

Justice, Amos Isaac ^[1]

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by C. Sylvester Green ^[2], 1988

8 Dec. 1851–21 Dec. 1945

Amos Isaac Justice, Baptist ^[3]clergyman, was born in the Edneyville section of rural Henderson County ^[4]. No record has been found identifying his parents, although it is known that his family moved to Rutherford County ^[5] in 1853 and subsequently to Madison County ^[6]. His father, probably a tenant farmer, was known to be an ardent churchman who saw to it that his children were "at home in the church." Further, his parents must have been better schooled than many others during the postwar period, for it was reported that Justice, at age sixteen, "began preaching and teaching while continuing efforts to advance his own studies and teaching." His formal schooling was limited to short periods of study at Judson College ^[7] in Hendersonville under Professor W. C. McCarthey and later at Weaver College ^[8] in Weaverville.

In 1867 Justice was ordained to the Baptist ministry in his home church in Madison County, and for the next sixty years he served churches in Madison, Buncombe, Polk, and Henderson counties. His last pastorate was at Marshall, from which he retired in 1930. Nevertheless, he continued to teach and to serve as supply preacher and interim pastor of many churches in the area until the age of ninety-three, when his hearing and eyesight failed and he entered a nursing home in Asheville. At the time of his death, he had long been the oldest active Baptist minister in the state.

During his ministry, Justice was pastor of thirty Baptist churches and was the leader in organizing five additional churches. He preached with great fervor, buttressing his sermons with wide reading and thoughtful interpretation of the Scriptures. His zeal for education provided the leadership that resulted in the organization of two educational institutions: Fruitland Institute ^[9] in Henderson County and Fairview Institute in Buncombe County ^[10]. A highlight of his career was the establishment of Fruitland Institute, near Hendersonville. Impressed with the need for formal educational facilities in that part of the state (around 1885, there was no high school in the four contiguous counties of Henderson, Polk, Rutherford, and Transylvania), Justice founded the school, became its first principal, and was involved in its administration for many years at great personal, physical, and financial sacrifice. He also sought funds to maintain the institution, which provided academic and Christian training for literally hundreds of students from the area. Wake Forest College ^[11], for one, accepted many Fruitland graduates who went on to become teachers, preachers, lawyers, congressmen, and business leaders across the state.

In denominational leadership, Justice served for years as moderator of the Carolina Association. His influence as a conciliatory and considerable force in solidifying church groups and organizations was widely felt throughout the Baptist State Convention, especially during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. One of his most successful undertakings led to the merging of the Western North Carolina Baptist Convention in 1898 with the North Carolina Baptist State Convention, which had been organized in Greenville in 1830. In that effort Justice worked with Albert Erskine Brown ^[12], a dedicated Baptist minister in western North Carolina.

In 1870 Justice married Minerva Fisher of Madison County. They were the parents of one son, James Foy ^[13], and five daughters: Lillie, Juliana, Minnie, May, and Lola. Justice died at age ninety-four; after funeral services in the First Baptist Church, Hendersonville, where he was a member, he was buried in the Hendersonville Cemetery.

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Subjects:

Biographies [18]

Religious Leaders and Clergy [19]

Authors:

Green, C. Sylvester [20]

Origin - location:

Buncombe County [21]

Henderson County [22]

Madison County [23]

Polk County [24]

Rutherford County [25]

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1 January 1988 | Green, C. Sylvester

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Links

[1] <https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/justice-amos-isaac> [2] <https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/green-charles-sylvester> [3] <https://www.ncpedia.org/baptists> [4] <https://www.ncpedia.org/geography/henderson> [5] <https://www.ncpedia.org/geography/rutherford> [6] <https://www.ncpedia.org/geography/madison> [7] <https://www.ncpedia.org/judson-college> [8] <https://www.ncpedia.org/weaver-college> [9] <http://www.fruitland.edu/> [10] <https://www.ncpedia.org/geography/buncombe> [11] <https://www.ncpedia.org/wake-forest-university> [12] <https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/brown-albert-erskine> [13] <http://hendersonheritage.com/political-events-and-leaders-1900-1920/> [14] <https://archive.org/stream/minutesofcarolin9395caro#page/4/mode/2up> [15] <https://archive.org/stream/commemoratingope01hend#page/44/mode/2up> [16] <http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=92ZPAAAAIBAJ&sjid=jCQEAAAAIBAJ&pg=2936%2C4517150> [17] <https://archive.org/details/minutesofannuals18320b> [18] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/subjects/biography-term> [19] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/subjects/clergy> [20] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/authors/green-c-sylvester> [21] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/mountain-8> [22] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/mountain-7> [23] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/mountain-10> [24] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/mountain-11> [25] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/mountain-12> [26] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/entry-source/dictionary-no>