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NORTH CAROLINA TARIFF POLICIES, 1775-1789

By WILLIAM FRANK ZORNOW

The Articles of Confederation were often blamed by historians because of their inability to provide a general policy of federal finance or a uniform system of customs duties. There might be some justification for criticizing the general financial policies of the central government, but there is really no justification for condemning the tariff system which was in operation throughout the thirteen states during the period 1775 to 1789.

Historians who emphasized the conflicts among state tariff policies and insisted that such policies presented a veritable maze of rates were guilty of perpetuating a myth which probably began when the movement was first launched to amend the articles. Historians who came afterward belabored this theme without investigating the facts.

In 1910 Albert Giesecke published a brief study on the commercial policies of the country prior to 1789 in which he made this significant statement in regard to state tariff policies under the confederation: "We must not forget that such action [discrimination among the states] was really exceptional, for it was usual during the period to exempt goods of the growth or produce of any of the United States from import duties by the legislating state."¹

Though the myth was questioned by Giesecke no significant studies were made to explode it once and for all. Merrill Jensen in his latest study of American affairs during this epoch devoted some pages to this important question in

¹ Albert Giesecke, *American Commercial Legislation before 1789* (Philadelphia, 1910), 135.

JOHN CHAVIS AS A PREACHER TO WHITES

By MARGARET BURR DESCHAMPS

John Chavis, accomplished free Negro, has long been recognized as a teacher of children of prominent white families in Raleigh.¹ He ought also to be known as a preacher to whites. Prior to the opening of his school about 1808, Chavis was licensed as a "probationer for the holy ministry" by Lexington Presbytery in Virginia.² Because he served the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church from 1801 to 1807 as a missionary to slaves in the upper South,³ it has been assumed that his ministry was chiefly to Negroes.

Although sent by the church to serve his own race, Chavis preached to far more whites than Negroes on his missionary tours. In May, 1803, the clerk of the Standing Committee of Missions wrote the following summary of Chavis's travels during the past year for presentation to the General Assembly:

Mr. John Chavis introduces his narrative by reminding the Assembly, that at the time of making his former report three months of the time for which he had been engaged were unexpired; he has since completed that tour of duty by visiting as a missionary the western parts of Virginia, which appear to present natural obstacles that require no small share of zeal and perseverance to surmount them. He met with very friendly receptions and great kindness from the people in those parts, who seem to have attended the preaching of the word in as great numbers as could reasonably have been expected,—to have heard it gladly, and in some instances profitably.

¹The most scholarly account of Chavis's life is Edgar W. Knight's "Notes on John Chavis," *North Carolina Historical Review*, VII (July, 1930), 326-345. Research for this paper was done while the writer was Elizabeth Avery Colton fellow of the American Association of University Women, 1951-1952.

²"Minutes of Lexington Presbytery, 1800-1810," November 19, 1800. Manuscript in Union Theological Seminary, Richmond, Virginia. Hereafter referred to as "Minutes of Lexington Presbytery, 1800-1810."

³*Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, A.D. 1789 to 1820 Inclusive* (Philadelphia, 1867), 229, *passim*. Hereafter referred to as *Minutes of the General Assembly*.

The following statement is made by the Committee from Mr. Chavis's Journal, to give the Assembly a view of the numbers and proportion of *blacks* who attended Divine service;

In Bedford County about 150	No blacks are mentioned persons attended,
Rock Bridge Ditto100	. . . . .Ditto
Lexington Ditto400	. . . . .100, a revival of religion here
Falling Spring50	. . . . .none mentioned
Kanawah200	. . . . .30
Ditto meeting house30	. . . . .
Kanford's30	. . . . .none
Morris's30	(mentions an old Affrican woman as being much affected and weeping.)
Johnson's50	. . . . .none mentioned
Kanawah Court House150	. . . . .50
George Lee's100	. . . . .none mentioned, a revival of religion among the Baptists.
Kanawah River about80	person attended no blacks mentioned
Ditto60	. . . . .Ditto
Coal River200	. . . . .20 Here one opposer of religion was made to fall and weep. He never saw a people more desirous to be instructed.
Kanawah Courthouse100	. . . . .15
E. Hughes's180	. . . . .5
Baptist meeting house)	
in Green Briar County200	. . . . .20 (numbers appeared to be (deeply imprest: he was strongly solicited to settle here.
Lewisburgh250	. . . . .50
Botetourt County200	. . . . .50
Rockbridge Ditto—	
Lebanon200	. . . . .80

In the tour he preached 23 sermons, and received \$7.74.

He began his mission under the appointment of last year, on the 18th of July, and continued in it for 7 months and 3 weeks, travelling in the Counties of Mecklinburg, Lunenburg, and Notoway in Virginia; and in Granville, Person, Wake, Warren, Orange, Chatham, Randolph, and Caswell, in North Carolina. In this tour he preached 68 times, and delivered 8 exhortations; attended several religious societies, assisted twice in the administration of the Lord's Supper, and collected \$1.86. He was several times prevented from preaching, by bodily indisposition.

The proportion of Blacks who attended was greater than on his former route, as appears from the following statement of the numbers of his congregations on different occasions, Vizt,

Mecklinburg	persons....250	Blacks	50
Person	500		150
Ditto	35		15
Ditto	40		15
Mecklinburg	800		300
Lunenburg	150		
Mecklinburg	persons.... 50	Blacks	
Bluestone	200		50
Ditto	150		50
New Bethel	300		100
Person	200		10
Wake	600		50
Person	250		80
Warren	30		20
Granville	250		10
Gillarns Meeting House	300		80
Granvill	150		30
Chatham	450		150
Ditto	300		50
Ditto	70		20
Ditto	400		150
Granville	30		10
Caswell	200		20
Granville	400		150
Cullon's, a Baptist)			
Meeting house	150		50
Poplar Creek	250		80
Granville	500		180 ⁴

So well did the white population attend his services that Presbyterian leaders soon came to regard Chavis's popularity as a problem. While their attitude is more clearly revealed in the unpublished records of the Committee of Missions, some indication of their feeling is found in the published proceedings of the General Assembly of 1805. At that meeting the Synod of Virginia reported that "Mr. Chavis, a missionary to the blacks, itinerated in several counties in the

⁴"Minutes of the Standing Committee of Missions, 1802-1807," May 21, 1803. Manuscript in Board of National Missions of the Presbyterian Church, U. S. A., New York City. Hereafter referred to as "Minutes of the Standing Committee on Missions, 1802-1807." The minutes give only the clerk's condensation of Chavis's report rather than the original.

south parts of the State; but owing to some peculiar circumstances stated in his journal, his mission was not attended with any considerable success." No hint was given in the printed records as to the "peculiar circumstances," and before the Assembly adjourned Chavis was re-appointed as a missionary. However, it should be noted that the travel directions to the Negro preacher for another year instructed him to "employ himself chiefly among the blacks and people of colour."⁵

The manuscript minutes of the Committee of Missions show why these explicit directions were given to Chavis and throw some light on the difficulties of his previous mission. Apparently, Chavis found that the slaves preferred the emotional and illiterate exhortation of a fellow bondsman to the sermon of a man of education and dignity; hence, he tended to preach to whites rather than to his own race. As he had been employed to minister to Negroes, a few Presbyterians regarded his missionary activities as something less than successful. They "intimated . . . that Mr. Chavis was not properly attentive to the Instruction of the Blacks, which was the primary object of his Mission." The chairman of the Committee of Missions promised to question Chavis about the matter so that he might "be stimulated to greater fidelity in [the] future" or given "an opportunity for his own vindication."⁶

Before the General Assembly met again Chavis replied in writing to the charge of neglecting his own race to preach to the white population. Unfortunately his letter was not preserved and no further mention of the affair occurs in the minutes of the Committee.⁷ But the preacher evidently explained his conduct to the complete satisfaction of the Committee and the Assembly, for in 1806 he was appointed as missionary "among the blacks and free people of colour in Maryland, if practicable, otherwise at his discretion."⁸ Thus

⁵ *Minutes of the General Assembly*, 323, 344.

⁶ "Minutes of the Standing Committee of Missions, 1802-1807," May 17, 1806.

⁷ "Minutes of the Standing Committee of Missions, 1802-1807." The minutes state that the letter was received, but it was not copied into the record.

⁸ *Minutes of the General Assembly*, 367.

he won the privilege of preaching to whites with whom he was more congenial and from whom he doubtless received more attention.

As Chavis's missionary reports show, the Great Revival was sweeping the South Atlantic states in the years that he was traveling for the General Assembly. Since he rode and preached in parts of North Carolina and Virginia where the religious fervor was greatest, he was in an excellent position to observe and describe it. From him people received information about the spiritual awakening, which many seem to have regarded as the beginning of the millenium, and passed it on in their letters to friends and relatives. It is regrettable that writers did nothing more than mention Chavis's name, but the casual manner in which the observations of the free Negro were introduced into letters indicates that he was a well known and acceptable visitor even to the lady of the house.

In January, 1802, Ann Smith, daughter of Samuel Smith in Granville County, North Carolina, described "The Great Revival of Religion about the Harfields [Hawfields]" for her relatives in South Carolina. Her information came from "Mr. Chavis and Uncle Wm. Webb . . . who have been at the Meetings where this great work was going forward."⁹ Later in the same year, Moses Hoge, Presbyterian minister in Shepherdstown, Virginia, and afterwards president of Hampden-Sydney College, wrote: "By Mr. J. Chavis I have had some account of the work going on in Mr. Wilson's Congregations."¹⁰ Association with the Smiths and the Hoges shows that Chavis's contacts were with the most prominent of Presbyterian families.

⁹ Ann Smith to Polly Williamson, January 16, 1802, in the Williamson Papers, Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia. A sketch of Samuel Smith, Presbyterian layman who migrated from Essex County, Virginia, to Granville County in the early 1760's to occupy land granted by the Earl of Granville, can be found in the Samuel Smith Downey Papers, Duke University library. For information on William Webb, Presbyterian layman at Tar River, see G. C. Shaw, *John Chavis, 1763-1838* (Binghamton, 1931), 19-20. Hereafter referred to as Shaw, *John Chavis*.

¹⁰ Moses Hoge to James Hoge, July 20, 1802, in Hoge Collection, Historical Foundation of the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches, Montreat, N. C. William Wilson was pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Augusta, Virginia. A history of the Hoge family is found in Peyton H. Hoge, *Moses Drury Hoge* (Richmond, 1899), 1-29.

Chavis' last preaching mission for the General Assembly was performed in 1807.¹¹ After that time his chief occupation was his school in Raleigh. Yet, he continued to preach not only from the pulpit, but also in what he described as "private and public conversations with my neighbors."¹² In 1824 he proposed to supply the pulpit of Old Providence, an interdenominational church near Oxford which had originally been sponsored by his Presbyterian friend William Webb. It was in the area of North Carolina where Chavis had spent much of his time at the turn of the century, and where, according to some accounts, he had been born and raised. Doubtless, he looked forward to pleasant weekends of visiting and worshipping with old friends. But the liberalism which followed the Revolution and for a time characterized the Great Revival had waned. Chavis, who twenty years earlier had moved freely among the most prominent Granville families, failed to find "such familiar and hospitable entertainment as was desired and necessary" and "discontinued his visits."¹³

The experience with the members of Old Providence Church was a foretaste of a more bitter lot which awaited the free Negro. In 1831 Chavis, like the rest of his race, was forbidden by the state legislature to preach at all. When he sought advice from his friends in Orange Presbytery, who had taken him under their care when he moved from Virginia to North Carolina in 1805, they recommended that he abide by the law.¹⁴

A feeble old man with no means of support, Chavis then applied to the presbytery for financial aid.¹⁵ Among the members of a committee appointed to assume responsibility in the care of the old man and his wife were Samuel Smith

¹¹ *Minutes of the General Assembly*, 391.

¹² *North Carolina Presbyterian*, December 27, 1882.

¹³ Shaw, *John Chavis*, 21-22, publishes the records of the church which relate to Chavis.

¹⁴ "Minutes of Orange Presbytery, 1831-1836," April 18, 1832, manuscript in Historical Foundation of the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches. Hereafter referred to as "Minutes of Orange Presbytery, 1831-1836."

¹⁵ The presbytery decided to give Chavis fifty dollars annually as long as he lived, and apparently paid that amount to him until he died in 1838. "Minutes of Orange Presbytery, 1831-1836, 1836-1846," September 5, 1832, *passim*.

Downey, Presbyterian elder who was a grandson of Samuel Smith, and William McPheeters, minister in Raleigh. Both men had probably known John Chavis for more than thirty years,¹⁶ and their interest in his welfare doubtless led to their appointment to the committee. A letter written by McPheeters to Downey in 1834¹⁷ shows Chavis's pitiful plight at that time, and also serves as a commentary on the change which had taken place in the whites' attitude toward the free Negro preacher. With the decline of liberalism, paternalism replaced the spirit of equalitarianism which had earlier characterized the Presbyterians' relationships with Chavis.

September 3, 1834

Dear Sir,

I have lately received two letters from our Old Friend John Chavis.

In the 1st he makes known to me his difficulties, distresses, and wants - Says that he is a miserable man - Old and infirm - his wife a dying - or at least on her death-bed - in want of the necessaries of life - and without money to procure them.

In the 2nd he say[s] that he had applied to you (lately, I suppose,) for some money - having understood that you had some for him in your hands - and that the messenger, on his return, stated that you had sent the money over to me, &c

If any money has been forwarded to me, I have not as yet received it - But probably the money referred to, as sent to me, was that which you put into my hands last year.

At the last meeting of Presbytery the following minute was adopted - "Resolved, that the Committee hitherto appointed in the case of Mr. Chavis, be directed to inquire into his situation, and make such provision for him as his necessities may require"

Yourself and Dr. Graham are members of the Committee - who the others are I dont recollect -

In Raleigh I collected for Mr Chavis in October or November last about \$20 - This sum, with what you put into my hands, was all delivered over to him last year - of the way in which it was expended by him he gave account to Presbytery at the last

¹⁶ For Chavis's relations with Downey see Shaw, *John Chavis*, 30. Chavis and McPheeters presented themselves as candidates for the ministry at the fall session of Lexington Presbytery in 1799. See "Minutes of Lexington Presbytery, 1794-1800," October 18, 19, 1799. Manuscript in Union Theological Seminary, Richmond, Va. Subsequent minutes show that Chavis was licensed on November 19, 1800, and McPheeters not until April 18, 1802.

¹⁷ This letter is in the Samuel Smith Downey Papers, Duke University library.

meeting - Presbytery then, with the view of providing for him during the present year, passed the Resolution above recited -

I think it will require in advance, on the part of Presbytery, [the amount] of 5 dollars a month - or 60 dollars a year to support the Old Man and his Wife - If this sum cant be got with some degree of certainty and punctuality, I see no other chance for him but the Poor House - Please to write to Mr. Chavis and give him any information you may possess -

I am yours &c
Wm McPheeters

Thus unpublished records of the Presbyterian Church, as well as letters written by its members, show that while serving as a missionary in North Carolina and Virginia, John Chavis preached to and moved freely among white Presbyterians. Even after teaching became his chief occupation he continued to minister to them. In the last years of his life, when he was unable to earn his livelihood, it was to these old friends that he turned for aid. His relationships with them illustrate both the early promise and the ultimate tragedy of his own career and that of other free Negroes of his generation.