

Shubal Stearns

A. Background and Career

1. Growth of "Separates"

- a. Many New Lights either left or were forced out of the older churches. These became known as "Separates" and formed their own churches.
- b. Some Separates rejoined Congregationalist churches or formed their own. Many, however, became Baptists, causing Whitefield to remark that many of his "chicks" (converts) had become "ducks." The Baptists and the Presbyterians grew most during the Great Awakening, with Baptist growth coming almost entirely by conversions.

2. Separate Baptists of Sandy Creek, North Carolina

- a. One of the Separates in New England who was touched by Whitefield's preaching in 1745, Shubal Stearns formed a Baptist church in Connecticut.
- b. Eventually, Stearns moved to Sandy Creek, North Carolina, just south of modern Greensboro.

3. The Sandy Creek Work

- a. The work served as a large-scale introduction of both Baptists and the revival to the South.
- b. The revival resulted in a large church (600 members) in a growing but still backwoods area.
- c. The revival also resulted in a network of pro-revival churches in Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina. At the time of Stearns' death, there were 47 churches and 125 ministers.

B. Boldness of Shubal Stearns

1. Boldness to stand

- a. Despite legal and social obstacles, Stearns took a stand upon his convictions in New England.
- b. At the end of his career, he took a brave stand against the Regulators (insurgents resisting the colonial government), which virtually destroyed his church.

2. Boldness to go: Stearns was willing to leave the settled safety of New England (despite his troubles there) to reach the relatively unreached and wild Carolina back country.
 - a. Religious teaching was somewhat rare on the Carolina frontier (despite established Anglicanism); Stearns won many simply by having the only work available.
 - b. Danger is shown by the trouble that the Sandy Creek church had during the War of the Regulation (c.1770).
3. Boldness to preach
 - a. Morgan Edwards wrote, "His voice was musical and strong, which he managed in such a manner, as...to make soft impressions on the heart... and anon to shake the nerves."
 - b. Tidance Lane described his gaze: "He fixed his eyes upon me immediately, which made me feel in such a manner as I never felt before."
 - c. Elnathan Davis came to a baptismal service to mock and was instead converted through the penetrating power of Stearns's preaching.
4. Boldness to be diminished: When the Sandy Creek Association became too large to be efficient, Stearns was willing to agree to the division of the body and the reduction of his role. This is the spirit of John the Baptist: "He must increase, but I must decrease." (John 3:30).