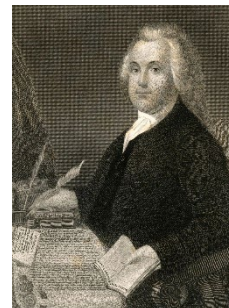


I. The Baptist church at Providence, RI was established in 1639.

- A. Roger Williams was born about the year 1600. He was sorely persecuted in England and fled to America. He arrived in Boston in February 1631.
- B. Roger Williams' views concerning separation of Church and State caused his banishment from the Massachusetts's Bay Colony in January 1636. For some time, Williams lived among the Native Americans but finally made his way with five others to Providence, RI.
- C. In Providence, Williams found many Massachusetts Christians who have adopted Baptist doctrine and views. Some of these had been Baptists in England.
 - 1. Roger Williams was already convicted of the truth of the Baptist position and adopted them in 1638.
 - 2. Williams submitted to baptism at the hands of Ezekiel Hoeliman and then in turn, Williams baptized and ten others.
 - 3. This was the beginning of the Baptist church in Providence, RI in 1638. This was probably the first organized Baptist church in America.
 - 4. Later, Roger Williams resigned from the pastorate of the church and counted himself a "seeker" for greater truth.
- D. Much dispute has raged over the history of Roger Williams and the Baptist church at Providence.
 - 1. In any event, the Baptists of America do not derive their origin from Roger Williams.
 - 2. Historians mention the names of fifty-five Baptists churches in America before the year 1751 and not one of which came out of the Providence church.

**II. The Baptist church at Newport, RI was established somewhere between 1638-1644.** Many believe this church was established before the Baptist church in Providence, RI.

- A. John Clark arrived in Boston from England in November 1637.
- B. John Clark, among others, left Massachusetts and came to Newport, RI, where they organized a Baptist church. This Baptist church is still in existence.

III. In 1638, Roger Williams and John Clark decided to organize a colony of their own.

- A. They decided a small section of land (Rhode Island) as yet unclaimed by any other colonies, would be a good place for their colony.
 - 1. In order to officially establish a colony, it was necessary to secure a legal charter from England.
 - 2. About the year 1651, Roger Williams and John Clark were sent to England to secure this charter.
 - a. Oliver Cromwell who was in charge of the English government refused to grant the charter and Williams returned to Rhode Island.

- b. Clark remained in England to press the plea for the charter. [John Clarke (October 1609 – 20 April 1676) was a physician, politician, and Baptist minister, who was co-founder of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, author of its influential charter, and a leading advocate of religious freedom in America.]
- (i) In 1663, twelve years later, Charles II granted the charter.
 - (ii) The Rhode Island Colony became a real legal institution and for the first time, Baptists could write their own constitution.



B. *The constitution of Rhode Island Colony attracted worldwide attention.*

- 1. *Rhode Island, the first Baptist colony, was the first place on Earth where religious liberty was made the law of the land.*
- 2. *This was the world's first declaration of "Religious Liberty" for all.*

IV. **Virginia becomes the great battle ground for religious freedom.**

- A. The Colony of Virginia was established by members of the Church of England and no others were tolerated within their jurisdiction.
 - 1. The charter for Virginia was granted in 1606 and laws were quickly passed forbidding any religion other than the Church in England.
 - 2. Baptist were beaten and imprisoned.
- B. In 1775, the Baptists of Virginia were able to get a bill passed in the Virginia Assembly that ended the reign of the "State Religion" and suspended the old laws of persecution.
- C. In 1784 the Baptists opposed the passing of laws taxing the people for support of religion. They won and the proposed laws were defeated.
- D. In 1786, Thomas Jefferson prepared the "Acts of Religious Freedom" which were passed by the Virginia General Assembly. It read: "Be it therefore enacted that no man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship, place or ministry whatsoever, nor shall be enforced or restrained, molested or burdened in his body or goods, nor shall otherwise suffer on account of his religious opinion or belief; and by argument to maintain, their opinions in matter of religion, and that the same shall nowise diminish, enlarge, or effect their civil capacities."
- E. Thus, religious freedom in Virginia won by Baptists.

V. **When the Revolutionary War broke out**, Baptists were the first to whole heartily gave themselves to the struggle.

- A. It was largely through the work of Baptists that we have the First Amendment of the Constitution.
- B. **"Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..."**