

## ABSTRACT

Early Theological and Historical Influences on the Doctrines of James Robinson Graves

Brad W. Aldridge

Director: Rosalie Beck, Ph.D.

As the Southern Baptist Convention of the mid-19th-century continued its tug-of-war over membership and churches with the Stone-Campbell Restoration movement, James Robinson Graves founded the Landmark movement at a meeting in Cotton Grove, Tennessee in order to rejuvenate the Baptist sense of theological identity. The firebrand minister and editor of the Tennessee Baptist prescribed strict boundaries to Baptist ecclesiology, including a definition for "legitimate" baptism and the restriction of the church to a local and visible nature, to the exclusion of the universal church and centralized missions. To carry his argument, Graves cited both Scripture and a theory of "historical succession" that linked the New Testament church to contemporary Baptists using a theological chain that included medieval heretics. This thesis examines the preacher's life and career prior to Graves's Cotton Grove Resolutions of 1851 and the sudden rise of Landmarkism that followed. In doing so, this thesis attempts to explain why Graves developed the Landmark theology contained in the resolutions. This thesis argues that while the essence of Graves's doctrines evolved from that of the Separate Baptists of Graves's New England birthplace, Landmarkism's exclusionary character arose from Graves's observations of the effects of the Stone-Campbell movement and the liberalization of mainstream ecclesiology on Southern Baptist life.

APPROVED BY DIRECTOR OF HONORS THESIS:

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Dr. Rosalie Beck, Department of Religion

APPROVED BY THE HONORS PROGRAM:

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Dr. Andrew Wisely, Director

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

EARLY THEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL INFLUENCES ON THE DOCTRINES  
OF JAMES ROBINSON GRAVES

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By  
Brad W. Aldridge

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction and Methodology

Traditionally, historians record and study events and ideas from the past in order to understand their effects and form a narrative for a chosen subject of research. A historian may study a particular subject for the sake of a career or for the personal enjoyment of strengthening an emotional connection to the subject. The author of this thesis falls into the latter category. His subject, the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Baptist preacher and journalist James Robinson Graves (1820-93), co-founded the theological movement known as the “Old Landmark Baptists,” the “Landmark Baptists,” or simply “Landmarkism.”

This dogmatic sect of evangelical Southern Baptist life insisted that only churches that administer the ordinance of baptism in a theologically acceptable manner are true Christian churches. Graves’s Cotton Grove Resolutions of 1851 initiated the Landmark movement, and the articles and speeches of Graves, the pamphlets of theologian James Madison Pendleton, and the novels of Amos Cooper Dayton spread Landmark thought throughout the Southern Baptist Convention of the 1850s. From this first peak of influence, Landmarkism declined somewhat after the Civil War, but Graves continued to contribute and hold sway in the movement until his death in 1893.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>For general information on Landmarkism, see H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1987), 447-461; and James E. Tull, *High-Church Baptists in the South: The Origin, Nature, and Influence of Landmarkism*, ed. Morris Ashcraft (Macon, GA: Mercer, 2000), passim.

Shortly thereafter, in 1905, some Landmarkists that could no longer tolerate the Convention's centralized government split from the Southern Baptists and founded the Baptist General Association, now called the American Baptist Association (ABA).<sup>2</sup> The author's church from childhood, Antioch Missionary Baptist Church of Little Rock, Arkansas, belongs to the latter denomination and continues to practice and preach Landmark ecclesiology. Because of the Landmark movement's relevance to his heritage, the author seeks a more personal understanding of the theological origins of the earliest figure of Landmarkism, J. R. Graves. Graves claimed to have formulated his first principles solely on the basis of the Bible; however, he was also influenced by the Baptist culture of the time he inhabited. This author specifically seeks to determine the people, churches, and movements that directly contributed to the public formulation of his distinctive theological principles at the June 24, 1851 meeting at Cotton Grove, Tennessee. The author ultimately agrees with biographers such as James A. Patterson and Leroy B. Hogue that Graves's identity as a Landmark Baptist was formed by a Separate Baptist intellectual heritage and a history of theological strife with infant-baptizing Pedobaptist denominations and schismatic Stone-Campbell Churches of Christ.<sup>3</sup>

To investigate Graves's need to define and maintain the unique identity of Baptists and Baptist churches, the author utilizes an appropriate historical methodology. The thesis chapters will be divided between an overview of Landmark theology and biographies for two periods of Graves's life; and sources appropriate for each topic and

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<sup>2</sup>James A. Patterson, *James Robinson Graves: Staking the Boundaries of Baptist Identity* (Nashville, TN, B & H Academic, 2012), 193-195.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 11-29; and LeRoy B. Hogue, "A Study of the Antecedents of Landmarkism," (ThD diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1966), chap. 3, accessed March 31, 2015, <http://landmarkism.tripod.com/chapter.3.new.english.html>.

time period will be analyzed. Each chapter's specific methodology, outlining authors, data types, and date ranges, is explained in each of these chapter summaries.

## *Chapter Two*

In the June 14, 1851 issue of the *Tennessee Baptist*, editor-in-chief Graves announced a “mass meeting” to be held ten days later at a church in a small community, Cotton Grove, less than ten miles east of Jackson, Tennessee.<sup>4</sup> Though the following five questions were neither the only resolutions adopted at the meeting nor the only resolutions proposed by Graves, they defined the central tenets of a Baptist school of ecclesiology known as Landmarkism:

- 1st. Can Baptists, consistently with their principles or the Scriptures, recognize those societies not organized according to the pattern of the Jerusalem Church, but possessing different *governments*, different *officers*, a different class of *members*, different *ordinances*, *doctrines* and *practices*, as churches of Christ?
- 2d. Ought they to be called gospel churches, or churches in a religious sense?
- 3d. Can we consistently recognize the ministers of such irregular and unscriptural bodies as gospel ministers?
- 4th. Is it not virtually recognizing them as official ministers to invite them into our pulpits, or *by any other act that would or could be construed into such a recognition?*

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<sup>4</sup>Patterson, *Graves*, 50-51. Hereafter in this chapter, italics for emphases are from the source and are not added by the author.



5th. Can we consistently address as *brethren* those professing Christianity, who not only have not the doctrine of Christ and walk not according to his commandments, but are arrayed in direct and bitter opposition to them?<sup>5</sup>

About a month after the gathering at Cotton Grove, Graves published the meeting's formal transcript in the *Tennessee Baptist*, and several Southern Baptist associations in Arkansas, Alabama, Tennessee, and Texas quickly adopted these "Cotton Grove Resolutions."<sup>6</sup>

Graves's movement gained further momentum when he enlisted collaborators James Madison Pendleton (1811-91), the skilled theologian who lent the Landmark movement its name with his 1854 tract *An Old Landmark Re-set*, and Amos Cooper Dayton (1811-65), the author of the popular religious novel *Theodosia Ernest*.<sup>7</sup> Though the three men, known as the "Great Triumvirate" in later literature, led the Landmark movement throughout the 1850s, the Civil War forced them to separate professionally and personally. After Dayton died in 1865 and Pendleton embraced the concept of the universal church and other doctrines contrary to Landmarkism, Graves maintained his Landmark stance and the editorship of the *Tennessee Baptist* and its successor, the

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<sup>5</sup>James Robinson Graves, "Communications: Mass Meeting at Cotton Grove, June 24, 1851," *Tennessee Baptist*, July 19, 1851, 2. For another text of the Resolutions, see James Robinson Graves, *Old Landmarkism: What is It?* 2nd ed. (Memphis, TN: Baptist Book House, 1880), xi-xii. Though Graves reported in his book that the questions were "unanimously answered in the negative," (p. xii) he overlooked the fact that the intended answer for the fourth question was affirmative.

<sup>6</sup>Joe Early, Jr., "The Cotton Grove Resolutions," *Tennessee Baptist History* 7 (Fall 2005): 50.

<sup>7</sup>See A. C. Dayton, *Theodosia Ernest: Or, The Heroine of Faith* (Nashville, TN: Graves & Marks, 1856; reprint, Philadelphia, PA: American Baptist Publication Society, 1903); J. M. Pendleton, *An Old Landmark Re-set* (Nashville, TN: Graves & Marks, 1854).

*Baptist*, until his death in 1893. The author of the Cotton Grove Resolutions was the sole leader of Landmarkism for the rest of his life.<sup>8</sup>

Graves was the first to publish material advocating the theology of Landmarkism, and was the most publicized preacher, journalist, and apologist among the Triumvirate. Because of his identity as the originator of the Landmark movement, this study into the origins of the ideas of Landmarkism will attempt to discover the reasons that Graves formulated the Cotton Grove Resolutions and other principles and characteristics of the movement. The second chapter of this thesis will aid this exploration by defining three of the doctrines of Landmarkism that distinguish it from other Baptist sects.

Various commentators have defined Landmarkism on their own terms, including Baptist historian Leon McBeth in *The Baptist Heritage*.<sup>9</sup> These definitions usually rely on the “marks” of the “Model Church” that Graves himself outlined in 1880 in *Old Landmarkism: What is It?*:

- (1) “the church and kingdom of Christ is a divine institution,”
- (2) “the church is a visible institution,”
- (3) “its locality is upon this Earth,”
- (4) “it [is] a local organization, a single congregation,”
- (5) “the membership [are] all professedly regenerate in heart before [being] baptized into it,”
- (6) “its baptism is the profession on the part of the subject, of the faith of the Gospel by which he is saved,” and

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<sup>8</sup>Patterson, *Graves*, 53-58.

<sup>9</sup>H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1987), 450-453.

(7) “the Lord’s Supper [is] observed as a local church ordinance.”<sup>10</sup>

Several practical doctrines, including protest against “alien immersion,” and a major supplementary theory, the historical succession of the church, resulted from these distinctive ecclesiological traits. Alien immersion was a pejorative term that labeled as invalid any immersive baptism by a non-immersed administrator.<sup>11</sup> Historical successionism was an attempt, by means of historical proof, to vindicate Jesus’ promise of church in perpetuity in Matthew 16:18 for the sake of the Baptist churches, which Graves determined were the churches defined in the Gospels.<sup>12</sup> Though the idea emerged independently from various American and British Baptists, the one successionist source that Graves relied on most was *A Concise History of Foreign Baptists* by British writer G. H. Orchard.<sup>13</sup> While elaborating on these characteristics of Landmarkism, the second chapter will also examine several perspectives and theories regarding Landmark doctrine, including those of historians McBeth and Harold Smith, stern critics James Tull and Hugh Wamble, and Landmark pastor J. C. Settlemoir.

### *Chapter Three*

The third chapter will analyze J. R. Graves’s life prior to his career at the *Tennessee Baptist* in Nashville, with a particular emphasis on the theology with which Graves grew up as a young man in Vermont, Ohio, and Kentucky. Primary sources,

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<sup>10</sup>Graves, *Old Landmarkism*, 27-30, 41, 48, 58.

<sup>11</sup>See James Robinson Graves, “Ecclesiastical Questions,” *Tennessee Baptist*, August 14, 1847, 2.

<sup>12</sup>Graves, *Old Landmarkism*, 83-85.

<sup>13</sup> G. H. Orchard, *A Concise History of Foreign Baptists* (Nashville, TN: Graves, Marks and Rutland, 1855), passim, accessed April 15, 2015, <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/moa/AJK2016.0001.001?view=toc>.

including the confessions of faith, church covenants, and other Baptist documents of early 19<sup>th</sup>-century New England and Kentucky will be examined, along with secondary biographers and historians such as James Tull, C. C. Goen, O. L. Hailey, and James A. Patterson. The following biography summarizes this chapter.

Born in 1820 in Chester, Vermont, less than a month before his father died, Graves broke with the Congregationalist tradition of his parents and region through baptism in a historically Separate Baptist church when he was 14 years old in 1834. The Separate Baptists were a sect of former Congregationalists that emerged during the First Great Awakening in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and rejected infant baptism, restricted communion to believers baptized as adults, were strongly Calvinistic, and were suspicious of strong associations between churches.<sup>14</sup> Though the distinct identity of the Separate Baptists had been absorbed over time into the wider New England Baptist culture by the year of Graves's baptism, the works of important Separate writers such as Isaac Backus, John Leland, and J. Newton Brown influenced Graves in his early adulthood. The eleventh and twelfth articles of the New Hampshire Confession of 1833, which Brown co-authored, were particularly influential because they did not endorse the concept of the universal church and required believer's baptism by immersion for church membership:

- (xi) "That a visible Church of Christ is a congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the Gospel;... that its only proper officers are Bishops or Pastors, and Deacons...;"

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<sup>14</sup>See C. C. Goen, *Revivalism and Separatism in New England, 1740-1800* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1962), 208-257.

- (xii) “That Christian Baptism is the immersion of a believer in water, in the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit, to show forth...our faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Saviour, with its purifying power; that it is a prerequisite to the privileges of a church relation; and to the Lord’s Supper...;”<sup>15</sup>

Evidence of Graves’s direct intellectual contact with Separate Baptists while in Vermont is only inferred, and there is virtually no record of his religious activity during his stay at his next residence, Kingsville, Ohio, from 1839 to 1841; however, there do exist records of his time in Jessamine County, Kentucky between 1841 and 1843.<sup>16</sup>

In Jessamine County, Kentucky, the leadership of Mount Freedom Baptist Church welcomed Graves as both a member and a licensed preacher on the same day in May 1842 and ordained him five months later in October. Graves quickly learned from the history of Mount Freedom and the local Baptist publication editor John L. Waller of the threats that Alexander Campbell (1788-1866) and his followers in the Restoration Movement posed for Baptists in frontier states like Kentucky and Tennessee. The chapter will conclude with accounts of Graves’s opponents’ 1858 accusations relating to opinions regarding slavery and “Campbellism” that Graves supposedly expressed during his Kentucky years.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>From William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Valley Forge, VA: Judson Press, 1959), 360-367. These statements of the New Hampshire Confession of 1833 are quoted with their original 1833 numbering and words. The source includes the two articles added in the 1853 revision, which are numbered (viii) and (x). Therefore, the articles numbered here as (xi) and (xii) are (xiii) and (xiv) in the 1853 source.

<sup>16</sup>Unless otherwise noted, paragraph cites Patterson, *Graves*, 7-22.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, 22-29.

#### *Chapter Four*

The fourth chapter will examine Graves's published works in Nashville as assistant editor to mentor R. B. C. Howell (1801-68) and full editor of the *Tennessee Baptist*, since the years between his move to Nashville in 1845 and the Cotton Grove meeting in 1851 saw the gestation of Graves's Landmarks. Some context on the history of Baptists in Nashville will be provided before a review of Graves's work as pastor of Second Baptist Church, Nashville, and as assistant editor. From the start of his tenure as full editor in 1848, Graves set the primary subject, historic Baptist principles, and tone, what Patterson called "a mode of militancy," of the *Tennessee Baptist* with his regular and unapologetically controversialist attacks on religious error, neutrality of opinion, and compromise. The reach of this polemical campaign extended to those of Graves's fellow Baptists who openly resisted his efforts, including former Kentucky mentor Waller, with whom Graves contended over alien immersion with the assistance of a reader or alter ego known by the pseudonym "Fidus." But it was the climate of Graves's less controversial campaign against powerful Pedobaptists such as Methodist journalist John B. McFerrin that would lead to the genesis of Landmarkism as a movement at Cotton Grove.<sup>18</sup>

#### *Chapter Five*

In the concluding chapter, the author will summarize the results of his research efforts for each chapter, reflecting on his ability to procure sources and use those that are available. The author will conclude by proposing further lines of inquiry into the life of Graves and the origins of Landmarkism.

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 34-51.

## CHAPTER TWO

### What is Landmarkism?

Landmarkism is defined historically as a set of doctrines that strictly define Baptist churches as local and exclusive entities. Its ecclesiological definitions emerged from the need to establish and maintain Baptist identity in each church organization and membership in the face of the growing Stone-Campbell Movement. Landmarkism's most distinctive doctrines are the theology of believer's baptism by immersion only, the local and democratic polity of a church, and the historical succession of Baptist churches. James Robinson [J. R.] Graves (1820-93) and other early Landmark leaders derived these principles from a literal reading of the Bible that placed emphasis on the commandments of Christ. The scholar of Landmarkism James E. Tull, in his critique of the movement titled *High Church Baptists in the South*, summarized this super-principle: "The Landmark ecclesiology drew much of its intensity and doctrinaire quality from the conviction that Christ founded the church, perpetuated it, and gave in detailed biblical commandment the principles of its structure, government, and life."<sup>1</sup>

In 1880, Graves himself set out to define the historic "marks" of Landmarkism explicitly and systematically in *Old Landmarkism: What is it?* These characteristics, each variously described as a "mark of the Church of Christ," "mark of the 'Model Church'," or "mark of the Model Ecclesia," include:

- (1) "the church and kingdom of Christ is a divine institution,

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<sup>1</sup>James E. Tull, *High-Church Baptists in the South: The Origin, Nature, and Influence of Landmarkism*, ed. Morris Ashcraft (Macon, GA: Mercer, 2000), 13-14.

- (2) “the church is a visible institution,”
- (3) “its locality is upon this Earth,”
- (4) “it [is] a local organization, a single congregation,”
- (5) “the membership [are] all professedly regenerate in heart before [being] baptized into it,”
- (6) “its baptism is the profession on the part of the subject, of the faith of the Gospel by which he is saved,
- (7) “the Lord’s Supper [is] observed as a local church ordinance.”<sup>2</sup>

Commenters on and historians of Landmarkism, including Tull, have elaborated on the full extent of Graves’s doctrines. Because Tull attempted to examine the doctrines of the entire Triumvirate,<sup>3</sup> he placed these marks under four distinct themes: the Bible as Law with Christ as “Lawgiver,” the local, visible organization of the church, the relationship between church and kingdom, and the historical succession of churches.<sup>4</sup> Tull noticed the inspiration that Graves likely gained from A. C. Dayton’s “marks of the true church” in *Theodosia Ernest*, concluding “[These lists] are in essential agreement on all matters.”<sup>5</sup> Tull also added an eighth mark, the perpetuity of the church by succession, to reflect Graves’s advocacy of this principle inside and outside of *Old Landmarkism*.

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<sup>2</sup>J. R. Graves, *Old Landmarkism: What Is It?* 2nd ed. (Memphis, TN: Baptist Book House, 1880), 27-30, 41, 48, 58.

<sup>3</sup>The Triumvirate consists of Graves, J. M. Pendleton (1811-91), and A. C. Dayton (1811-65), as noted in Chapter 1.

<sup>4</sup>Tull, *High Church Baptists*, 13-26.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 43-44; For Dayton’s list of marks, see *Theodosia Ernest: Ten Days’ Travel in Search of the Church*, (Nashville, TN: Graves & Marks, 1857; reprint, Philadelphia, PA: American Baptist Publication Society, 1903), 183-134.



Several of these “Landmarks” are discussed below in this chapter’s exposition of Graves’s writings.

Like Tull, Leon McBeth, in *The Baptist Heritage*, identified the “taproot” of Landmarkism in general with a “high” doctrine of the church.<sup>6</sup> He then listed six basic characteristics of Landmark doctrine:

- (1) *Baptist churches are the only true churches in the world.* The Landmark System was exclusive; in this view, Baptists alone represented the true church.
- (2) *The true church is a local, visible institution.* According to Landmarkism, the only “church” is a local organization. No room is made for any “invisible” or “universal” church.
- (3) *The churches and the kingdom of God are coterminous.*
- (4) *There must be no “pulpit affiliation” with non-Baptists....* Since such brethren represented “human societies” instead of churches, they had no valid ordination and no commission to preach.
- (5) *Only a church can do churchly acts.* Certain acts or functions are by their nature “churchly,” such as baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and preaching.... [N]o organization but a church can validly perform them. Out of this doctrine grew the Landmark advocacy of closed communion and opposition to “alien immersion” and missions boards.
- (6) *Baptist churches have always existed in every age by an unbroken historical*

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<sup>6</sup>H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1987), 450. Hereafter in this chapter, italics for emphases are from the source and are not added by the author.

*succession.*<sup>7</sup>

Harold S. Smith, in his chapter on Graves in *Baptist Theologians*, gave a similar definition of Landmark ecclesiology, but with a specific emphasis on Graves's thought. For Smith, the six marks of Graves's true church were "divine origin, perpetual existence, visible institution, local organization, biblical practices, and a Baptist body."<sup>8</sup> Smith also discussed the relation between the church and the kingdom of God as a separate characteristic of Graves' doctrine.<sup>9</sup> While Smith borrowed from Graves when describing the Landmark church and the kingdom as "synonymous," McBeth observed that Graves actually claimed a somewhat more nuanced doctrine where churches are individual units of the kingdom of God and are thus "coterminous" with the kingdom.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to these recognizable marks of Landmarkism, Smith discussed broader elements of Graves's theology, including his doctrines of God, revelation, the Trinity, Creation, atonement, and eschatology.<sup>11</sup> In particular, Graves's adoption of plenary-verbal inspiration and his resulting strict biblical literalism must be kept in mind when reading Graves's writings on any theological matter. Hugh Wamble agreed while remarking, "Landmarkers accepted the Reformation view of the supremacy of Scripture

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 450-453. "Pulpit affiliation" designates the practice of allowing a non-Baptist preacher to speak from a Baptist pulpit. In Landmark literature, "alien immersion" was a pejorative term for any immersive baptism by a non-immersed administrator.

<sup>8</sup>Harold S. Smith, "J. R. Graves," in *Baptist Theologians*, ed. Timothy George and David S. Dockery (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1990), 238.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 239.

<sup>10</sup>McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage*, 451. While the church-kingdom relationship is significant to Graves as an element of ecclesiological theory, this paper will treat it as a subordinate, assisting doctrine for his more central doctrines of church government.

<sup>11</sup>Smith, "J. R. Graves," 230-238, 241.

but applied it primarily to practice, as contradistinguished from faith.”<sup>12</sup> But Smith believed that Graves’s driving motivation wasn’t one specific doctrine or set of doctrines but rather a distinct and deep concern for Baptist identity and strength.<sup>13</sup>

No review of secondary sources on Graves’s principles would be complete without contemporary Landmarkers’ assessments of his theology. One 21<sup>st</sup>-century manifestation of Landmark doctrine, the Essential Mother-Daughter Authority [EMDA], is an example of a theory whose identification as a “Landmark” doctrine would have been disputed by Graves. The EMDA rule of ecclesiology and succession dictates that each Baptist church must, as an “essential” necessity, gain explicit permission by a vote from a “mother church” in order to receive the Holy Spirit and the authority of Christ.<sup>14</sup> Traditional Landmark pastor J. C. Settlemoir discredited this theory by pointing out that in Graves’s ecclesiology, any Christians that are baptized validly may constitute a church because they receive their authority directly from Christ. Notably, Robert Ashcraft, who quoted extensively from Graves in his comprehensive history *Landmarkism Revisited*, did not disagree with EMDA when he reprinted Landmark critic Bob L. Ross’s statement on the matter: “In denying church authority, Ross wrote: ‘...I do not dispute the basis for the argument. The basis for the argument is that Jesus gave or delegated *His* authority to the church and the church is now the only institution which can give authority in baptism, forming new churches, ordaining preachers, administering the ordinance of the Lord’s

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<sup>12</sup>G. Hugh Wamble, “Landmarkism: Doctrinaire Ecclesiology among Baptists,” *Church History* 33, no. 4 (December 1, 1964): 430. Wamble then claimed, “Graves was not interested in theology, and he abhorred Calvinism.” In this author’s opinion, this is an unfair or at least incomplete critique.

<sup>13</sup>Smith, “J. R. Graves,” 229.

<sup>14</sup>J. C. Settlemoir, *Landmarkism Under Fire*, 1st ed. (Lizton, IN: By the author, 2005), accessed April 30, 2014, <http://libcfl.com/articles/LUF/index.html>.

Supper, etc.’”<sup>15</sup>

A full analysis of each of Graves’s marks, or any author’s list of defining traits of Landmarkism, is beyond the scope of this discussion; therefore, we will identify three distinct Landmark doctrines or sets of doctrines that can be observed in Graves’s theology—as seen in his writings and perceived by scholars of Landmarkism. First and foremost among these beliefs is a mandate for baptism by immersion of the adult believer as the proper baptism in mode and subject. When Graves asked in the first of the five Cotton Grove Resolutions, “Can Baptists, consistently with their principles or the Scriptures, recognize those societies...possessing...different ordinances, doctrines and practices as churches of Christ,” he had baptism and not simply polity in mind.<sup>16</sup> In his early and famous anti-Methodist polemic *The Great Iron Wheel*, written in the form of letters to Methodist ministers, Graves included the word “baptism” in the Table of Contents entries for five letters and made additional attacks on his addressees for their improper practice of the ordinance in other chapters.<sup>17</sup> Three of the six questions debated, and a majority of the pages in the publication of Graves’s *Great Carrollton Debate* with Methodist Jacob Ditzler, concern baptism.<sup>18</sup> Though Graves made these efforts in response to the strong influence of Methodists as Pedobaptist competitors in Tennessee

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<sup>15</sup>Robert Ashcraft, *Landmarkism Revisited* (Mabelvale, AR: Ashcraft Publications, 2003), 193-194.

<sup>16</sup>Graves, *Old Landmarkism*, xi, 14. This and the remaining five Cotton Grove Resolutions of 1851 are listed in Chapter 1.

<sup>17</sup>J. R. Graves, *The Great Iron Wheel: Or, Republicanism Backwards and Christianity Reversed* (Nashville, TN, 1855), accessed April 30, 2014, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.hwrsqx>, xi-xii.

<sup>18</sup>J. R. Graves and Jacob Ditzler, *The Graves-Ditzler: Or, Great Carrollton Debate*, 1st ed. (Memphis, TN: Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1876), 11, 553, 1057.

and Missouri, he also directed his ire toward the “Campbellites” of the encroaching Restoration Movement of Alexander Campbell (1788-1866) even before he started writing for *The Tennessee Baptist*.<sup>19</sup>

To find Graves’s own explication of the doctrine of baptism, the best source is *Old Landmarkism*, in his explanation of the fifth and six marks. For the fifth mark, he cited verses like 1 Peter 1:5 and Acts 2:47 and elaborated, “Persons ‘quickened,’ made alive by the Spirit, are called ‘living stones’; and of such is His church said to be ‘built up a *spiritual* house, and to such – ‘the *saved*’ – alone are to be added.”<sup>20</sup> Using additional Scripture (Matthew 3:11, John 4:1), Graves upheld this “Baptist theory” to the exclusion of the infant sacramentalism of Roman Catholics, Episcopalians, and Methodists, along with the “Presbyterian theory” of a child’s entitlement to membership by virtue of faithful parentage.<sup>21</sup> For the sixth mark, Graves summarized the outcome of his hermeneutic, “Christian baptism...is a *specific* act, instituted for the expression of *specific* truths; to be administered by a *specific* body, to persons possessing *specific* qualifications.”<sup>22</sup> To Graves, the literal meanings of βαπτίζω [*baptizo*] and its derivatives mandated immersion for the baptismal act, while other points in Scripture defined “the faith of the Gospel” as the expressed truth. As with the previous mark, Graves contrasted his belief with the doctrines and practices of non-Baptists, paying special attention to the Methodists and Campbellites. The reason for Graves’s career-long dispute with

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<sup>19</sup>Chad W. Hall, “When Orphans Became Heirs: J. R. Graves and the Landmark Baptists,” *Baptist History and Heritage* 37, no. 1 (December 1, 2002): 114. This will be elaborated on in Chapters 3 and 4.

<sup>20</sup>Graves, *Old Landmarkism*, 41-42.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 42-47; See also Acts 2:38, Acts 19:3, 1 Corinthians 10:2 for other verses that Graves cites.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 48-57.

Restoration churches was as clear here as in his other writings: Campbellites emphasized immersion as a regenerative, saving act and not as a ritual that commemorates an individual's salvation. Graves accused Pedobaptists and Campbellites alike of placing "water before blood" by maintaining the requirement of a meaningless and unbiblical sacrament for the grace of Christ's death and resurrection.<sup>23</sup>

Though Graves, James Madison Pendleton, and Amos Cooper Dayton perceived this theology of baptism as a distinct mark of the Landmark Baptist, scholars tend to discount basic Baptist doctrine in itself as an exclusively Landmark trait. Instead, Tull remarked on the consequences of Graves's strict emphasis on church authority over proper baptism, including his opposition to "alien immersion."<sup>24</sup> As seen above, Smith classified proper baptism under the vague category "biblical practices," and McBeth viewed Landmark opposition to alien immersion and "pulpit affiliation" primarily as consequences of a high view of the church. Indeed, opposition to alien immersion is one of the most controversial outward traits of historical Landmarkism, and its presence in Graves's writings will be noted in later chapters as an indicator of the intensity of his belief regarding the church in his core theology.

The primary targets of Tull's critique of Landmarkism were the exclusively local nature of the church and the independent authority of each congregation regarding "gospel acts."<sup>25</sup> The former put Graves at odds with J. M. Pendleton because of Pendleton's post-bellum belief in the universal church, but each agreed on the latter.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 56-57.

<sup>24</sup>Tull, *High Church Baptists*, 27-36.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 13-36.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 43-44.

The import of the local church to Graves's overall ecclesiology cannot be overestimated. The omitted portion of the above Cotton Grove question inquired whether Baptists may recognize religious "societies" with "different governments, different *officers*, [and] a different class of *members*."<sup>27</sup> The majority of the letters of *The Great Iron Wheel* concerned the superiority of the Baptists' church government to that of the Methodists. Graves applied much of the logic in *The Great Iron Wheel* to his *Carrollton* arguments against the Campbellites.

Because the visibility and independence of the individual church were Graves's key doctrines of church constitution, they will be analyzed together as the second distinct set of common Landmark doctrines. While Graves defended the visibility of the church as a distinct mark only briefly in *Old Landmarkism*, the lack of a global, invisible church in Landmarkism generated Graves's hostility toward ecumenical projects and informed his interpretations of Scripture when he defended the fourth mark. Graves's primary arguments for the local church included the literal interpretation of ἐκκλησία [*ecclesia*] and the strict conditions of its usage in the New Testament. These conditions showed that even the figurative usage of the word translated as "church" points to the reality of the local, visible church.<sup>28</sup> Graves juxtaposed this "scriptural theory" with his summaries of the "Catholic" concept of universal church and the "National or Provincial" model of most Pedobaptist organizations.<sup>29</sup> Perhaps to help bolster both church successionism and his theory of church constitution, Graves included quotes from Clement, Eusebius,

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<sup>27</sup>Graves, *Old Landmarkism*, xi.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 32-33.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 30-32.

Irenaeus, and Tertullian that supposedly discredit the concept of the invisible church.<sup>30</sup>

Graves further defined the “inalienable rights” of the local church for a full chapter of *Old Landmarkism*. Here, Graves claimed that the admissions of Pedobaptist commenters were conducive to four facts. The first of these was that “Christ commissioned His churches alone to preach His gospel.”<sup>31</sup> In other words, not every gathering of Christians carried the same authority as a church; therefore, Masonic Lodges, the “Woman’s Missionary Board,” and non-Baptist religious societies were not to be viewed as possessing this authority. The second “divine prerogative” reserved for the local church was the ordination of officers.<sup>32</sup> The church was authorized “to elect and to commission her officers without being required to call on some outside party.” Because preachers in the New Testament church did not require or need written “credentials” as qualification to preach, the church could ordain any officer that it deemed worthy. The third right of the local church was that of the reception, discipline, and exclusion of its own members.<sup>33</sup> Because of this right, the congregation could not delegate these duties to the minister. On the other hand, the congregation could delegate the administration of baptism and the Lord’s Supper to the minister and deacons as a part of its fourth right, the “sole right and duty of a Christian church to administer the ordinances.”<sup>34</sup>

Although one should be careful to avoid confusing the practical doctrines that

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 33.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 35-36.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 36-37.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 37-39.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.



resulted from or supplemented Graves's core theology, such as protest against alien immersion and pulpit affiliation, with said core theology, there is one supplementary theory that is too recognizable as a defining trait of Graves and Landmarkism to be ignored in this study: the historical succession of the church. McBeth commented, following the logic of Landmarkers, "Since it is unthinkable that the kingdom of God would ever go out of existence, even for a short time, and the kingdom is composed of Baptist churches, then it follows that there must have always been Baptist churches."<sup>35</sup> Because the apostles have no recognizable successors for Baptists, historical church succession is meant as an alternative to apostolic succession as the reason for church perpetuity.

Wamble identified three methods of argument for succession among Landmarkers.<sup>36</sup> The first of these is the literal veracity of Christ in his prophecy relating to the church in Matthew 16:18. Graves clearly argued for the literal prophetic truth of Christ, stating, "Landmark Baptists very generally believe that for the Word of the Living God to stand, and for the veracity of Jesus Christ to vindicate itself, the kingdom which he set up 'in the days of John the Baptist,' has had an unbroken continuity until now."<sup>37</sup> Though "Landmarkers disclaimed any necessity to prove succession," the second method of their argument ironically involved a proof by definition.<sup>38</sup> Through this, believers would test the contemporary religious bodies against the known characteristics of the

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<sup>35</sup>McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage*, 453.

<sup>36</sup>Wamble, "Landmarkism," 439-443.

<sup>37</sup>Graves, *Old Landmarkism*, 83; Daniel 2:44, Matthew 16:18, Hebrews 12:28.

<sup>38</sup>Wamble, "Landmarkism," 440.

original church until they found a close contemporary match. Graves utilized the analogy of a trans-Atlantic telegraph cable to illustrate his point, answering the hypothetical deniers of this cable's continuity by pointing to the presence of a traceable wire on both continental shelves and the congruence of the cipher and message on each side with the other.<sup>39</sup>

The third and most famous method used to argue the succession claim, the historical proof, is also the element of the succession theory that draws the most contemporary criticism. Though Graves relied on Pedobaptist historians for greater effect in *Old Landmarkism*, the true source of his inspiration was *A Concise History of Foreign Baptists* by G. H. Orchard. Graves believed Orchard's idea that Baptists could prove their place historically as the true church to be so important to his ministry that he republished Orchard's history in 1855 with an extensive introduction that added several historians' quotes and historical episodes to its content.<sup>40</sup> In both that essay and *Old Landmarkism*, he claimed that Baptists could establish a line of baptismal succession from John the Baptist. Graves frequently named the supposed predecessors of the Baptists, such as the Donatists, Novatians, Cathars, Waldensians, and Anabaptists, and claimed with little more elaboration that their kinship was proved by their refusal to baptize infants and their embrace of the local church. After the controversy surrounding William Whitsitt's refutation of the doctrine in the 1890s, successionism was in steady decline. Orchard's errors in scholarship, and the tendency of later Landmarkers like J. M. Carroll to not

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<sup>39</sup> Graves, *Old Landmarkism*, 85.

<sup>40</sup>G. H. Orchard, *A Concise History of Foreign Baptists from the Time of Christ Their Founder to the 18th Century* (Nashville, TN: Graves, Marks and Rutland, 1855; reprint, Lexington, KY: Ashland Avenue Baptist Church, 1956), passim.

improve upon Orchard and Graves, has left the theory in disregard among most contemporary Southern Baptists. But it is not the place of this paper to critique any specific Landmark doctrine.

Instead, these three defining doctrinal categories—baptism, the local and independent church, and church successionism—are the marks that determined the time when Graves fully believed in the theology of the movement he created. From whatever point this may be until his death, Graves consistently and confidently defended his beliefs. Because he could not have formulated these doctrines from nothing, the next chapter will analyze the theology with which Graves grew up as a boy and young man in Vermont and Kentucky. This will be accomplished by examining the confessions of faith, church covenants, and other Baptist documents of early 19<sup>th</sup>-century New England and Kentucky.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Life and Influences in New England and Kentucky

On April 10, 1820, in a small town at the intersection of two coach lines called Chester, Vermont, James Robinson Graves's life began. He was the third and last child of Lois Schnell and Zuinglius Calvin Graves. His father died when J. R. was less than a month old. In light of the younger Graves's convictions against the identification of Baptist churches with Protestantism, it's quite ironic not only that his Congregationalist father was named for two of the major Reformers, but that the elder Graves passed the name of "Zuinglius Calvin" to J. R.'s older brother, a fellow Baptist convert and minister who was the longtime President of Mary Sharp College in Winchester, Tennessee.<sup>1</sup> J. R. Graves showed reluctance to write or say much about his origins in the North, and James Patterson speculates that this was because his critics, as an adult in antebellum Tennessee, attempted to brand him as an abolitionist and a northern sympathizer. Yet in a rare comment on his genealogy in *The Little Iron Wheel*, Graves painted a narrative of a lineage engaged in a vigilant search for religious and political freedom, including his father's French Huguenot ancestors and his grandfathers' service in the Revolutionary War:

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<sup>1</sup>This women's institution, which opened in 1851, was the first female college with a classical curriculum equivalent to those of men's colleges. J. R. shared his brother's desire to educate women throughout his life; in fact, as chairman of the trustees at Southwestern Baptist University in Jackson, Tennessee [currently Union University], Graves motioned in 1889 to admit women to that school. See Tara Mitchell Mielnik, "Mary Sharp College," *The Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, last modified February 21, 2011, accessed November 13, 2014, <http://tennesseencyclopedia.net/entry.php?rec=843>; and James A. Patterson, *James Robinson Graves: Staking the Boundaries of Baptist Identity* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2012), 185.

I may add here, my deep-seated and uncontrollable hatred of monarchy, despotism, hierarchy, and oppression, is doubtless owing to my Huguenot blood, and to the early impressions especially made upon my young mind, when listening...to the recitals of the persecutions of the Reformers—to my grand father's [*sic*] fightings, sufferings, and the tyrannical acts of King George...how my *mother's* father fought at Lexington, but especially at Bunker's [*sic*] Hill...for it was at [my mother's] side and from her lips I heard it—until my young nature was all on fire and glowed with patriotic indignation.<sup>2</sup>

Graves eventually married this revolutionary “indignation” to his doctrine of the church, but this childhood patriotism was the genesis of a lifelong contempt for ecclesiastical tyranny. This enmity only intensified in the wake of his baptism and absorption into the culture of the New England Separate Baptists.<sup>3</sup>

J. R. Graves was baptized at the North Springfield Baptist Church in 1834, in the Vermont city of the same name, after a conversion motivated both by doubts about Congregationalism and by guilt for being, in his later words, “a lively and jocose youth.”<sup>4</sup> This church, as a distinct congregation, was founded about 30 years earlier, though its organizational roots lay in a church in Chester. That congregation began in 1786 with about 15 non-Baptist believers who called the young minister Aaron Leland (1761-1833) to preach for them. Leland, a distant relative of the well-known John Leland (1754-1841),

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<sup>2</sup>J. R. Graves, ed., *The Little Iron Wheel: A Declaration of Christian Rights and Articles, Showing the Despotism of Episcopal Methodism* (Nashville, TN: South-Western Publishing House; Graves, Marks & Company, 1856), 256. Emphasis in original.

<sup>3</sup>Unless otherwise noted, this paragraph cites Patterson, *James Robinson Graves*, 7-9.

<sup>4</sup>J. R. Graves, “Reaction of Injury,” *Tennessee Baptist*, July 10, 1858, 2.

was first ordained at a Separate Baptist church in Bellingham, Massachusetts, and he continued to influence the region as an ecclesiastical leader up to the time of his death. The North Springfield church's articles of faith, revised a year after Graves's birth, were distinctly within the Separate tradition, with a Calvinistic theology and a restriction of the Lord's Supper to those who had been immersed as adult believers.<sup>5</sup>

Though most Separate Baptist churches had been absorbed into a wider New England Baptist culture by the year of Graves's baptism, there were still successful attempts to reinforce the Calvinistic identity of these churches, including the famous New Hampshire Confession of 1833. According to historian William Lumpkin, the Baptist Convention of New Hampshire appointed a committee to create this document in 1830 in order to "restate its Calvinism in very moderate tones" in response to increased competition from Arminian Free Will Baptists. Though the original author was I. Person of the first committee, the final copy was prepared by J. Newton Brown (1803-1868) after discussion and revisions by two further committees. Its sixteen original articles expressed, in summary, with direct quotations of the eleventh and twelfth statements:

- (i) That Scripture is "divinely inspired" with "God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter;"
- (ii - x) A doctrine of God and several soteriological statements that advocate a soft but distinct Calvinism;
- (xi) "That a visible Church of Christ is a congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the Gospel;... that its only proper officers are Bishops or Pastors, and Deacons...;"

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<sup>5</sup>Paragraph, unless noted, cites Patterson, *James Robinson Graves*, 10-12.

(xii) “That Christian Baptism is the immersion of a believer in water, in the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit, to show forth...our faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Saviour, with its purifying power; that it is a prerequisite to the privileges of a church relation; and to the Lord’s Supper...;”

(xiii - xvi) A specification of the day of the Sabbath; an endorsement of civil government “except in things opposed to the will of our Lord Jesus Christ;” a strict distinction between “the righteous and the wicked;” and a statement on eschatology.<sup>6</sup>

The eleventh and twelfth articles were the most influential on Graves’s ecclesiology, since they included no mention or endorsement of any concept of an invisible or universal church and specified a believer’s baptism by immersion as a requirement for membership. These statements remained in place when Brown revised the creed in 1853, and this later version was disseminated in church manuals and remained a core of many Landmark and other Baptist creeds for over a century.<sup>7</sup> But the ecclesiological position of the New Hampshire Confession was not novel in 1833; in fact,

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<sup>6</sup>Paragraph and list cite William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Valley Forge, VA: Judson Press, 1959), 360-367. All statements of the New Hampshire Confession of 1833 are quoted with their original 1833 numbering and words. The source includes the two articles added in the 1853 revision, which are numbered (viii) and (x). Therefore, all articles numbered here from (ix) to (xvi) are (xi) to (xviii) in the 1853 source.

<sup>7</sup>See e.g. J. M. Pendleton, *Church Manual, Designed for the Use of Baptist Churches* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1867), 43-61; and “The Baptist Faith and Message,” in *A Sourcebook for Baptist Heritage*, ed. H. L. McBeth (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1990), 503-18. McBeth offered a side-by-side comparison of the 1925 Southern Baptist Convention BFM, which kept the 1833 Confession’s omission of the universal church, and the 1963 BFM, which asserted the universal church.

the statement followed an especially resilient current of theology that came to fruition at the genesis of the Separate Baptist movement in the mid-1750s.

C. C. Goen, in his comprehensive history of Separatism, claimed that “the more permanent fruits of the Great Awakening were borne off by the Baptists.”<sup>8</sup> This is a remarkable observation because few Baptists participated in the larger movement due to the majority of churches being Arminian General Baptists in the 1740s, when the primarily Calvinist and Pedobaptist revival first broke out.<sup>9</sup> The source of lasting influence on American Baptist religious life was therefore not in the sparse numbers of already-Calvinist Regular and Six Principle churches, but in a group of originally Congregationalist New Lights who converted largely of their own accord. That earlier evangelical movement, also known as the “Separates,” emerged on the inspiration of traveling preachers such as Gilbert Tennent and George Whitefield and in resistance to the ecclesiastical centralization and perceived spiritual frigidity of the Old Light Congregationalists. While the Baptist converts kept this paradigm of the Congregational establishment, they departed from the New Lights out of doubt that the practice of infant baptism was congruent either with Scripture or with the core New Light principle of regenerate membership. In contrast to the Regulars, these new Separate Baptists were more rural, less educated, more suspicious of the Philadelphia Baptist Association’s Confession of 1742 and other creeds, more skeptical of the merits of strong associations, and subject to more discrimination and even outright persecution by the state churches

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<sup>8</sup>C. C. Goen, *Revivalism and Separatism in New England, 1740-1800* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1962), 207.

<sup>9</sup>LeRoy B. Hogue, “A Study of the Antecedents of Landmarkism,” (ThD diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1966), chap. 3, under “The Great Awakening: Its Influence on Baptists,” accessed November 12, 2014, <http://landmarkism.tripod.com/chapter.3.new.english.html>.



and other established Protestants. This Separate Baptist minority movement became a lasting influence on J. R. Graves and American Baptist theology thanks to its leading figures, including Isaac Backus, John Leland, and J. Newton Brown.<sup>10</sup>

Though the first conversion of Isaac Backus (1724-1806) in 1741 to Separate Congregationalism was emotionally subdued and quiet compared to those of his peers, his fifteen years of tedious, yet tormented, realignment to the Baptist churches formed him into a vigorous evangelist and historian.<sup>11</sup> Backus was first exposed to Baptist beliefs in early August 1749 while pastor of Titicut Separate Church in present-day Middleborough, Massachusetts, and despite initial doubts, he preached a sermon advocating Baptist principles within the month because it seemed to him that “*nature fights so against them.*”<sup>12</sup> Backus quickly regretted this action, but the question of the ordinance of baptism remained in his mind, and after two years of intense study, he declared his finding of no scriptural justification for infant baptism to his own church in July 1751. He was immersed the following month, and after five years of internal conflicts at Titicut over a failed compromise plan of open communion that attempted to allow Pedobaptists to remain together with the new Baptists of the congregation, he came to the conclusion that “those who hold the church to be national cannot build with those who hold it to be congregational.”<sup>13</sup> He saw infant baptism as a hallmark of a national

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<sup>10</sup>Remainder of paragraph cites Patterson, *James Robinson Graves*, 13-14, but see Goen, *Revivalism and Separatism*, 107-257, for full background on Separate Congregationalists and Baptists.

<sup>11</sup>Goen, *Revivalism and Separatism*, 216-222.

<sup>12</sup>Alvah Hovey, *A Memoir of the Life and Times of the Rev. Isaac Backus, A.M.* (Boston: Gould and Lincoln, 1859), 83-85. Emphasis in original.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, 116.

and territorial religion rather than a regenerated local church, and he believed that open communion was a sin of “practical lying” for Baptists.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, he obeyed his conscience and formed a new closed communion Baptist church in June 1756 and never looked back.<sup>15</sup>

Through his tireless local and touring ministries, along with his large body of written polemical pamphlets, Backus advocated both strict Baptist ecclesiology and the religious liberty of all. Though he has rightly been remembered by most scholars primarily for the latter, including his role in successfully challenging the established church in Massachusetts, this thesis will primarily remark on his specific parallels with and influence on J. R. Graves.<sup>16</sup> Both the Separate Backus and the Landmark Graves drew inspiration from documents relevant to the foundations of American politics. Yet, where Graves believed that his own ecclesiology contained a post-revolutionary political spirit, Backus attempted to weld a strict congregational polity to the pre-revolutionary thought of John Locke, the philosopher who powered that spirit, and he largely succeeded in living by this combined ethical-theological system.<sup>17</sup>

Within this framework, Backus codified local church prerogatives, such as the sole authority to call and ordain officers and to govern and discipline members, for the sake of not only Separates but all New England Baptists.<sup>18</sup> Eventually, Backus

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<sup>14</sup>Goen, *Revivalism and Separatism*, 259-260.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 221.

<sup>16</sup>On Backus’s career as a whole, see William G. McLoughlin, *Isaac Backus and the American Pietistic Tradition* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1967). Cited in Patterson, *James Robinson Graves*, 14.

<sup>17</sup>Goen, *Revivalism and Separatism*, 223-224.

<sup>18</sup>Isaac Backus, *A History of New England with Particular Reference to the Denomination of Christians Called Baptists*, Vol. 2 (Newton, MA: Backus Historical Society, 1871), 231-233.

successfully made the case for these policies and for closed communion for most Baptist congregations in New England, including Graves's North Springfield church.<sup>19</sup> Patterson observed that Backus also argued another position closely in line with later Landmarkism: "that Jesus instituted only 'particular' churches."<sup>20</sup> Backus probably did not endorse the successionist historiography that followed from this belief in Graves's teaching, but in the preface to the second volume of his *History of New England*, he memorialized the Petrobrussians, Waldenses, Wycliffites, Hussites, and Anabaptists as victims of medieval Catholic tyranny and the Counter-Reformation, identifying them as predecessors to the Baptists in the struggle for religious liberty.<sup>21</sup>

John Leland, a contemporary of both Backus and a young Graves, took the autonomy of the local church and the believer even further than his predecessors during the Separate identity's twilight years at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Best known as a political supporter of the abolition of slavery and broad religious freedom for all Americans, Leland connected the local autonomy of the congregation to the republican revolutionary attitude with accessible, spirited rhetoric:

[A]s far as the church government on earth is the government of Christ, it is of democratical genius. Church government is congregational, not parochial, diocesan, nor national. Each congregated church...claims the right and power to

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 2:487.

<sup>20</sup>Patterson, *James Robinson Graves*, 14.

<sup>21</sup>Backus, *History of New England*, Vol. 2, v-vi.

govern itself according to the laws of Christ.... [Churches are] little republics which form the empire of Christ.<sup>22</sup>

By “empire,” Leland most certainly meant the theological Kingdom of Christ and not a literally imperial church structure, since a church resembling an empire would feature centralization, hierarchy, and other obstacles to the inalienable rights of the local congregation and the individual that Leland zealously defended in both Virginia and New England.<sup>23</sup> Though Leland expressed an even more extreme individualistic and iconoclastic opinion in ecclesiology than Graves did, it’s difficult to link the two men directly.<sup>24</sup> Nonetheless, it is doubtful that Graves could avoid knowledge of Leland’s crucial role in the formation of the Separate Baptist tradition while in Vermont.

In comparison to Backus and Leland, the celebrated titans of the Separate Baptists, J. Newton Brown (1803-1868) was relatively obscure other than for his principal authorship of the New Hampshire Confession of 1833, but Graves more explicitly drew from Brown’s career. The localist bent of the Confession was confirmed when Brown, in his 1846 circular letter to the Central Union Baptist Association of Pennsylvania, basically equated the aggregate of local churches with “the visible kingdom of Christ on earth.”<sup>25</sup> Just as the Confession was woven into the tapestry of

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<sup>22</sup>John Leland, “The Government of Christ a Christocracy,” in *Writings of the Late Elder John Leland*, ed. Louise F. Greene (New York: G. W. Wood, 1845), 275-278. The excerpt is from a sermon first preached in 1804.

<sup>23</sup>Goen, *Revivalism and Separatism*, 289-290. For an overview of the remarkable political lives of both Backus and Leland, see Joe L. Coker, “Isaac Backus and John Leland: Baptist Contributions to Religious Liberty in the Founding Era,” in *Faith and the Founders of the American Republic*, ed. Daniel L. Dreisbach and Mark David Hall (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 305-337.

<sup>24</sup>Patterson, *James Robinson Graves*, 17.

<sup>25</sup>Cited in James Tull, “A Study of Southern Baptist Landmarkism in the Light of Historical Baptist Ecclesiology,” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1960), 282-86.

thought of Southern and Landmark Baptists as a whole, another thread, that of Brown's historical approach, wound through Graves's thought specifically. Brown's *Memorials of Baptist Martyrs*, like Backus's briefer martyrology, mapped a path of establishment repression, albeit one more detailed and inclusive of more obscure dissenters. While Brown, unlike G. H. Orchard, primarily focused his historical lens on the second millennium, both presented some of the most radical dissenters and heretics of the early, medieval, and Reformation churches as a trail of Baptist witnesses.<sup>26</sup> Neither the circular letter nor *Memorials* escaped the attention of Graves, who was already editor of the *Tennessee Baptist* by the year of the book's publication, 1854. Wider familiarity with accounts of persecution stoked enthusiasm for Graves's ecclesiology in his readers; hence, Graves believed that Orchard and Brown were invaluable in his quest to craft a Baptist historical narrative that was credible for his audience.<sup>27</sup>

In these ways the New England Separate Baptists, even long after the movement had been organizationally absorbed into the larger body of American Baptists, made their mark on Graves's thought from his baptism in North Springfield, Vermont to the peak of his career in Nashville. But evidence of Graves's intellectual contact with Separate Baptists other than Aaron Leland while in Vermont is inferred, and there is no record in his next home, Kingsville, Ohio, of even his church affiliation, let alone contact with

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<sup>26</sup>John Newton Brown, *Memorials of Baptist Martyrs: With a Preliminary Historical Essay* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1854), passim; Orchard, *A Concise History of Foreign Baptists*, passim.

<sup>27</sup>See J. R. Graves, "An Old Landmark," in *The Southern Baptist Almanac and Register, for the Year 1855*, ed. J. R. Graves (Nashville, TN: Graves & Marks, 1855), 36, which included long quotations from Brown, *Memorials*, passim., and J. R. Graves, "Church History," *Southern Baptist Review and Eclectic* 1 (April and May 1855): 193-218. The latter article excerpted Brown's circular letter extensively. Cited in Patterson, *James Robinson Graves*, 19.

former Separate Baptists. What is known of the two years between 1839 and 1841 is perplexing: Z. C. Graves helped appoint his brother, then 19, to the office of principal for an academy in the town, and qualifications in J. R.'s background for the position remain unclear. When his health collapsed after the stress of this post caught up with him, he moved southward, to rural Jessamine County, Kentucky.<sup>28</sup>

Though Graves improved at managing his educational career at Clear Creek Academy in Jessamine County, the leadership of Mount Freedom Baptist Church swiftly steered his ambitions in the direction of the ministry.<sup>29</sup> He initially joined this congregation during a revival led by Pastor Mason Owens and Elder Thomas Fisher in May of 1842, was logged in the church's minutes for both membership and licensure to preach without explanation, and very soon was called to the pulpit for his first sermon, in which he preached on the text, "Adam, where art thou?" Patterson inferred a theme of challenge to "pious chameleons who lacked the fortitude to stand for bedrock principles" from this sermon, an observation that seems congruent with both his New England past and his Landmark future.<sup>30</sup>

Graves did not leave Kentucky without gaining his famous disdain for Alexander Campbell (1788-1866) and the Restoration Movement. He probably first heard the news about the ongoing conflict with the Campbellites, in which 9,580 members of Kentucky Baptist churches were lost to the Disciples between 1829 and 1832 alone, from Mount

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<sup>28</sup>Patterson, *James Robinson Graves*, 22.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 23; and O. L. Hailey, *J. R. Graves: Life, Times and Teachings* (Nashville, TN: By the author, 1929), 17-18. As Patterson noted, Hailey wrongly identified the pastor of Mount Freedom at that time, thereby raising skepticism on the historical accuracy of his account.

Freedom members, and from his church's own history.<sup>31</sup> Mount Freedom's founders declared in 1832, the year of its constitution, "We do solemnly protest against the doctrines of the Rev. Alexander Campbell and all its [*sic*] adherents."<sup>32</sup> The schism likely inspired two resolutions passed by the congregation in early 1838 that rejected both open communion and what Graves would later call alien immersion. These resolutions' format, of a query and a response, and their subject matter seem to foreshadow the content of the Cotton Grove Resolutions of 1851.<sup>33</sup>

Graves also met specific mentors on the Kentucky front lines of the war with Campbell's movement, including R. T. Dillard (1797-1878) and John L. Waller (1809-1854). Biographer and son-in-law of Graves, O. L. Hailey, recounts that Dillard, pastor at a neighboring church, "impressed his thoughts and spirit on young Graves, and a fearless, persistent opposition to [Campbellism] marked the ministry of J. R. Graves throughout his life."<sup>34</sup> Waller acquired his reputation as the editor of several Baptist publications: first the *Baptist Banner and Pioneer*, and later the *Western Baptist Review* and the *Western Recorder*. By the time Graves met Waller, the former was well aware of Waller's more famous critiques of Campbell.<sup>35</sup> Among such reactions to Campbellism was this 1835 piece:

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<sup>31</sup>Tull, "A Study of Southern Baptist Landmarkism," 112-113.

<sup>32</sup>Patterson, *James Robinson Graves*, 25.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid. The earlier resolutions read: (1) "Is it right that a member of this church should commune with any other church that is not of the same faith and order? Answer: No." and (2) "Is it right for this church to receive a member's baptism [as] valid that was baptized by another society, that is not of the same faith and order with us? Answer: In the negative."

<sup>34</sup>Hailey, *J. R. Graves*, 18, 21. Hailey's account is questionable due to a mistaken identification of Dillard as the pastor at Mount Freedom.

<sup>35</sup>Patterson, *James Robinson Graves*, 26.

Let me fall in company with one of you upon the highway—he may be a stranger—let the subject of religion be introduced; and ere he utters five sentences I will know who he is. His phraseology is peculiar. He talks of reformation—the ancient order of things—of entering the kingdom by immersion etc. Let me enter a meeting house. A man is speaking from the pulpit. He is describing scrap preachers, ridiculing a call to the ministry, and the operations of the spirit, he sports with the idea of being pardoned or regenerated before immersion; he tells us that God has done all he intends to do in giving us the scriptures.... Need I hear any more to ascertain to what sect he belongs.<sup>36</sup>

Here and in polemic after polemic thereafter, Waller made the essential Baptist objections to Campbell's movement clear: it clashed with the Baptists' conception of biblical authority, it divided and destroyed congregations because of Campbell's call to a specific kind of Christian unity, and its teaching directly contradicted Baptists' conception of salvation as a gift of pure grace with its insistence on immersion for the remission of sins.<sup>37</sup>

Though Graves would later engage in intra-denominational rivalry and boundary-staking with Waller for reasons described in the next chapter, their relationship was close enough at first that Graves was able to share his moral reservations regarding slavery. Evidence of this confession leaked in 1858 during a period of dispute with fellow Southern Baptists, and his enemies insinuated that Graves was an abolitionist. Graves

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<sup>36</sup>John L. Waller, "Letters to a Reformer, Alias Campbellite," *The Christian Repository*, XLV (1855), 538, quoted in Tull, "A Study of Southern Baptist Landmarkism," 103.

<sup>37</sup>Tull, "A Study of Southern Baptist Landmarkism," 94. For Tull's entire treatment of the Campbellites, see "A Study of Southern Baptist Landmarkism," 90-113.



protested that his personal concerns over abuse of the practice did not make him an abolitionist, and he defended himself with self-acknowledgement as a slaveholder and reprints of a July 12, 1853 letter from Waller to M. W. Phillips of Mississippi.<sup>38</sup>

Around the same time in 1858, Graves faced even nastier allegations of sympathy with Campbellism in his Kentucky years. His opponents procured a letter from Graves's former landlord, W. G. Cogar of Jessamine County, in which the supposedly Restorationist Cogar painted Graves as "a wild and thoughtless man" and an "unscrupulous" liar who attempted to convert Mount Freedom to doctrines of "reform," i.e. Campbellism. Graves countered by producing his own letter from Cogar that made no mention of Cogar's own beliefs and essentially refuted every charge of crypto-Campbellism made by Graves's antagonists.<sup>39</sup>

When Graves returned to Kingsville, Ohio in 1843, he took the time to educate himself daily with the Bible, theology, Greek, and other subjects.<sup>40</sup> In this intensive schedule of informal scholarship, he adequately prepared himself for his future roles as religious journalist, preacher, and theological leader in a movement of 18<sup>th</sup>-century radical ecclesiology under a 19<sup>th</sup>-century name and style. And though Waller and his colleague ultimately disagreed on the Landmark contention against pulpit affiliation, alien immersion, and the universal church, their common concerns, such as the sovereignty of the local congregation, the integrity of religious freedom, the restriction of communion to immersed believers, and even some ideas about the historical succession

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<sup>38</sup>J. R. Graves, "The Last Charge of the S.W. Baptist. Has He Proved It?" *Tennessee Baptist*, June 12, 1858, 2, and J. R. Graves, "Abolitionism and the S.W. Baptist," *Tennessee Baptist*, July 17, 1858, 2.

<sup>39</sup>J. R. Graves, "Reaction of Injury," 2.

<sup>40</sup>Patterson, *James Robertson Graves*, 27.

of churches, marked J. R. Graves and John Waller as the intellectual descendants of the Separate Baptists.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### *The Tennessee Baptist and Cotton Grove*

In the period between 1845 and 1851, J. R. Graves gradually began what would later be called the Landmark movement in editorial and pastoral campaigns against alien immersion. In the years that led up to the meeting at Cotton Grove, Graves met his mentor and future denominational rival R. B. C. Howell (1801-68), gained a position as Howell's assistant at the *Tennessee Baptist* without formal journalistic experience, founded his own publication society, and succeeded Howell as editor of the paper. In his biography of Graves, James A. Patterson explains, "He gained considerable renown—as well as notoriety—through the *Tennessee Baptist* as it became the primary vehicle for his attempts to define Baptist distinctives and shape Baptist identity."<sup>1</sup> Though the writings of Graves during this period are largely confined to this publication, Graves was ambitious and prolific enough, even in his early career, that his editorials and letters there define the timeline of Graves's reactions to the theological climate of Nashville and the South.

The Baptists of Nashville of the early and mid-19<sup>th</sup> century did not experience as much growth as did the Methodists and Presbyterians of the city. This is because the Baptists of the Second Great Awakening primarily relied on farmer-preachers to plant rural churches in communities surrounding cities, and the Nashville of the 1820s had

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<sup>1</sup>James A. Patterson, *James Robinson Graves: Staking the Boundaries of Baptist Identity* (Nashville, TN, B & H Academic, 2012), 39-40.

recently transitioned from its beginnings as a frontier outpost into a decently sized urban center of commerce and politics. Though it was also slow to start in this environment, Methodism became the most popular of the established Protestant groups through circuit riders and centralized funding. As a result, as Graves's biographer and son-in-law O. L. Hailey claims, Methodists "outnumbered the Baptists in Nashville [in the late 1840s] five to one."<sup>2</sup> The first Baptist congregation in the city began with an 1820 revival by evangelist Jeremiah Vardeman, who closely cooperated with the pastor of the Mill Swamp church five miles outside of town, James Whitsitt.<sup>3</sup> This First Baptist Church nearly closed its doors later in that decade when only five members resisted the persuasions of its Restorationist second pastor, Philip Fall. Fall was among several Baptist pastors in Tennessee and Kentucky who embraced the principles of Alexander Campbell and thus produced schisms in many churches. Graves definitely heard about the struggle of his new home church and others, supporting his antagonism toward the Campbellite movement that resulted from his experiences in Kentucky. First Baptist's survival was in question until Howell took the reins as its fourth pastor in 1834.<sup>4</sup>

Graves married Lua Ellen Spencer in June of 1845 in his family's residence of Kingsville, Ohio and moved to Nashville the next month. Though it's uncertain why he and his wife chose Nashville specifically, Graves had the intention of opening a classical academy and may have believed that it was best to attempt this venture somewhere south

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<sup>2</sup>O. L. Hailey, *J. R. Graves: Life, Times and Teachings* (Nashville, TN: By the author, 1929), 23.

<sup>3</sup>Whitsitt was the grandfather of William Whitsitt (1841-1911), the one-time acquaintance of J. R. Graves who would later challenge Landmarkers on the successionist theory of Baptist history in the 1890s. See Patterson, *Graves*, 33.

<sup>4</sup>This paragraph cites Patterson, *Graves*, 31-34.

of familiar territory in Ohio and Kentucky.<sup>5</sup> He arranged for the *Tennessee Baptist*, then called simply the *Baptist*, to announce his arrival on June 28: “The Rev. J. R. GRAVES, of Lexington, Ky., has arrived in Nashville, and wishes to conduct a Classical School the next Session. He may be found at the City Hotel.”<sup>6</sup> Graves’s services at that short-lived school, the Vine Street Classical and Mathematical Academy, were inconsequential, as no surviving source indicates how long it was in operation. It was Graves’s membership at First Baptist Church, then, that led him to acquaintance with its pastor, Howell. Howell began their professional relationship quite constructively, inviting Graves to write occasional pieces for the *Baptist*. These earliest pieces suggested a strong commitment to denominational causes, such as publications and missions, and an opposition to the divisive anti-mission Baptists, anticipating his later characterization of their position as “an unscriptural sect and apostate from the faith and practice of the Apostolic Baptists.”<sup>7</sup> Howell also apparently ensured Graves’s ordination as pastor of Second Baptist Church, Nashville, in the same year of 1845, in the wake of membership losses at that church attributable to a Campbellite schism. Howell showed his approval of Graves in editorial comments in the *Baptist*, including this sentence from his write-up of Graves’s first communion service, at which Graves’s mother Lois was admitted to the church:

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<sup>5</sup>The previous chapter of this thesis briefly notes Graves’s prior experiences in educational administration.

<sup>6</sup>*Baptist*, June 28, 1845, 720. Unless otherwise noted, emphasis and capital letters are present in the original text for this and subsequent quotations of the *Baptist* and the *Tennessee Baptist*. Patterson observes that the reference to Lexington and the timing doesn’t fit with the date, since the couple would move from Ohio during a later week, in early July. Patterson, *Graves*, 35.

<sup>7</sup>J. R. Graves, *Trilemma: All Human Churches without Baptism, or Death by Three Horns*, 2nd ed. (Memphis, TN: Graves, Mahaffy & Co., 1881; reprint, Memphis, TN: J. R. Graves & Son, 1890), 198. Cited in Patterson, *Graves*, 36. The original edition of *Trilemma* was published in 1860 (Nashville, TN: Graves, Marks, & Co.), when the anti-mission controversy was fresh in readers’ memories.

She remarked, that she had ... always been a Baptist at heart, that from her sons, she had given TWO MINISTERS to the Baptist Church, and that she could not, in conscience, any longer withhold *herself*.... We confidently anticipate, with the blessing of God, a career, for the Second Church...of great prosperity and usefulness.<sup>8</sup>

Graves stayed in this ministerial position for almost four years, resigning in September of 1849, as he needed to keep up with his duties as editor and publisher of the *Tennessee Baptist*.<sup>9</sup>

From the start of his tenure as editor at the *Tennessee Baptist* in 1848, Graves intended its primary subject to be historic Baptist principles, and he expressed his thoughts in what Patterson called “a mode of militancy.”<sup>10</sup> In one 1849 editorial, he imagined himself as Ezekiel (3:17ff), a sentinel with a responsibility to “sound the alarm, else blood will be found on us,” and he defended his regular creation of controversy by claiming a controversialist heritage in Paul, citing the Apostle’s daily disputation in the school of Tyrannus (Acts 19:9).<sup>11</sup> Several months later, in a piece attacking Protestantism in general, he encouraged Baptists to fight like “an army in active operation, waging a war of extermination upon sin and error in every shape and guise.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Robert Boyte Crawford Howell, “Nashville Second Church,” *Baptist*, January 10, 1846, 306.

<sup>9</sup>Unless otherwise noted, the paragraph cites Patterson, *Graves*, 34-38.

<sup>10</sup>Patterson, *Graves*, 42-44.

<sup>11</sup>J. R. Graves, “A Chapter on Controversy,” *Tennessee Baptist*, February 8, 1849, 2.

<sup>12</sup>J. R. Graves, “Volume Sixth,” *Tennessee Baptist*, September 6, 1849, 2.

This campaign against religious error, neutrality of opinion, and compromise extended to those of Graves's fellow Baptists who openly resisted his efforts. In August of 1847, Graves responded to a letter by John A. Wheelock of Eastport, Mississippi, who asked, among similar questions, "Is it scriptural to receive members from a Paedobaptist denomination, who have been immersed by a Paedobaptist denomination, without re-baptizing them?" In response, Graves reworded this enquiry to fit his conclusion that such immersions are not true baptisms: "Ought a person, immersed by a Paedobaptist, to be [*sic*] received into our communion without baptism?" Graves then, as was his later habit in *Old Landmarkism* and other long-form works, lists three questions to imbue his conclusion with what he believed was sound logic: Is baptism necessary for church membership, is a Christian who is not baptized qualified to administer baptism, and what is a valid baptism? From the answers to these questions he drew a simple conclusion: "To admit a person immersed by an unimmersed administrator, would be to admit into your church an unbaptized person, and this would be in violation both of Scripture and the usage of our church—consequently schismatic."<sup>13</sup> On similar ground, Graves told his readers and Wheelock that intercommunion with Pedobaptists would also be unscriptural, but this matter would be buried under the baptismal question for several years, since Graves soon came into conflict with his old friend and mentor from Kentucky, John L. Waller (1809-54).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>J. R. Graves, "Ecclesiastical Questions," *Tennessee Baptist*, August 14, 1847, 2.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid; J. R. Graves, *Intercommunion Inconsistent, Unscriptural and Productive of Evil* (Memphis, TN: Baptist Book House, 1881), 14. See also J. R. Graves, "The Lord's Supper," *Tennessee Baptist*, May 11, 1848, 1; "The Lord's Supper, No. II," *Tennessee Baptist*, May 18, 1848, 3; and "The Lord[']s Supper, No. III," *Tennessee Baptist*, May 25, 1848, 3. Cf. J. R. Graves, "Plain Answers to Plain Questions," *Tennessee Baptist*, November 16, 1848, 2, at which point he did not appear to limit communion exclusively to a local congregation's members.

In the March 1848 issue of the *Western Baptist Review*, of which he was editor, Waller responded to a question on alien immersion posed by Richard B. Burleson of the Muscle Shoals Association of Alabama.<sup>15</sup> James Leo Garrett, in his chapter on Landmarkism in *Baptist Theology: A Four-Century Study*, summarizes Waller's defense of the practice:

Waller...responded by tracing historically this question, by asserting that the question should be resolved by the congregation, not by the association, and by suggesting that only those who can trace successionaly the validity of their own immersions should attempt to disfellowship churches and ministers who recognize pedobaptist immersions.<sup>16</sup>

Two months later, not long after Graves returned to Nashville from a revival in Shelbyville, Tennessee, the first letter of many from the pseudonymous correspondent "Fidus" appeared in the *Tennessee Baptist*.<sup>17</sup> Though Fidus appeared as a minister actively involved in the Muscle Shoals Association and in the affairs of northern Alabama Baptists in his dispute against alien immersion, O. L. Hailey wrote a marginal note in a hard copy of one of the letters that read: "OLH. 7/27/91 –[Fidus] is J. R. Graves."<sup>18</sup> While Garrett and Paul Stripling take Hailey at his word, Patterson clarifies

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<sup>15</sup>J. L. Waller, "The Validity of Baptism by Pedobaptist Ministers," *Western Baptist Review* 3 (March 1848): 267-72. Burleson was the brother of Rufus C. Burleson (1823-1901), who would become President of Baylor University three years later.

<sup>16</sup>James Leo Garrett, *Baptist Theology: A Four-Century Study* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2009), 213-214.

<sup>17</sup>Fidus, "Muscle Shoal [*sic*], May 16, 1848—Letter [No. 1]," *Tennessee Baptist*, May 25, 1848, 2.

<sup>18</sup>The note may be found in the margin of the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary's copy of the *Tennessee Baptist*, June 29, 1848, 2. The best conjecture is that Hailey was verifying that Graves was Fidus. Hailey's printed copies may be found at the Roberts Library on the seminary campus, Fort Worth, Texas. Facsimiles of these copies are online at [http://www.sbhla.org/tb\\_archive/index.asp](http://www.sbhla.org/tb_archive/index.asp).



that for this to be true, Graves “sustained a considerable work of fiction for some time.”<sup>19</sup> While Patterson remains neutral on the question of Fidus’s identity, he implies that Graves allowed Fidus’s debate with another unidentified correspondent, “Veritas,” to take place in his paper so that audiences could recognize Graves’s opinions about alien immersion in another reader.<sup>20</sup>

Fidus’s first letter specifically challenges Waller’s piece, including the “*spirit*” motivating it.<sup>21</sup> On the very same page, Graves introduces Fidus by dismissing Waller’s argument with a sweeping appeal to the consensus of churches, claiming, “We do not know of one church in Tennessee or Alabama that would vote the affirmative of the question discussed by Bro. [Waller].”<sup>22</sup> He even attempts to convince Waller to switch sides using this argument. Waller and Veritas held their ground throughout the later months of 1848, even though Waller shared and influenced many of Graves’s other ecclesiological doctrines, as noted in the previous chapter.

While the exchange between Fidus and Veritas might have been constructive, the former, almost from the start of the discussion, ventured into mere *ad hominem* attacks. For instance, in response to his personal perception that Waller believed “an *administrator is not necessary* to the validity of baptism,” Fidus suggested in his second

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<sup>19</sup>Garrett, *Baptist Theology*, 214; and Patterson, *Graves*, 46. For Stripling’s analysis of the Waller conflict, see P. W. Stripling, “Attitudes Reflected in the Editorials of J. R. Graves, 1848-1851” (Th.M. thesis, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1965), 27-33.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid. See also Patterson, *Graves*, 46-47, where he cites both a skeptic and a believer, the latter from as early as 1849: C. W. Sumerlin, “A History of Southern Baptist State Newspapers” (Ph.D. diss., University of Missouri, 1968), 338; and Letter from A. B. Gilbert, *Tennessee Baptist*, March 15, 1849, 3.

<sup>21</sup>Fidus, “Muscle Shoal [*sic*], May 16, 1848—Letter [No. 1],” *Tennessee Baptist*, May 25, 1848, 2.

<sup>22</sup>J. R. Graves, “The Western Review,” *Tennessee Baptist*, May 25, 1848, 2.

letter, “The aberrations of [Robert] Hall were not half so wild... as this article discovers the mind of the Reviewer to have been.... [T]is a new dogma, we will call it a *Wallerism!*”<sup>23</sup> Veritas responded in his first letter by reprimanding Fidus for his insults and asking Fidus to prove his assertions that there never was a dissenting voice like Waller’s among the Baptists on the matter “from the depths of remote antiquity [until] *since* the days of Robert Hall.” Moreover, Veritas contended that Fidus placed the authority of the association above that of the local church.<sup>24</sup> In fairness, Fidus answered Veritas’s first two letters in late July 1848 by not only claiming, as he had done before, that he would always “*oppose the introduction of vexed ecclesiastical questions to an association,*” but he also tried to demonstrate the fairness of his review of the Waller article by reprinting the latter in its entirety.<sup>25</sup>

Waller himself entered the fray in the August 1848 issue of the *Western Baptist Review* by rendering his forceful criticism of Fidus’s strict, impossible historical successionism, which encompassed a succession of valid administrators.<sup>26</sup> In October, after a dry spell of articles on the subject, Graves endorsed and defended Fidus, characterizing the “spirit” and “language” of the *Review* editor in his August article as “not worthy of our bro. Waller.”<sup>27</sup> But Waller, showing he was still not so far from

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<sup>23</sup>Fidus, “Muscle Shoal [*sic*], May 24, 1848—‘No. 2,’” *Tennessee Baptist*, June 1, 1848, 2. Robert Hall (1764-1831) was an English Baptist minister who famously advocated intercommunion among all Christians.

<sup>24</sup>Veritas, “[No. 1],” *Tennessee Baptist*, June 22, 1848, 2.

<sup>25</sup>Fidus, “Muscle Shoal [*sic*], July 4, 1848—‘No. IV,’” *Tennessee Baptist*, July 20, 1848, 2-3.

<sup>26</sup>J. L. Waller, “The Administrator of Baptism,” *Western Baptist Review* 3 (August 1848): 473-74.

<sup>27</sup>Graves, “The Western Review,” *Tennessee Baptist*, October 19, 1848, 2.

Graves on Baptist perpetuity, convinced him to reprint a series of articles from the *Review* defending a less rigid doctrine of succession.<sup>28</sup> However, this series began well after November of 1848, when Fidus reported the controversy as being practically settled within its place of origin at the Muscle Shoals Association, which “resolved to adhere to that article in our constitution, that requires every member...to be immersed by an authorized [Baptist] minister.”<sup>29</sup>

The Fidus/Veritas affair prepared Graves’s audience to rally around him for any debate, with Baptists or non-Baptists, that involved Graves’s high standards for the ordinance of baptism. As Patterson writes on the Fidus/Veritas letters, “Graves felt compelled to deal with Waller and his allies on baptismal issues before drawing up well-defined borders against those he habitually referred to as Pedobaptists and Campbellites.”<sup>30</sup> Graves was not quite so bold as to doubt his enemies’ faith in 1850, assuring in one editorial, “We regard the large mass of Pedobaptists as pious, godly, and devoted, and as such, we extend to them *Christian* fellowship and brotherly love, but we at the same time most conscientiously believe them deceived.”<sup>31</sup> He nonetheless deemed these deceptions serious enough that the organizations of these non-Baptists with sincere, genuine belief were mere societies and not true churches. By that year, he had already

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<sup>28</sup>E. g., J. L. Waller, “Were the Waldenses Baptists or Pede-Baptists?” *Tennessee Baptist*, May [10], 1849, 1. This is the conclusion of the seven-part series.

<sup>29</sup>Fidus, “Muscle Shoal [*sic*]—‘No. VI,’” *Tennessee Baptist*, November 16, 1848, 1.

<sup>30</sup>Patterson, *Graves*, 49.

<sup>31</sup>Graves, “Remarks on the Above,” *Tennessee Baptist*, May 11, 1850, 2. The editor writes in response to a letter from L. D. Massengale of Lawrence County, Alabama.

built up the momentum needed to convince many ministers of the state and region to take action and separate these brethren from the Baptists along distinct lines.

Patterson and another scholar, Joe Early, Jr., emphasize different aspects of the events leading up to the Cotton Grove meeting on June 24, 1851. Patterson infers a personal motive, observing the placement of “several critical remarks at Pedobaptists” in the months following Graves’s first wife’s death in childbirth in January of 1851. He then notes Graves’s announcement, on June 14, 1851, of plans for his own gathering at the location of a debate scheduled between a preacher from nearby Jackson, Tennessee and a Methodist representative, “perhaps because such public events often attracted decent-sized crowds.” He makes no further speculation into Graves’s motives behind the Cotton Grove meeting.<sup>32</sup>

Early elaborates, with support from O. L. Hailey, on exactly which Pedobaptists Graves critiqued, specifically on “R. B. C. Howell’s old Methodist nemesis, J[ohn] B[erry] McFerrin.”<sup>33</sup> McFerrin (1807-87) was the powerful editor of, to quote Hailey, “[The Methodists’] one paper published in the Southwest,” the *Christian Advocate*.<sup>34</sup> After Graves first assumed editorship of the *Tennessee Baptist*, McFerrin attacked him on similar grounds as in his earlier pieces on Howell. Hailey remarked that McFerrin was “overconfident” in the face of one he imagined a weaker opponent.<sup>35</sup> Graves answered

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<sup>32</sup>Patterson, *Graves*, 50.

<sup>33</sup>Joe Early, Jr., “The Cotton Grove Resolutions,” *Tennessee Baptist History* 7 (Fall 2005), 47-48.

<sup>34</sup>Hailey, *Life, Times and Teachings*, 23. Early relies on Hailey heavily for this period; consequently, much of the narrative relies on Graves’s decades-old memories of the matter and many now-lost sources, such as the *Advocate* from that decade.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*

the Methodist with a full ideological assault on the Methodist Episcopal denomination, expressing contempt for their excessive associational power, Arminian soteriology, and supposed biblical ignorance.<sup>36</sup>

Early describes the inter-denominational climate in June of 1851 as a “fever pitch” of “irritation.”<sup>37</sup> While the month does live up to those words, Early mixes up much of the chronology, placing events from years in the future into June 1851, even citing an article from February 1852!<sup>38</sup> Nonetheless, Early is correct in that Graves thought of McFerrin not too kindly and kept him in mind in the very article announcing the meeting: “We say [that only immersion ‘by a proper administrator’ is scriptural] because Methodists now say, from McFerrin to every circuit rider who endorses him or his paper, that immersion is not Christian baptism at all!”<sup>39</sup> Graves follows this confident charge with this fateful announcement:

Now, we propose to our brethren in the ministry of West Tennessee, and all the deacons, and especially the membership, let us meet at Cotton Grove and hold a *mass meeting*, to consult the best ways and means to meet...the assault now making upon our doctrines, principles and history....Come, brethren, let us make it a day at Cotton Grove to be dated from.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>J. R. Graves, “Special Addresses,” *Tennessee Baptist*, February 15, 1851, 2.

<sup>37</sup>Early, “Cotton Grove,” 48.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, 48-49.

<sup>39</sup>J. R. Graves, “Another Debate,” *Tennessee Baptist*, June 14, 1851, 2.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*

And so the Cotton Grove resolutions listed in this thesis's first chapter were first laid down ten days after Graves published these words.

Though it is claimed by Graves and Hailey later that Cotton Grove earned the Landmark founder immediate notoriety, this author cannot find any article within six months of July 1851 in Georgia's *Christian Index*, Virginia's *Religious Herald*, or Alabama's *South Western Baptist* that references the meeting itself. Yet Graves successfully built hype for the resolutions in his *Tennessee Baptist* reprints and announcements of formal approvals by the Big Hatchie Association of Bolivar, Tennessee and others in Tennessee, Arkansas, Alabama, and Texas.<sup>41</sup> Early called this response "a strong grassroots movement."<sup>42</sup> Yet, as discussed in the first chapter, Landmarkism would only gain its name when J. M. Pendleton, already a one-time contributor to the *Tennessee Baptist*, befriended Graves and penned the article series that would become *An Old Landmark Re-set* in 1854.<sup>43</sup> In the time before the war, Graves intensified his militancy against non-Baptists and dissenting Baptists, and this led him to make an enemy of R. B. C. Howell upon the latter's return to First Baptist in 1857, in a grinding dispute that split the church between Howell and Graves and had lasting effects on Southern Baptist Convention politics.

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<sup>41</sup>J. R. Graves, "Communications: Mass Meeting at Cotton Grove, June 24, 1851," *Tennessee Baptist*, July 19, 1851, 2; J. R. Graves, *Old Landmarkism* (Memphis, TN, Baptist Book House: 1880), xi-xii; and Patterson, *Graves*, 52-53. In *Old Landmarkism* (p. xii), Graves claimed that "multitudes all over the South, indorsed [*sic*] the decision."

<sup>42</sup>Early, "Cotton Grove," 50. He incorrectly dates the Big Hatchie meeting to 1854.

<sup>43</sup>Pendleton's first article was a reprint from the *Baptist Banner* of Kentucky. See P., "Tennessee Correspondence," *Tennessee Baptist*, June 29, 1850, 2, where Pendleton lauds Graves's preaching. "P." was Pendleton's primary byline in Graves's newspaper thereafter.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to discover the reasons for which James Robinson Graves made his first contributions to the Landmark Baptist movement, particularly the 1851 Cotton Grove Resolutions. As a prelude to this discussion, the second chapter defined the theology of the Landmark Baptists, illustrating that its distinctions with the rest of Baptist theology are primarily ecclesiological. Then, this thesis contributed a biography of Graves's life and career that was split into two chapters: the first with a focus on Graves's childhood and young adulthood prior to his move to Nashville in 1845, the second outlining his contributions to the *Tennessee Baptist* leading up to Cotton Grove. The third chapter presented two lines of influence which converged in Graves: the ecclesiology of the Separate Baptists of the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and the reaction of Graves's contemporaries in Kentucky against the Stone-Campbell Restoration Movement. The latter chapter, the fourth, explained that Graves's early articles were intentionally controversial attacks on Paedobaptists, Campbellites, and any fellow Baptists who defended practices that Graves judged heterodox, such as alien immersion.

The author believes that the second chapter accomplished its intended task: to define Landmark theology using a large enough array of reference points. This thesis defines Landmarkism by noting its core doctrines, the definition of the ordinance of baptism as the immersion of a believer and the local and democratic polity of the church, and the prominent secondary doctrine used to justify the others, historical succession. The most prominent primary source featured here was J. R. Graves in the 1880 work *Old*

*Landmarkism*, in which he provided a comprehensive definition of his theology for later adopters. Here, Graves defined seven marks of the “true church” and heavily relied on the theory of historical succession, which James Tull saw as an eighth mark. Tull, a strong critic of Landmarkism, was consulted as a secondary source alongside historians such as H. Leon McBeth and Harold Smith and Landmark pastors such as J. C. Settlemoir. The author concluded that the presence of the three aforementioned doctrines in Graves’s writings was a sufficient gauge for Graves’s development of Landmark theology.

Though the third chapter did not cite an occasion when J. R. Graves directly relied on any Separate Baptists prior to J. Newton Brown or Aaron Leland, the chapter could discern significant Separate Baptist influence on Graves’s doctrines. It was found that the Separate Baptists, in general, believed in baptism by immersion of believers exclusively, restricted communion to those who had been baptized in this manner, and favored local church autonomy over strong church associations. The careers of Isaac Backus, John Leland, and Brown were examined because of their stature as Separate Baptists within New England. Brown, in particular, was found to have directly influenced Graves’s ideas on historical succession, by way of his *Memorials of Baptist Martyrs*, and more importantly Graves’s core ecclesiology, by way of the New Hampshire Confession of 1833. The third chapter then demonstrated that Graves acquired his strong distaste for the Stone-Campbell Restoration movement from the mentorship of John L. Waller and his own experience with ministry at Mount Freedom Baptist Church in Jessamine County, Kentucky between 1841 and 1843.

The intention of the fourth chapter was to record accurately Graves’s career in Nashville between 1845 and 1851. The chapter catalogued the fast development of



Graves's journalistic career, which was marked by his fearless controversialist style from early on. This attitude was demonstrated by his will to dispute with his mentor from Kentucky, John Waller, over the practice of alien immersion. The efforts of Graves and the pseudonymous letter writer Fidus helped ensure his readers' loyalty to his more ambitious cause against Paedobaptists and Campbellites. This larger campaign rapidly evolved into the Landmark movement after the Cotton Grove Resolutions gave it a written foundation and raised Graves's profile.

In order to establish a definition of Landmarkism that was consistent across time in the second chapter, the author utilized references that were primarily comprised of Graves's later, post-Civil-War works and 20<sup>th</sup> century and contemporary secondary sources. It was beyond the scope of this thesis to do more than briefly compare *Old Landmarkism* with the Cotton Grove Resolutions, *The Great Iron Wheel*, or other prewar writings of Graves. Future scholarship should focus on comparing Graves's works across his entire career in order to determine the ways his theology evolved throughout his life.

Admittedly, the third chapter lacked the depth of evidence that the author predicted would be available. The chapter tended to rely on James Patterson's biography of Graves and the sources that Patterson used. The chapter wasn't a comprehensive survey of the available evidence and scholarship for Separate Baptist influence on Graves and Graves's years in Kentucky. Future research into the subject of the third chapter should investigate the direct influence of the Separate Baptist Aaron Leland on Graves's first church in North Springfield, Vermont, find any links between Graves's teaching and journalistic careers, and make note of any more records of Graves's contact with John Waller and ministry in Jessamine County, Kentucky.

The evidence shown in the fourth chapter did not prove or disprove that Fidus, the pseudonymous campaigner against alien immersion supporter Waller, was J. R. Graves. In addition, the author mentioned his inability to discover references by Baptist publications other than the *Tennessee Baptist* to the Cotton Grove Resolutions within six months after June 24, 1851. Attempts to identify Fidus and a more comprehensive survey of newspapers throughout the South within the suggested time range are recommended.

Before he arrived at the church in Cotton Grove, Tennessee, in 1851, J. R. Graves was raised by a Congregationalist widow, baptized by a church with Separate Baptist influences, pressured by Kentucky's Campbellites in his ministry, and challenged by every Baptist and non-Baptist he disagreed with in writing. We do not know how he developed his divisive personality, but we do know that his journalistic prowess and reactionary indignation for the state of Southern Baptist ecclesiology led to his decision to propose the Cotton Grove Resolutions, the founding queries of Landmarkism.

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