

New Lights ^[1]

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by Ellen Fitzgibbons Causey, 2006

"New Lights" refers to a specific sect of Baptists that emerged during the [Great Awakening](#) ^[2] of the 1730s and the [Second Great Awakening](#) ^[3] of the early 1800s. During these revivals, some converted [Baptists](#) ^[4] were named "New Lights" because they believed that God had brought new light into their lives through their emotional conversion experiences. These New Light Baptists were also known as Separate Baptists for their belief in conversions, which set them apart from other Baptists, who preached Calvinistic ideas of predestination. These differences in beliefs caused the Baptist Church in North Carolina to develop slowly during the colonial period.

The General Baptists had moved into North Carolina from the beginning of settlement. The first permanent General Baptist church was organized in [Camden County](#) ^[5] in 1729, the same year North Carolina became a Crown colony. While the General Baptists were getting settled in the colony, the Great Awakening brought other missionaries to North Carolina to preach their evangelical messages. In 1739 George Whitefield traveled from Connecticut and stopped in [Edenton](#) ^[6] to preach the Methodist faith. Many people listened to Whitefield's sermons, but few converted.

One of Whitefield's New England converts was [Shubal Stearns](#) ^[7], who traveled to North Carolina on a mission of conversion. In 1754, Stearns, a former Congregationalist who had converted to the Baptist faith, arrived from Connecticut in present-day [Randolph County](#) ^[8]. With a small group under his leadership, Stearns founded the Sandy Creek Association four years later. It was his Sandy Creek Association churches that subsequently became known as New Light Baptist churches.

The cultural impact of New Light Baptists on North Carolina is widespread. The Baptists settled in communities all over the state and left their names behind. In northwestern [Wake County](#) ^[9], the New Light District was settled by Baptists. The New Light Meeting House in that community was founded in 1775. Within that settlement, two [gristmills](#) ^[10] and three general stores were established and thrived until the 1880s. In modern times, that section of Wake County is still known as the [New Light community](#) ^[11].

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