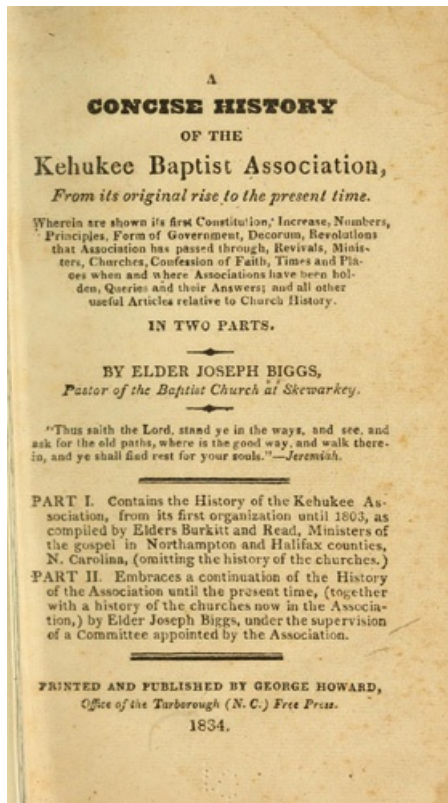## Burkitt, Lemuel [1]

Burkitt, Lemuel

by Hugh B. Johnston, Jr., 1979; Revised November 2022.

26 Apr. 1750–5 Nov. 1807

Lemuel Burkitt wrote "A concise history of the Kehukee Baptist Association, from its original rise to the present time" in 1803. [2]Lemuel Burkitt, Baptist [3] clergyman, member of the Hillsborough convention of 1788, and author of religious and other works, was born in the neighborhood of Yeopim Baptist Church, a few miles east of Edenton [4] in Chowan County [5]. His parents, Thomas Burkitt and his wife, Mary Evans, were among the charter members of the church. After receiving the best local education, he considered the study of law but not long afterward resolved to devote his life to the ministry. In July of 1771 he was baptized in the Pasquotank River by the Reverend Henry Abbot [6], and in the following September he was ordained a minister.

Burkitt spent much of the remainder of his life in evangelical work, preaching in Eastern North Carolina [7] and southeastern Virginia. In 1801 he made a four-month tour with almost nightly preaching among the Baptist churches of Kentucky and Tennessee, bringing back with him the spirit of the Great Revival, which then swept through the churches of the Kehukee Baptist Association in North Carolina. His lifetime pastorate was the Sandy Run Baptist Church in Bertie County [8], where he was installed by Elders Jonathan Thomas and John Meglamre in November 1773. He became a frequent participant in the founding of churches and the installation of pastors and is known to have delivered the funeral sermons of Elders James Bell and Henry Abbot and that of Elisha Battle [9], Sr.

Burkitt began his long and immensely fruitful relationship with the Kehukee Baptist Association [10] as a messenger from the Pasquotank church on 31 July 1773, when he was elected clerk for the first of some twenty-nine times. In 1775 he was a leader of the small group of "separate" churches when the first split occurred among the Baptists of North Carolina and the minutes were "Loste." On 9 Aug. 1777, when the Separates held their own association at Sappony Meeting House in Virginia, "being the first after the division took place at the Falls of Tar River," Burkitt resumed the office of clerk; he retained it through 1805, excepting the war years, 1779–81, when the Association did not meet, 1797 and 1802.

In addition to his part in the Great Split of 1775, Burkitt was a leader in three other important actions taken by the Kehukee Baptist Association: on 10 Oct. 1789, the Separates and Regulars were reunited as the United Baptist Association, with Burkitt as both clerk and treasurer; on 9 Oct. 1790, the Virginia members were allowed to withdraw in order to form the Virginia Portsmouth Association; and on 12 Oct. 1793, the remaining members whose churches lay south of Tar River were dismissed to form the Neuse Association. On 14 June 1805, Burkitt was a member of the joint committee from the

three associations that evolved a practical foundation for "the first organized missionary work among the North Carolina Baptists."

Because Burkitt resided until about 1790 inHertford County [11], where the early records were burned, we have little knowledge of his public life there. The 1779 tax list indicates that he already owned 100 acres, 4 horses, and 7 cattle, worth in all £2,270, plus around £84.12.4 in cash. He also was recorded to have enslaved three people, and they were part of the estates value. Representing Hertford County at the celebrated constitutional convention held at Hillsborough in 1788, he took his seat on 25 July and was an outspoken anti-Federalist who demanded the maximum preservation of state rights and personal liberties. At the time of his death in Northampton County [12], his estate consisted of considerable real and personal property, including £41.6.9 in money, a brandy still, 11 slaves, 935 acres in four plantations, 5 horses, and over 50 hogs, sheep, and cattle. The surviving inventory and account of the sale of his household furnishings complete the picture of a very prosperous planter.

Burkitt was the author of several religious works, one of which (a collection of hymns) had unusual popularity. Few of his writings have survived the passage of time, but another publication was *An Abridgement of English Grammar, Partly Extracted from Eminent and Approved Authors with Observations Entirely New* (Halifax, 1793). Beginning in 1789, he was responsible for compiling and having printed the Minutes of Kehukee Baptist Association. For a dozen years following 1791 he was a contributor to John Rippon's London *Baptist Annual Register* [13]. However, his chief claim to literary fame rests upon *A Concise History of the Kehukee Baptist Association, from its original rise to the present time*[2] (Halifax, 1803), in which he was assisted by Elder Jesse Read, pastor of the Rocky Swamp Baptist Church in Halifax County [14].

In about 1778, Burkitt married Hannah Bell (2 June 1758–ca. 1806), daughter of Elder James Bell and his wife, Mildred Robinson, of Sussex County, Va. The Burkitts had seven children known to have survived childhood: Mary married John Halsey and later John Nixon; Nancy married Abednego Rutland; Thomas died unmarried; Lemuel married Mary Smith; Burges married Mary Hardin; William married Nancy Gordon; and Sarah married Nathaniel Thatch, William Long, and then Henry A. Long. In about 1807, Burkitt married as his second wife Prudence Watson of Virginia; she died in 1808, leaving an infant who briefly survived her.

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