

McAden, Hugh ^[1]

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by George W. Troxler, 1991

ca. 1720–20 Jan. 1781

Hugh McAden, Presbyterian ^[2] minister, was born in Pennsylvania to "poor but pious parents" of Ulster Scots ancestry ^[3]. He was graduated from the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University) in 1753 and was awarded a master's degree in 1756. McAden studied theology with John Blair at Fagg's Manor in Chester County, Pa., and was licensed in 1755 by the New Castle Presbytery, which was affiliated with the "new side" or "new light" Synod of New York. In June 1755 the presbytery sent him to the Carolinas as a missionary.

The young licentiate kept a journal of his eleven-month mission. Although the original manuscript has been lost, lengthy excerpts appear in William Henry Foote ^[4]'s *Sketches of North Carolina* ^[5]. It is one of the few primary accounts of the early Presbyterian congregations in North Carolina. McAden spent nearly two months preaching to Presbyterian congregations in Virginia before he entered North Carolina near the site of modern Milton in Caswell County ^[6]. During the nine months he spent in the colony, he visited the nucleus of nearly all of the early Presbyterian congregations. After a month in the area now comprised of Caswell and Person counties, he visited churches in Orange, Granville, and present-day Guilford before moving on to the Ulster Scots settlements in Rowan and what later became Mecklenburg County. Following a visit of nearly two months to South Carolina he returned to preach in Anson County ^[7], in the Highland Scots settlements on the Cape Fear River ^[8], and in Wilmington. While in the Ulster Scots settlements along the Northeast Cape Fear River, he received calls from what became the Rockfish and Grove churches in Duplin County ^[9]. McAden continued itinerant preaching as he traveled through Edgecombe County ^[10] and revisited some of the churches in Granville ^[11] and Orange ^[12] counties before leaving the colony.

After his ordination in 1757 by the New Castle Presbytery, McAden returned to North Carolina to accept the calls from the Duplin County ^[9] congregations. His pastorate covered most of present-day Duplin, Pender ^[13], and New Hanover ^[14] counties. He bought land and built a house near Grove Church in the vicinity of present-day Kenansville. When he returned to Pennsylvania, McAden persuaded James Campbell ^[15], a Gaelic-speaking minister, to settle among the North Carolina Highlanders ^[16]. McAden and Campbell, who also came in 1757, were the only settled Presbyterian ministers in the colony until 1765.

In 1759 McAden joined the Hanover Presbytery in Virginia and was frequently assigned to preach at churches in North Carolina. His continued association with congregations in northern Orange where he often was assigned to preach, as well as the conviction that the coastal climate was bad for his health, prompted him to accept a call from the Hyco, Dan River, and Country Line Creek churches in 1768. When McAden moved to Orange County ^[12], he made his home at the Middle Hyco Church (later Red House ^[17]) in present-day Semora. He also served various churches in Caswell and Person counties and in Virginia. At the time of his death he was preaching at Middle Hyco, Griers (Upper Hyco), and a church in Pittsylvania County, Va. McAden was one of the seven original members of the Orange Presbytery, created in May 1770 to serve the congregations in the Carolinas.

During the Regulator movement ^[18] McAden and the other three Presbyterian ministers in the Piedmont supported the colonial government. In a letter to the governor they expressed their "abhorrence" of the Regulator's "turbulent and disorderly spirit." The ministers counseled their brethren who had signed the Regulator oath to repent and warned that "greater guilt" would "lie upon them" if they kept it.

In 1762 McAden married Catherine Scott of Lunenburg County, Va. He was buried at Red House Church in Caswell County, survived by his wife and seven children. Two weeks after his death, a detachment of Lord Cornwallis's army occupied the church building and burned his library and papers.

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Additional Resources:

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