953*. Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1954.
- Blight, David W. *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory*. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001.
- Blum, Edward J. *Reforging the White Republic: Race, Religion, and American Nationalism, 1865-1898*. Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 2005.
- Boles, John B. *The Great Revival: Beginnings of the Bible Belt*. Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1996.
- Boykin, Samuel. *History of The Baptist Denomination In Georgia - Vol. 1*. Atlanta, Georgia: Jas. P. Harrison & Co., Printers and Publishers, 1881.
- Brawley, Benjamin Griffith. *History of Morehouse College: Written on the Authority of the Board of Trustees*. Atlanta, Georgia: Morehouse College, 1917.
- Bryan, Thomas Conn. *Confederate Georgia*. Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2009.
- Burton, John. *Epochs of Home Missions: Southern Baptist Convention, 1845-1945*. Atlanta, Georgia: Home Mission Board, Southern Baptist Convention, 1945.
- Dowell, Spright. *A History of Mercer University: 1833-1953*. Atlanta, Georgia: Foote and Davies, 1958.
- Eighmy, John Lee. *Churches in Cultural Captivity: a history of the social attitudes of Southern Baptists*. Knoxville, Tennessee: University of Tennessee Press, 1972.
- Fallin, Wilson. *Uplifting the People: Three Centuries of Black Baptists in Alabama*. Tuscaloosa, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 2007.
- Faust, Drew Gilpin. *This Republic of Suffering*. New York, New York: Alfred A Knopf, 2008.
- Finney, Charles G. *Charles G. Finney: An Autobiography*. Westwood, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1876.
- Fletcher, Jesse. *The Southern Baptist Convention: A Sesquicentennial History*. Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman & Holman, 1994.
- Flynt, Wayne. *Alabama Baptists: Southern Baptists in the Heart of Dixie*. Tuscaloosa,

- Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1998.
- Foster, Gaines M. *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South, 1865 to 1913*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1987.
- Fowler, John D. and David B. Parker. *Breaking the Heartland: The Civil War in Georgia*. Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2011.
- Fuller, A. James. *Chaplain to the Confederacy: Basil Manly and Baptist Life in the Old South*. Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 2000.
- Giggie, John. *After Redemption: Jim Crow and the Transformation of African American Religion in the Delta, 1875-1915*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Graham, Harold. *A History of the Flint River Baptist Association, 1824-1974*.
- Grant, Judith. *Columbus, Georgia*. Charleston, South Carolina: Arcadia, Publishing, 2000.
- Hatch, Nathan O. *The Democratization of American Christianity*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1989.
- Heyrman, Christine Leigh. *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt*. New York, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1997.
- Higginbotham, Evelyn Brooks. *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993.
- Hill, Samuel. *Baptists North and South*. Valley Forge: Judson Press, [1964].
- Hillyer, Shaler Granby. *Reminiscences of Georgia Baptists*. 1902.
- Holifield, E. Brooks. *God's Ambassadors: A History of the Christian Clergy in America*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2007.
- Lawrence, John Benjamin. *History of the Home Mission Board*. Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1958.
- Lester, James Adams. *A History of the Georgia Baptist Convention, 1822-1972*. Nashville, Tennessee: Curley Printing Company, 1972.
- Loveland, Anne C. *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order: 1800-1860*. Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1980.

- Manly, Louise. *History of Judson College: 1838-1913*. Atlanta, Georgia: Foote & Davies Company, 1913.
- Mathews, Donald. *Religion in the Old South*. Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 1977.
- McBeth, H. Leon. *The Baptist Heritage*. Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman, Press, 1987.
- McBeth, H. Leon. *The Sourcebook for Baptist Heritage*. Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1990.
- Montgomery, William E. *Under Their Own Vine and Fig Tree: The African American Church in the South, 1865-1900*. Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1993.
- Ownby, Ted. *Subduing Satan: Religion, Recreation, and Manhood in the Rural South, 1865-1920*. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990.
- Pegues, A.W. *Our Baptist Ministers and Schools*. Springfield, Massachusetts: Willey & Company, 1892.
- Rable, George C. *God's Almost Chosen Peoples: A Religious History of the American Civil War*. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010.
- Raboteau, Albert J. *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Ragsdale, B.D. *Story of Georgia Baptists*. Georgia Baptist Convention, 1931.
- Rogers, William Warren, Robert David Ward, Leah Rawls Atkins, and Wayne Flynt. *Alabama: The History of a Deep South State*. Tuscaloosa, Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1994.
- Rutledge, Arthur B. *Mission to America: A Century and a Quarter of Southern Baptist Home Missions*. Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1969.
- Ryan, Mary P. *Cradle of the Middle Class: The family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Cambridge University Press, 1981.
- Schweiger, Beth Barton. *The Gospel Working Up: Progress and the Pulpit in Nineteenth-Century Virginia*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Scott, Donald M. *From Office to Profession: The New England Ministry, 1750-1850*. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978.

- Snay, Mitchell. *Gospel of Disunion: Religion and Separatism in the Antebellum South*. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997.
- Spain, Rufus. *At Ease in Zion: Social History of Southern Baptists, 1865-1900*. Nashville, Tennessee: Vanderbilt Press, 1967.
- Sparks, Randy J. *On Jordan's Stormy Banks: Evangelicalism in Mississippi, 1773-1876*. Athens Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1994.
- Startup, Kenneth. *The Root of All Evil: The Protestant Clergy and the Economic Mind of the Old South*. Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1997.
- Stowell, Daniel W. *Rebuilding Zion: The Religious Reconstruction of the South, 1863-1877*. New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Sweet, William Warren. *The Baptists, 1783-1830. A collection of source material*. New York, New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1964.
- Tull, James E. *High-Church Baptists in the South: The Origin, Nature, and Influence of Landmarkism*. Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2000.
- Torbet, Robert G. *History of the Baptists*. Judson Press, 1973.
- Vedder, Henry Clay. *A Short History of Baptists*. London, England: Baptist Tract and Book Society, 1898.
- Wagner, Clarence M. *Profiles of Black Georgia Baptists: 206 Years of Georgia Baptist and 100 Years of National Baptist History*. Atlanta, Georgia: Bennett Brothers Printing Company, 1980.
- Wills, Gregory A. *Democratic Religion: Freedom, Authority, and Church Discipline in the Baptist South, 1765-1900*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Wilson, Charles Reagan. *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920*. Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 2009.

Articles

- Allen, Lee N. "The Alabama Baptist Association: Distress, Destitution, and Decline, 1861-1862." *Alabama Baptist Historian* 18 (January 1982): 3-14.
- "The Alabama Baptist Association: Years of Fulfillment, 1840-1860." *Alabama Baptist Historian* 16 (January 1980): 3-14.

- Bradley, J. C. "Profiles of Home Mission Board Executives." *Baptist History and Heritage* 30 (April 1995): 26-33.
- Bryant, James C. "From Penfield to Macon: Mercer University's Problematic Move." *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, Winter 2005.
- Chambliss, A. W. "Public Offenses, or Church Discipline." Part 1. *Baptist Preacher* 4 (October 1845): 4-17.
- Cloyd, Daniel L. "Prelude to Reform: Political, Economic, and Social Thought of Alabama Baptists, 1877-1890." *Alabama Review* 31 (January 1978): 48-64.
- Crowther, Edward R. "Interracial Cooperative Missions among Blacks by Alabama's Baptists, 1868-1882." *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 80, No. 3. (Summer 1995): 131-139.
- Crowther, Edward R. "Independent Black Baptist Congregations in Antebellum Alabama." *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 72, No. 3/4. (Summer - Autumn 1987): 66-75.
- Doss, Chriss H. "ORIGINAL FIFTEEN TRUSTEES OF HOWARD COLLEGE." *Alabama Baptist Historian*, Vol. 29, No. 2. (1993): 3-25.
- Faust, Drew Gilpin. "Christian Soldiers: The Meaning of Revivalism in the Confederate Army." *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 53, No. 1. (February 1987): 63-90.
- Fels, Rendigs. "The Long-Wave Depression, 1873-97." *The Review of Economics and Statistics* Vol. 31, No. 1. (1949): 69-73.
- Fleming, Walter L. "The Churches of Alabama During the Civil War and Reconstruction." *Gulf States Historical Magazine* 1 (September 1902): 2-127.
- Garrett, Mitchell B. "Sixty Years of Howard College, 1842-1902." *Howard College Bulletin* 85 (October 1927): 1-165.
- Hatch, Nathan O. "The Puzzle of American Methodism." *Church History*, Vol. 63, No. 2. (June 1994): 175-189.
- Helmhold, F. Wilbur. "Baptist Periodicals in Alabama, 1843-1873." *Alabama Baptist Historian* 2 (July 1966): 2-12.
- Hunt, Robert E. "Home, Domesticity, and School Reform in Antebellum Alabama." *Alabama Review* 49 (October 1996): 253-75.
- Nettles, Thomas J. "Southern Baptist Identity: Influenced by Calvinism." *Baptist History and Heritage* 31 (October 1996): 17-26.

- Nichols, Robert Hastings. "The Influence of the American Environment on the Conception of the Church in American Protestantism." *Church History*, Vol. 11, No. 3. (September 1942): 181-192.
- Porch, Quentin. "James H. DeVotie: A Ministry Fraught With Difficulty." *The Alabama Baptist*, (December 6, 1973).
- Quist, John W. "Slaveholding Operatives of the Benevolent Empire: Bible, Tract, and Sunday School Societies in Antebellum Tuscaloosa County, Alabama." *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 62, No. 3. (August 1996): 481-526.
- Richards, W. Wiley. "Southern Baptist Identity: Moving Away from Calvinism." *Baptist History and Heritage* 31 (October 1996): 27-35.
- Taliaferro, H. E. "The Covenant of redemption, the Soul of the Missionary Enterprise." *Baptist Preacher* 8 (January 1849): 1-18.
- Waldrep, Christopher. "'So Much Sin': The Decline of Religious Discipline and the 'Tidal Wave of Crime'." *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 23, No. 3. (Spring 1990): 535-552.
- Walker, Arthur L. "THREE ALABAMA BAPTIST CHAPLAINS, 1861-1865." *Alabama Review*, Vol. 16, No. 3. (1963): 174-184.
- Walker, Joseph. "Mental Requisites of Pulpit Efficiency." *Baptist Preacher* 13 (October 1854): 1-81
- Wiley, Bell Irvin. "'Holy Joes' of the Sixties: A Study of Civil War Chaplains." *The Huntington Library Quarterly*, Vol. 16, No. 3. (May 1953): 287-304.
- Windsor, Jerry M. "NOBLE BY NAME AND NOBLE BY NATURE." *Alabama Baptist Historian*, Vol. 40, No. 1. (2004): 16-25.
- Windsor, Jerry M. "PREACHING UP A STORM FROM 1839 TO 1889." *Alabama Baptist Historian*, Vol. 29, No. 1. (1993): 13-24.
- Wyatt-Brown, Bertram. "The Antimission Movement in the Jacksonian South: A Study in Regional Folk Culture" *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 36, No. 4. (November 1970): 501-529.

Dissertations

- Barber, Stephen Presley. *The Gospel Horse in the Valley: Evangelical Slavery and Freedom in the Chattahoochee Valley, 1821-1877*. Auburn University 2011.

Government Publications

Slave Schedules for 1850 and 1860

U.S. Federal Census, Alabama, 1850. National Archives.

U.S. Federal Census, Georgia, 1860 and 1880. National Archives, T9.

Newspapers

Alabama Baptist, 1843-1865, 1873-1997 (also called *Alabama Baptist Advocate* and *South-Western Baptist*, 1850-1865)

The Atlanta Constitution

The Baptist (Tennessee)

The Baptist and Reflector (Tennessee)

The Charleston Mercury (South Carolina)

The Christian Reflector

The Christian Index (Georgia)

Christian Union

Columbus Daily Enquirer-Sun

Columbus Daily Times/ Daily Columbus Times

Columbus Weekly Times

Daily Morning News (Savannah, Georgia)

The Daily News and Herald (Savannah, Georgia)

The Evangelical Pulpit

Georgia Weekly Telegraph and Georgia Journal & Messenger (Macon, Georgia)

Greenville Mountaineer (South Carolina)

Griffin Daily News and Sun

The Religious Herald (Virginia)

Religious Herald

Southern Cultivator

The Tuscaloosa News

The Watchman

Western Recorder

Zion's Herald