

Hodge (Hodges), William ^[1]

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by Durward T. Stokes, 1988

1747/50–1819/20

William Hodge (Hodges), clergyman, was born in the Hawfields section of Orange ^[2] (later Alamance ^[3]) County. Evidence is almost conclusive that he was the son of John and Agness Hodge, whose family also included sons John, Robert, George, and Samuel. Hodge joined the Hawfields Presbyterian Church during the pastorate of John DeBow ^[4] and planned to enter the Christian ministry, but the untimely death of DeBow discouraged him and he resigned himself to farming.

Hodge married Charity White, daughter of Stephanus and Ann Ross White; increased his real estate holdings; and was a successful planter until he neared the age of fifty. At that time, inspired by the evangelistic zeal of James McGready ^[5], his interest in religion revived and he studied under McGready and David Caldwell ^[6] to prepare himself for the ministry. When the Presbytery of Orange met on 4 Oct. 1792, Hodge had just been ordained and shortly afterwards became pastor of the Hawfields and Cross Roads Presbyterian churches. Thus, he was the first son of Hawfields to become a minister and he was influential in the decision of Robert Tate to become the second.

Active in the affairs of the Presbytery, Hodge was elected treasurer of the organization of 6 Mar. 1797. He was also an effective preacher. A sermon he delivered in 1791 at Alamance Presbyterian Church on the subject "God Is Love" was primarily responsible for the conversion of Barton Warren Stone ^[7], who later founded the denomination known today as the Disciples of Christ. However, Hodge's emphasis on evangelism offended some of the staid members of his congregations and a number withdrew from his churches. As a result, Hodge resigned his pastorate on 4 Apr. 1799 and the following year was dismissed from his Presbytery so he could go to the West.

In 1800, he became pastor of the Shiloh Presbyterian Church in Sumner, Tenn., and was associated with McGready, Stone, and others in the Great Revival ^[8] which began that year in the Southwest. During the Revival, the practice soon became widespread for members of the congregations to exhibit strange physical exertions, which the sympathetic called "The Exercises" and scoffers called the "jerks." Unlike the fiery McGready, Hodge preached in a calm but convincing manner, and became known as "a Son of Consolation," though his influence was equal to that of his more dynamic associates.

Revivalism, of which Hodge had always approved, sparked the rapid formation of congregations of converts but there were no ministers to serve as pastors for the new organizations. To meet this crucial need, Hodge, McGready, and their colleagues in the Cumberland Presbytery proceeded to license young exhorters who did not have the educational qualifications demanded by the Presbyterian church in general. This led to a rebuke from the Presbyterian Synod of Kentucky, which met on 21 Oct. 1806 and suspended the Shiloh minister and John Rankin from the ministry for insubordination. McGready and others soon received similar sentences. Hodge eventually made peace with his church and on 6 Dec. 1809 was restored to good standing as a minister. The same action followed one year later in McGready's case, but the others involved refused to yield to the denominational authority and organized the Cumberland Presbyterian Church.

The dissension that existed among the clergy had repercussions among the church members, and Hodge encountered increasing difficulties with his congregation at Shiloh. In 1818, he resigned the pastorate and moved to Logan County, Ky., where he died a year or two later. His burial place is unknown.

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