

Rev. Hezekiah J. Balch

Rev. Hezekiah J. Balch was born at Deer Creek, Harford county, Md., in 1748. He was said to be the brother of Col. James Balch, of Maryland, and the uncle of the late distinguished Rev. Stephen B. Balch, D. D., of Georgetown, D. C. He graduated at Princeton in 1766, when not quite eighteen years old, in the class with Waightstill Avery, Luther Martin, of Maryland, Oliver Ellsworth, of Connecticut, and others. He came to North Carolina in 1769, as a missionary, being appointed for this work by the Synod of New York and Philadelphia. Although ordained before the war, he served four years as Captain of a company in Maryland, under General Somerville. Soon after this service, he removed to North Carolina, and settled on "Irish Buffalo Creek," in Cabarrus county. He was the first Pastor of Rocky River and Poplar Tent Churches, where he continued to faithfully labor in the cause of his Divine Master, until the time of his death. Abundant in every good word and work, he took an active part in moulding the popular mind for the great struggle of the approaching evolution.

He combined in his character, great enthusiasm with unflinching firmness. He looked to the achievement of principles upon which a government of well-regulated law and liberty could be safely established, and which should be removed from its strong foundations no more forever. Hence, he was a prominent actor in the Convention at Charlotte on the 19th and 20th of May, 1775, which declared independence of the British crown. But in the inscrutable ways of Providence, he did not live long enough to see the warmest wish of his heart gratified--the independence of his country, for which he was ready, if necessary, to yield up his life in its achievement. He died in the spring of 1776, in the midst of his usefulness, and his mortal remains repose in the old graveyard of Poplar Tent Church.

On the occasion of a railroad meeting at Poplar Tent Church in 1847, attention was called to the fact that no monument of any kind marked the grave of this eminent divine and patriot; whereupon, a voluntary subscription was immediately made, and the necessary funds promptly raised to build a suitable monument to his memory. Fortunately, Abijah Alexander, then ninety years of age, was still living, a worthy citizen, and long a member of Poplar Tent Church, who was present at the burial of his beloved pastor, and who could point out the precise spot of sepulture, near the centre of the old graveyard. The following is a copy of the inscription over his grave:

"Beneath this marble are the mortal remains of the Rev. Hezikiah J. Balch, first pastor of Poplar Tent congregation, and one of the original members of Orange Presbytery. He was licensed a preacher of the everlasting gospel, of the Presbytery of Donegal in 1766, and rested from his labors A.D. 1776; having been pastor of the united congregations of Poplar Tent and Rocky River, about seven years. He was distinguished as one of the Committee of Three who prepared the Declaration of Independence, and his eloquence, the more effectual from his acknowledged wisdom, purity of motive and

dignity of character, contributed much to the unanimous adoption of that instrument on the 20th of May, 1775."

Source: Sketches of Western North Carolina, Historical and Biographical
by Author: C. L. Hunter