

Newton, George ^[1]

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by Bertha Freeman, 1991

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George Newton, educator and Presbyterian ^[2] minister, was the youngest of seven children of Ebenezer Newton and his wife of Shrewbury District, York, Pa. The family moved to North Carolina before the American Revolution ^[3] and on 10 Jan. 1774 sold some land in Mecklenburg County ^[4]. In 1778 George Newton took an oath "to bear faithfull and true allegiance to the State of North Carolina." There is some evidence to suggest that he also served in the war.

Because of the destruction of local records, little is known of Newton until 1797. In the autumn of that year he arrived in the newly chartered town of Asheville ^[5] to begin a classical school for boys ^[6], with which he was associated until 1814. His school came to be highly regarded, and it attracted pupils from several adjacent states. Named Union Hill, it was chartered by the General Assembly ^[7] in 1805. In 1809, when it occupied a new brick building, its name was changed by legislative act to Newton Academy. An early effort to establish a female seminary with funds coming from a lottery was not successful. Among Newton's students were David Lowry Swain ^[8], governor and president of The University of North Carolina ^[9]; B. F. Perry ^[10], governor of South Carolina; Waddy Thompson ^[11], of South Carolina, congressman and minister to Mexico; and numerous other state and local officials.

The academy building was also the site of religious services on Sunday, with Newton officiating. He was only a licentiate when he began his teaching career, but when local congregations were organized by visiting missionaries in 1794, he received a call to become the pastor of churches at Swannanoa, Bee Tree, Reems Creek, and Asheville. He was readily ordained after preaching a prepared sermon on a stated passage of Scripture and passing an examination on the chronology, history, and government of the Presbyterian church. Traveling on foot and on horseback, he kept a schedule of services at the various places, but two or three Sunday afternoons each month were reserved for worship at the academy building by his largest congregation.

Late in 1813 or early the following year, Newton consented to go to Bedford County, Tenn. There he generally repeated the process that he had followed in North Carolina, operating schools and nurturing Presbyterian congregations. His Mount Reserve Academy (later called Bethsalem Academy) was the first-known school in the new county. Having established several schools and Presbyterian congregations, Newton moved to Shelbyville, Tenn., where he spent the final years of his life.

Newton's first wife, Mary McCall (or McCaule), whom he married in Orange County ^[12], N.C., in 1794, died in 1828. His second wife, Ann, died on 5 July 1831. Sometime before December 1833 he married Helen M., who survived him. His children, all by his first wife, were William, Jane McCall, John, Ebenezer James, Alexander, and Elizabeth.

A portrait of Newton, painted by his great-grand-daughter, was unveiled at the Newton School in Asheville, site of the old Newton Academy, on 14 Apr. 1954.

References:

Asheville Citizen, 11, 14 Apr. 1954.

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Ora Blackmun, *A Spire in the Mountains* (1970). <https://archive.org/details/spireinmountains00blac> ^[13] (accessed September 29, 2014).

Foster A. Sondley ^[14], *A History of Buncombe County*, 2 vols. (1930).

Foster A. Sondley and T. F. Davidson, *Asheville and Buncombe County* (1921). <https://archive.org/details/ashevillebuncomb00sond> ^[15] (accessed September 29, 2014).

Additional Resources:

"Newton Academy." N.C. Highway Historical Marker P-18, N.C. Office of Archives & History. <https://www.ncdcr.gov/about/history/division-historical-resources/nc-highway-historical-marker-program/Markers.aspx?sp=Markers&k=Markers&sv=P-18> ^[16] (accessed September 29, 2014).

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