

**1865 CIRCULAR LETTER**  
Of the  
Delaware River Old School Baptist Association  
Tuesday May 30, 1865

[NOTE: The associations corresponded with in this annual Minute are: Warwick, Elder G. Beebe; L. Cox; deacons M. Sutton and A. Elston  
Baltimore, Elders J.P. Smith, J.A. Badger; Silas Durand and G.W. Slater  
Delaware, Del – Elder E. Rittenhouse and brother J. Hardy  
Corresponding of Va, no represented in this civil war year  
Salisbury, Elders G. W. Slater and E. Rittenhouse  
Western New York Conference, correspondence via the Signs  
Maine Predestinarian Conference, Elder J.A, Badger  
Maine Predestinarian Association, Elder J.A. Badger  
Lexinton, New York, Elder G. W. Slater and brother Rouley  
Chemung, PA. Silas Durand, & minutes  
Licking Association of Particular Baptists of Ky, Minutes  
Ocmulgee, Uharley, Yellow River of Ga,  
Kehukee, N.C.  
Contentnea

For those who may not know how a body of Old Baptists settle on what to put in a Circular Letter as representing their views, we copy the following note: “The Circular Letter, prepared by brother Wm. W. Tufts was committed to the following committee of Elders, viz: Cox, Beebe, Durand, Badger, Hartwell, Conklin, Smith, Staton, Harding, Slater and Rittenhouse, together with the author.”

Elder Conklin is appointed to write the Corresponding Letter

Elder Conklin is also appointed to write the Circular Letter for next year, 1866  
Wednesday Morning: The Circular Letter was read before the body, and adopted.]

*The Elders and brethren, composing the Delaware River Old School Baptist Association, convened with the church at Kingwood, Hunterdon Co., N. J., May 30, 31, and June 1, 1865, to the churches which we represent, and love in the Lord:*

*Dearly Beloved Brethren:-*

We rejoice in believing that the saints find mutual joy in hearing the voice of their Lord in their hearts, saying, “*I am the good Shepherd, and know My sheep, and am known of Mine; and there shall be one fold, and one Shepherd.*”

Our Shepherd is faultlessly faithful. If ever He withdraws His manifest presence it is not to leave us to be destroyed or lastingly scattered. He saves His sheep; He brings them into the fold; He leads them into the pasture.

They love their Shepherd, but when He does not show Himself to them, nor let His voice be heard, then they stray away into the wilderness of doubt, questioning whether they have a Shepherd. They remember whom they *would* have, they long for His presence, they

yearn after some token of His being their Shepherd, they look up and see not His face; they behold, rather, objects that are hostile, or scenes that are sterile; they get sick with longing for Him; and when He has tried them He comes again, and speaks again, and joy fills their hearts and they run to Him. Their souls then follow hard after their dear Lord, their good Shepherd.

And sometimes they get into the wilderness of indifference to Him. Love is still present, but indifference keeps rising in their hearts against their will, thrusting itself upon them, and growing in spite of them, and the way becomes dark, and at last there seems to be no way, and they turn to self for guidance, and think that self has found a better way to the fold, and they go on until the very way that self has led them in disappears, and the howl of the wolves sounds in their ears, they know not how near; and they fear greatly, and the sense of their need of the good Shepherd becomes keen, and the sense of their inability to find Him is vivid, and they know not what to do or what will become of them, and then *He comes to them*, and they learn that when lost they cannot go to Him, but that He must come to them, and that He is altogether needful in order that indifference to Him, as well as other wanderings, may not lead them into deserts.

And sometimes, too, they become so careful of themselves that the good Shepherd leaves them for a while to take care of themselves. It is a very dreary wilderness that they stray into then. They feel drawn to the flock; they think how it is there that the good Shepherd's voice is largely heard uttering divine words in answer to the heart's inquiries; they feel that their iniquities will not be responded to if they do not go whither they are drawn; they feel the drawings to the flock of a divine love which should there, in company with the sheep grow in manifestation until it should make the yoke of Christ easy and His burden light, and should put into the proper places, in their estimation, the things of earth; they feel all this and yet some earthly interest will keep them away; and when a sheep is alone he is sure to wander, and more especially when he seeks to take care of himself in preference to seeking to be taken care of by the Shepherd. When the Shepherd comes after him in time, and leads him back under His care and to the fold, the wanderer is very lean, and his leanness appears as he stands among the fatlings of the flock, But being there, he fattens again.

The sheep never wanders into a wilderness that is darker, colder, more barren and more dreadful, than *self*. Self always chooses the ways that God forbids. And so the good Shepherd is always needed. Even though the wandering arise not from perverseness, folly is ever ready to produce it. The sheep are easily scattered even by objects that are harmless. They flee before them, startled, confused, trembling, some on one side and some on the other, with no certain look, and then stray off. In their best estate they would be but as hirelings. Were the lambs put under *their care* they would forget them when the danger should come. A sense of self-preservation would close out the thought of everything but self. And should the wolf come the hireling would flee and leave the flock to be devoured or scattered.

The inoffensive sheep are defenseless. The wolf's tooth – the world's weapon of false statement – is met only by the sheep's tenderness; the wolf's rage by the sheep's gentleness. The church's only reply to the world's false charges can be the utterance of a Truth which the world hath not ears to hear. Should a sheep fight he would come off torn, bleeding, dying. The believer cannot defend the Truth by taking up the sword of natural controversy. And if he does there is danger of his perishing by the sword in becoming a spectacle of unsheeplike quarrelsomeness, which is as likely to be turned toward the church as to the

world, so as to turn away from him both church and world. It is the good Shepherd who, by the arm of His power and wisdom in controlling all things, is to be the believer's defense.

Even in the events of the past few years of this apostasy, we may see how we have been defended. When we last met in this place civil war had just burst upon our land, rendering it asunder. Those who were present at the time will remember the mingled feelings of grief, apprehension and trustfulness which moved in the hearts of the assembly. The harsh sundering of communication with brethren whose faces were worn with the traces of spiritual experience wrought out side by side with us, was a process which we were called to look upon without being able to prevent. We stood defenseless. But we have been defended. None of our meetings have been interrupted. And now communication with them who were almost as dead is about to be opened again, and our messengers of peace, our invaluable paper, the "Signs of the Times," is once more to bear to them upon its dove-like wings our assurances of love and the manifestation of our oneness with them in the Truth.

And even now is our good Shepherd manifesting His character to us in bringing us from the wilderness, in bringing us together in one fold, in leading us into these green pastures and beside these still waters. How largely do we realize her that the fold is one, and the Shepherd one, even as the Shepherd says in our hearts! We enjoy a sense of security from the world because we feel that our Shepherd is caring for us. We feel that we are cared for by Him because we feel that we would enter by the door, and we hear His voice in our hearts saying, "*I am the door; by Me if any man enter in he shall be saved, and shall go in and out and find pasture.*" And we feel that we do enter by Him because we are thinking of Him in coming, and because it is for His sake that we come. And we do find ourselves saved – saved from the world and from self; saved from the earthly and the troublous, saved from the sense of unforgiveness and fear, saved in the kingdom that is not of this world, saved in cleansing and righteousness, saved in the discernment of the Truth, in the perception of its power, and in the wonder of its glory.

He putteth us forth from the fold in the morning when the sun returns; He goeth before us and we follow Him, for we know His voice. He leadeth us to where the pastures lie dewy beneath the morning sky, and the fragrant air is filled with the song of birds. Upon the word of life does He cause us to feed; we hear His voice as He speaks, and we look up and behold Him and are filled with love and joy. Grace, mercy and peace glow benignant in His countenance; love, gratitude and adoration spring up responsive in our hearts. And shall we not see also the "other sheep" coming into the flock as His blessed call? It is not we who are the shepherds! He is the one only Shepherd. If He manifest one as a pastor it is not by showing the *man* as the Shepherd, but by showing *Himself in the man* as the Shepherd. His people are but sheep – the cared for, not the caring. And when they appear as sheep the "other sheep" will join with them. Sheep of the same fold seek one another, and when led by the Shepherd, they find the flock to which they belong, they join it.

Brethren, does not God cause joy to be in our hearts on account of these things? While, then, the sheep are prone to wander, and do wonder, and while they through folly get scattered, and while they are inoffensive and defenseless, and in themselves nought but a prey, yet does the good Shepherd call them together into the one fold, and lead them out into the green pastures of the word, and fill them with the joy of His presence, and surround them with the power of His omnipotence. Even so, good Shepherd, keep us!

G. Conklin, *Moderator.*

John T. Risler, *Clerk.*

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