

Daniel Wiers
In the Maelstrom
Of the Early Restoration Movement
On the Niagara Frontier

With
Addendum

By Edwin Broadus

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by Edwin Broadus

In about the year 1833 or 1834, Daniel Weirs (sic), a Baptist preacher, was walking along the streets of, I think, Lewiston, N.Y. He heard an auctioneer crying out “How much am I bid for these books?” He made a bid and got the books, but did not know what they were until he arrived home and began to read them. He at once became interested in the reformation plan and finally took his stand with Bro. Campbell. This was all done through the instrumentality of these volumes. This man is thought to be the first preacher of the ancient Gospel in Canada. He soon converted another preacher by the name of Streight (sic) and these two men by the aid of these seven volumes of the *Christian Baptist* soon became a terror to sectarianism, shook the country around “Niagara District,” from centre to circumference, and established the cause of truth in many places, where it is still strong and healthy, and a power for good.¹ (H. B. Sherman, 1883)

Many remembered and repeated this story, for it is the stuff of legend. While parts of it are untrue and misleading, there is no reason to doubt its core elements – that Daniel Wiers,² founder of what evolved into churches in Beamsville and Jordan, bought some of Alexander Campbell’s writings at a book sale, shared them with a friend, and was emboldened to preach these new ideas in the Niagara district. Even though many years had passed before Sherman first heard the story and a half century had elapsed before he recorded it, the narrative about the book sale is not one people easily forget. However, some of the details are clearly wrong. Sherman said this happened in 1833 or 1834, while, as will be shown later, Wiers had to know about Campbell and his teachings by 1829. Nor could it have been a full set of the *Christian Baptist*, for the last volume of the periodical was not completed until 1830. But these are mere details. While there no reason to question the seminal role of Campbell’s writings in Wiers’ changed convictions and subsequent actions, we should recognize that he did not live in a theological and ecclesiastical vacuum. Other ideas and people also influenced him in both positive and negative ways. This paper is an attempt to identify at least some of these influences and to understand the turbulent times and complex interactions of Wiers and other participants in the early Restoration Movement in Upper Canada,³ as well as to give due credit to the preacher whose direct legacy includes the two churches already mentioned.⁴

¹ H. B. Sherman, *Christian Worker*, December 1883, p. 3. Sherman was editor of the *Worker* and soon after this was the preacher for the Beamsville Church when it moved into town. Reuben Butchart used this story in his book, *History of the Disciples of Christ in Canada Since 1830*, as did Leroy Garret in his history, *The Stone-Campbell Movement*. Joseph Ash was also aware of it when he wrote about Wiers in his *Reminiscences* in August 1883 in the *Worker*.

² Wiers began this work in Clinton Township, near the shore of Lake Ontario. The town of Beamsville was in this township. The name *Wiers* is variously spelled in extant records, but this is apparently the correct one, since both he and his father spelled it this way. Probably it was pronounced “Wires,” for this is the spelling of three family members in the 1871 census, indicating that the census taker spelled it like he or she heard it.

³ What is now southern Ontario was known as Upper Canada from 1791-1841.

⁴ Both churches, Beamsville and Jordan, trace their origins to the work of Wiers. Jordan is located in what was once neighboring Louth Township, and before the two congregations were organized separately the church was sometimes known as Clinton and Louth. In 1970, Clinton and the western half of Louth became the Town of Lincoln.

Nearly all we know about Wiers' religious beliefs and activities occurred in a short span of nine years, between the time he joined the Presbyterians in 1825 and his reputed departure from Canada in the fall of 1834. In less than a decade he joined one church, left it to be immersed by the Baptists and to preach for them, learned about the Restoration teachings of Barton W. Stone and Alexander Campbell, openly advocated these views among the Baptists in Beamsville, was tried and excommunicated by them, preached on his own in the countryside around Beamsville, baptized several people, and organized a church whose congregational descendants in two Niagara communities continue to flourish after 175 years. During these tumultuous times he first struggled with his own convictions and then with his fellow Baptists. When the latter would tolerate him no longer, he left to preach on his own, but even his success in this work did not spare him disappointment from some who advocated unity without practicing it and from others whose immoral conduct belied the message they were proclaiming. His cherished convictions brought him, not peace, but a sword.

Wiers' Background

But before relating the story of those turbulent years, more needs to be said about who Daniel Wiers was and where he came from, for many have incorrectly assumed that he came to Upper Canada from New York. This was at least implied by the Canadian Restoration historian, Reuben Butchart:

It might be said that the church in Clinton township and "along the lake shore" was planted almost directly by Alexander Campbell, owing to Baptist preachers in New York State who having read his *Christian Baptist*, then proceeded to go forth and proclaim the new gospel of Restoration in their localities. Daniel Weirs (sic), was one preacher who first read and acted; he got his assistant, F. W. Straight to read, and he also began preaching along the lake shore. They are credited with baptizing a number in 1830, and with having effected some organization in 1831. Lucien Moote, of Rosedene, read a paper at Niagara convention, in 1898, stating the foregoing, and Jos. Ash, in the *Christian Worker*, August 1883, also affirmed the same.⁵

What Ash actually said in the account Butchart cited is that "Daniel Wiers was converted from the Baptists in N. Y. to the Church of Christ by reading the *Christian Baptist*"— an allusion to Wiers' book purchase in Lewiston. However, this does not necessarily mean that Ash thought Wiers came to Canada from New York, but only that he was converted there. But whatever Ash thought, the evidence shows that Wiers had lived on the Niagara peninsula, if not for his entire life, at least from very early childhood.

Daniel was one of seven children of Conrad and Magdalen Wiers, who owned a 200-acre farm on Lot 8 of Concessions 3 and 4 in Clinton Township. The farm was between Beamsville and Vineland, alongside what is now Merritt Road, extending south from John Street, across Highway 8, and part way up the side of the escarpment. Conrad's will, written March 21, 1825, shortly before his death, lists his wife, Magdalen, his sons, John, Daniel, and Peter, and his daughters, Mary, Nancy, Catherine, and Magdalen. His son,

⁵ Butchart, p. 398.

Daniel, and Mary's husband, Robert Skelly, were named as his executors. Conrad was buried at the south end of Mount Osborne Cemetery in Beamsville.⁶

Conrad bequeathed equal portions of his farm to his three sons. He also gave five pounds in currency to John and a horse, bed, and "furniture thereunto belonging" to each of his other sons. He stipulated that they were to care for his widow and to give her a bedroom near the stove or a fireplace, as well as kitchen privileges. (John had married Margaret Fulton the previous July, so Conrad knew that another woman would be living in the house.)⁷ The remainder of his personal estate, which was valued at slightly over 120 pounds when inventory was taken after his death, was divided equally among his four daughters.

Contemporary records provide additional information about some of the children. Mary, who was apparently the oldest, was born in 1787 and had been married to Robert Skelly for several years before her father died.⁸ Catherine, who married Henry Konkle in Grimsby in 1814, was born in 1794.⁹ No birth or marriage records have been found about their sisters, Nancy and Magdalen. If Conrad listed his sons in chronological order, John was the oldest. According to the census reports, he was sixty-five in 1861 and seventy-four in 1871. Apparently the 1861 census was taken after his birthday, and he was born in 1796. Peter was born in 1807, for when he was serving in the Lincoln County Militia in 1828 his age was given as twenty-one.¹⁰ He married Catherine Ensley in Grimsby in 1830.¹¹ Daniel's date of birth is not recorded, but assuming he was about thirty years old when he began preaching at the Baptist Church he was only a year or so younger than John.¹² The number of years without other children between the births of Mary and Catherine suggest that Nancy may have been born about 1790. Magdalen was perhaps born after Daniel and before Peter.¹³

There were other Wiers in the Niagara area. When Conrad died, William and Elizabeth Wiers were living at the southeast corner of Clinton Township, near the present

⁶ Conrad's gravestone gives 1825 as the date of his death. Supposedly it lists his birth date as 1737, and while this date is early enough to be suspect, it is possible. However, because of the age and consequent condition of the stone, the transcriber may have read it incorrectly.

⁷ Presumably John had received his horse and furniture when he married a few months earlier. This is corroborative evidence that he was the only son who was married when Conrad wrote his will.

⁸ The dates for Mary's birth and death (1839) are from the plat for the Beamsville Baptist Cemetery. After she died her husband married the widow of Thomas Morgan, who was Daniel Wiers' immediate predecessor as minister of the Baptist Church.

⁹ Catherine and Henry were married by Robert Nelles, J. P., in Grimsby. See Dan Walker and Fawne Stratford-Devai, compilers, *Vital Records of Upper Canada/Canada West*, Vol. 1: Part 1, p. 9. Catherine's tombstone at Mt. Osborne Cemetery, Beamsville, Ontario, reads, "Catherine, Wife of Henry Konkle, Died Dec. 3, 1852, Age 68 yrs & 5 mo."

¹⁰ Bruce Elliott, Dan Walker, and Fawne Stratford-Devai, editors, *Men of Upper Canada, Militia Nominal Rolls, 1828-29*. Peter served in the 3rd Company of the 4th Regiment, under Captain John Henry.

¹¹ Walker and Stratford-Devai, p. 9. Daniel Wiers was one of the bondsmen. Daniel, Peter, and Catherine are all listed as residents of Clinton Township.

¹² James Black was thirty when the church invited him to preach for them, and Thomas Morgan was thirty-six, but the most we can infer from this is that the church may have preferred men who were this mature.

¹³ There may well have been other children who died before Conrad did and thus were not listed in his will. There was, for example, an Elizabeth Wiers, who married Daniel House and who died in 1825, according to inscriptions in the Beamsville Baptist Cemetery. She was born in 1800. Members of the House family were near neighbors to the Wiers.

junction of Victoria Avenue and Twenty Road.¹⁴ William's father, who was also named William, had come to Canada from New Jersey soon after the birth of William, Jr. in 1791/92.¹⁵ William, Sr. had sided with the British during the American Revolution and was even imprisoned for awhile by the colonists,¹⁶ and so he and his family moved to Canada, along with his brother, John, and probably Conrad, although it has not been proved that Conrad was William's brother. William and John soon went to Townsend Township in Norfolk County, near Port Dover, to seek land in 1797. However, after making improvements to the property they learned they could not obtain title, so William, at least, returned to Niagara peninsula, where Conrad lived.¹⁷ Nothing more is known about John's whereabouts, but William sold his land at "The Twenty" (vicinity of Jordan) in 1800 to Samuel Meyer (later spelled "Moyer") when he came to Canada from Pennsylvania.¹⁸ William then purchased 200 acres in the extreme southeast corner of Clinton Township, and when he died in 1809 he bequeathed 100 acres to each of his two sons, Peter and William, Jr.¹⁹ Peter sold his portion in 1818 and moved to a neighboring township,²⁰ but William continued to live on his until his death, sometime prior to the 1871 census. The sale of his farm in 1880 was likely completed after the death of his widow, Elizabeth.

If Conrad came to Clinton Township at the same time as William and John, the census records help establish the time of the family's move. As mentioned, William, Jr. was born in 1791/92 in the United States, while Conrad's son, John, was born in 1796 in Upper Canada. This places the family's arrival in Canada between 1792 and 1796.²¹ There is other evidence suggesting that the move took place in 1796, for on July 12th of that year Conrad petitioned for land, and it was recommended that he be given 200 acres.²² He may never have been granted this land, for in 1816, when his name appeared on the electors' list for Clinton Township, he was living on the farm that he still occupied at the time of

¹⁴ Their farm is identified in 1862 and 1876 atlases for Lincoln County. See, for example, *Historical Atlas of the Counties of Lincoln and Welland* (H. R. Page, Toronto, 1876), p. 10.

¹⁵ 1861 census for Clinton Township, which states that William was born in the United States.

¹⁶ 1965 letter from Vernon Coon, whose father, Harmon, a Wiers relative, bought the Wiers' farm in 1880.

¹⁷ *The Index to Upper Canada Land Books*, Vol. 4; Robert Mutrie, Norfolk County historian, says that both William and John returned to Clinton and that their father was named Conrad. Mutrie provides no evidence that their father was named Conrad, and decisions on the land petitions of William and John do not identify him. Some have surmised (perhaps correctly) that there were two Conrads (father and son) and that the one who died in 1825 was Conrad, Jr. Others speculate that William and John were sons of the Conrad who died in 1825, but his 1825 will rules this out, since his son, John, was too young to have petitioned for land in 1797.

¹⁸ This information is from an online version of a record sheet at Conrad Grebel University College, University of Waterloo, about Samuel Meyer. See also G. Elmore Reaman, *The Trail of the Black Walnut*, p. 113. Reaman says that Meyer paid Wiers four hundred dollars for this land, which included a primitive log cabin in a clearing of a few acres.

¹⁹ In his will, written March 26, 1809, William named his wife, Magdalena, his sons, Peter and William, and his daughters, Elizabeth, Mary, and Anna. Elizabeth was the only daughter who had married by that time. William died sometime prior to May 3, 1809, when his will was proved.

²⁰ Peter died in 1832 and was buried in Heaslip Cemetery in Smithville, Ontario.

²¹ Robert Wiers also came from the United States to Canada in the 1790s to Niagara-on-the-Lake, where he owned an inn called "Sign of the Lyon" until his death in April 1797. This was on the northwest corner of Prideaux and Gate streets. Robert was buried in the Anglican cemetery in Niagara-on-the-Lake, and his wife, Sarah, continued to operate the inn. Some Wiers researchers think Robert was a brother of Conrad, William, Sr., and John.

²² *Annals of the Forty*, No. 10, 1959, p. 62.

his death. This property had originally been granted to men named Henry and Bradford. By 1791 it was acquired by George House, and afterward Conrad purchased it.²³

While the family's move occurred during the time of the Mennonite exodus from the United States, there is no indication that the Wiers were Mennonites, even though some of them identified their ancestry as German in census reports.²⁴ What we do know is that Conrad's three sons as well as either his wife or daughter (both, as noted already, were named Magdalen) joined the Presbyterians. Daniel was accepted into membership July 11, 1825, presumably a short time after his father's death. The next month Magdalen joined. Daniel's brother, Peter, joined at an unknown date, as did his future wife, Catherine Ensley. In 1843 Peter was chosen to be a trustee of the church.²⁵ A year earlier both Peter and John identified themselves in the census as Presbyterians "not in connection with the Church of Scotland." Meanwhile, at least two of Conrad's daughters, Mary and Catherine, joined the Baptist Church.

Thus, Daniel Wiers belonged to a Loyalist family of German ancestry that came to the Niagara region in the mid-1790s. He was reared on a farm in Clinton Township between Beamsville and Vineland, joined the Beamsville Presbyterian Church with both of his brothers as well as either his mother or one of his sisters, and had at least two other sisters who became members of the Beamsville Baptist Church.

Wiers and the Beamsville Baptist Church

By early 1827 Daniel Wiers left the Presbyterians to join the nearby Baptist Church, where his baptism was recorded in the church minutes February 1st of that year.²⁶ This congregation, which is either the oldest or second oldest Baptist church in all Ontario, was begun in 1790 by Jacob Beam, founder of the town of Beamsville. Later, it was determined that the church had not been properly organized, since it had been under the influence of an Arminian preacher. When Asahel Morse, who like most Baptist preachers of his day was a Calvinist, visited them, he provided them with an appropriate statement of faith, and, according to the church minutes, set the church in proper Baptist order in 1807.²⁷ The list drawn up that year of charter members of the newly organized church included Wiers' brother-in-law, Robert Skelly. Wiers' sister, Mary, was likely accepted into the congregation after she married Skelly, and several years later his sister, Catherine, and her husband, Henry Konkle, joined.²⁸

²³ Thomas Kennedy, *Crown Grants, 1781-1869, Lincoln and Welland Counties*, Vol. 1 (available at Rittenhouse branch of Lincoln Public Library, Vineland, Ontario); Ministry of Natural Resources, Map. No. 5, "Nassau, October 25, 1791."

²⁴ The family had close association with many of their Mennonite neighbors. Thomas Topping, Jacob Gross, and Samuel Moyer, witnesses to Conrad's will, were Mennonites and gave this as the reason for not taking an oath as witnesses.

²⁵ Corlene Taylor, "Records of the Presbyterian Church, Clinton and Grimsby, 1819-1870," *Families*, Vol. 26, No. 1, 1987. This is available in the Grimsby, Ontario Public Library.

²⁶ *Minutes*, February 1, 1827. Both the original of the Beamsville Baptist *Minutes* and a typed transcript are available at the Baptist archives at McMaster Divinity College.

²⁷ Marion Whitman Dawdy, *Baptists of Beamsville*, p. 9

²⁸ Henry Konkle was withdrawn from by the Beamsville Baptist Church May 11, 1839 (*Minutes*), although the reason was not specified. The church rolls included Catherine and Nancy Konkle, both added in 1833. Nancy was Henry's mother.

Wiers' church change, so soon after he became a Presbyterian, raises questions. Did he have difficulties in the Presbyterian Church? Knowing some of his problems later, we would have to consider this as a definite possibility. Did some of the Baptists hold out to him the possibility of employment with the church? This is unlikely, for the church was not seeking a preacher until after Wiers was baptized. Had he become convinced, through his reading and study, as well as discussions with his Baptist relatives, that he needed to be immersed? While we cannot be certain of the answer, his subsequent conduct suggests that he was seeking biblical truth, and so there is good reason to believe that he was acting out of conviction and that this was a primary reason for changing.

Whatever might be the reasons for his move, according to the church minutes, on March 2, 1827, about a month after his baptism, Daniel Wiers was invited to be the church's half-time minister for fifty dollars per year, and by March 27th the agreement was finalized. Why was this done so soon after his baptism? It may have been, in part, from a sense of urgency, for the previous minister, Thomas Morgan,²⁹ had died only eight days after Wiers' baptism was recorded and just three weeks before the church invited Wiers to preach for them. Morgan was only thirty-nine years old, and his death was unexpected and possibly sudden, for the story is that he suffered a fatal fall from his horse when he was visiting the sick.³⁰

But this begs the question of why the church would choose a new convert as preacher. If he had been a Presbyterian longer, there would be some reason to suppose that he had some teaching experience, but even though he may have attended the Presbyterian Church for several years (it had been in existence in Beamsville since 1802), he had been a member less than two years before joining the Baptists. It is more likely that the Baptists were impressed by his conversion and that, because they knew him and at least some of his family members, they were already aware of his potential. Joseph Ash tells of his own positive appraisal of Wiers when he met him some seven years later: "I was pleased to make his acquaintance, was much pleased with the man and his enterprising spirit."³¹ He must have made a similar impression on many of the Baptists when they were looking for a new minister. Added to this is the fact that Wiers' brother-in-law, Robert Skelly, was a member of the committee charged by the church to negotiate with him.³² Skelly had been made a deacon in 1825, and for several years afterward his name frequently appeared in the church minutes in conjunction with various church responsibilities as one of the congregation's main leaders.

After Wiers completed his year as the church's minister, James Black, later one of the most prominent leaders in the Ontario Restoration Movement, served in the same capacity. Black had been living in Beamsville and teaching school during the time Wiers was preaching there. While the church minutes do not state the reason for replacing Wiers, the church must have been reasonably satisfied with his work, since they employed him again a year later.³³ Perhaps Wiers himself did not wish to continue preaching for the church at the end of his first year. At any rate, Black was hired, with the

²⁹ According to the inscription on his memorial stone in the Baptist church yard in Beamsville, Elder Morgan was born in Wales in 1788, came to the United States in 1817, was ordained as a Baptist minister in Utica, New York, came to Upper Canada in 1824, and served as minister of the Beamsville Baptist Church for three years, until his death February 9, 1827. One of the first things Daniel Wiers did after succeeding Morgan was to send his obituary to the *New York Baptist Register*, Utica, New York. This was published April 27, 1827.

³⁰ Dawdy, p. 16.

³¹ Ash, p. 49. This is the only first-hand description of Wiers that has been handed down to us.

³² *Minutes*, March 2, 1827. Other members of the committee were named Root and Beam. The latter was apparently a son of Jacob Beam, who had died a short time earlier.

stipulation that he would preach half time for fifty dollars per year, “provided he get a scholl of 34 scollers.” When the school failed to materialize, the church revised his contract in the fall, agreeing to pay him one hundred dollars and provide him with a lot for half of his time.³⁴

Black left Beamsville in the spring of 1829,³⁵ and although nothing is recorded in the church minutes at that time about again employing Wiers, it is apparent from what happened later in the year that he was again hired to preach for the church. Sometime, either during the year Black preached there or soon after Wiers resumed his preaching duties, Wiers changed radically when he embraced Alexander Campbell’s Restoration views. On December 26, 1829 the church presented him with the following charges and ultimatum, based on the recommendations of a visiting committee from two neighboring Baptist churches:

1. that Br. Wiars ought to give up his service as a Preacher to the Chh
2. that he aught to acknowledge to the Chh that he was imprudent in saying that he would wage war against the sentiment of the Chh
3. that he was wrong in disapproving of articles of faith
4. that he was wrong in speaking slightly of the present Translation of the Scriptures – and recommending Campbells Testaments and writings to others
5. that often he had been cencured by the Church and a Council cald for he was wrong in making and attending appointments
6. if Br Wier comply with the above requirement he aught to return his membership³⁶

While some of the problems between Wiers and the church may have stemmed from his style and from personality differences, there were also important matters of substance involved, so it is of particular interest to know when and how he was influenced by Campbell. It is reasonably easy to determine when Wiers learned about Campbell, or at least when he espoused some of Campbell’s distinctive teachings. It had to be long enough before he was put on trial by the Beamsville Baptist Church during his second year as their preacher for, among other things, “recommending Campbells Testaments and writings to others,” for some in the church to become alarmed and to marshal their forces. Here it is important to follow the sequence of events intimated in the church minutes for December 26, 1829: The church had “heard reports” against Wiers, and then, apparently after confronting him, had not gained “satisfaction from him.” As is often the

³³ There is evidence that Daniel Wiers was still very much in the good graces of at least some members of his family, for on August 2, 1828, five months after he completed his first year as minister, his brother and sister-in-law, John and Margaret, had a son whom they named Daniel. After he was grown, the younger Daniel Wiers took over the farm that his father and grandfather had operated. He was still living there in 1888 when his only child, Laura, married. He died March 9, 1901, and he and his wife, Matilda, were buried at Springfield Cemetery, two kilometers east of Springfield, Ontario.

³⁴ *Minutes*, March 8, 1828 and September 27, 1828. For the definitive story of Black, see Geoffrey H. Ellis, “Life and Times of James Black,” *The Campbell-Stone Movement in Ontario*, Claude Cox, editor pp, 101-142. It was not until a few years later that Black fully accepted Restoration principles.

³⁵ Ellis, p. 112.

³⁶ *Minutes*, December 26, 1829. This list from the Beamsville Baptist Church *Minutes* is also found in Ellis’ “Life and Times of James Black,” pp. 111-112. A more abbreviated summary is found in “A Church upon the New Testament Alone (The History of the Beamsville Church of Christ, 1832-1982).” This booklet was published by the church on the occasion of its 150th anniversary in 1982.

situation in churches when some have grievances against the preacher, the church was “not...agreed fully on the case,” so they “voted to call a council from sister Churches.” Elder John Hanes, Elder George Ryerse (sic) and Deacon Oliver Maybee (sic) from Townsend and Charlotteville “heard,” and the church “took their advice.” Even with a collective sense of urgency, it may have taken weeks between the time complaints reached a crisis point until the church conducted its December 26th heresy trial of Wiers.³⁷

These sister churches in Townsend and Charlotteville were both near Lake Erie in Norfolk County. Townsend, which is immediately west of Jarvis, was the township where the Wiers brothers, William and John, had lived some thirty years earlier. Charlotteville, now defunct, was a township, and Vittoria, a short distance south of Simcoe, was the town seat. The Baptist church in Vittoria began in 1803 in the home of Oliver Mabee, who later became a church deacon. Elder George Joseph Ryerse (b. 1795) was licensed in 1828 by the Vittoria Church to preach and was later ordained as a regular minister.³⁸ Presumably, since Mabee and Ryerse were from Charlotteville, Elder Hanes was from Townsend. It is possible that some from one or both of these churches knew members of the Wiers family and were selected in part for this reason.

Careful consideration of all these facts – the period of time over which Wiers said enough about the Articles of Faith, the King James Translation, and Campbell’s translation and writings to arouse opposition, plus the amount of time needed for the church to finally take conclusive action against him – suggest that it was soon after he began his second year of ministry (sometime in the spring of 1829) that he began setting forth his controversial ideas.³⁹ Campbell’s translation (commonly known as the *Living Oracles*) was first published in 1826. Wiers presumably learned about it from reading Campbell’s periodical, the *Christian Baptist*, published from 1823-1830. Since it is unlikely the Baptist Church would have employed Wiers a second time had he openly advocated the writings of Campbell during his first tenure, from 1827-1828, his famous purchase at the Lewiston book sale may have been as late as 1828 or early 1829.

But even if the story about the book sale were entirely apocryphal, it is not strange that a Baptist preacher at that time would soon learn about Alexander Campbell. After Campbell and his home congregation affiliated with the Redstone Baptist Association, conflict between Reformers⁴⁰ and Baptists soon developed and escalated. The Redstone

³⁷ Readers today can hardly escape noticing that this critical church meeting took place the day after Christmas. But likely Baptists of the time, like many other Protestants, thought of Christmas as a Catholic and Anglican holy day and carried on their church business as usual.

³⁸ George Watt, “Vittoria Baptist Church,” <http://www.vittoria.on.ca/baptist.html>; George J. Ryerse, Jr., *Early Days at Port Ryerse* (Norfolk County, Ontario, c. 1900), pp. 13, 14.

³⁹ The church minutes do not tell when his second year began, but they make it clear that after his first year ended, in March 1828, James Black was called to be the church’s minister. It is not clear how long into 1829 Black preached, although his wedding records, cited by Geoffrey Ellis (pp. 112-113), indicate he was in Beamsville until at least the last part of April 1829. Either Wiers’ second year did not begin until May or Black remained in Beamsville for a month or two after he ceased preaching for the church. After Wiers was withdrawn from following his heresy trial, Black apparently preached for the church again for a few months in early 1830, although the only hint of this in the church minutes is the notation that he was “returned to standing” in the church in 1830. In August 1830 the church contracted with Thomas Hill to be its new pastor, which indicates that Black’s tenure in 1830 was a comparatively short one.

⁴⁰ We use the term *Reformers* in this paper as it was used then, to distinguish those who subscribed to Campbell’s views from others, such as the Christian Connection in New York and Canada. Campbell preferred calling his

Association, which was in Pennsylvania, took action against the Reformers as early as 1825. In 1829 the Beaver Association in western Pennsylvania disfellowshipped the Mahoning Association in Ohio, where Campbell's associate, Walter Scott, did his famous evangelizing. In 1830 Tate's Creek Association in Kentucky, where "Raccoon" John Smith did some of his most effective work, excluded the Reformers.⁴¹ Later that year the largest of the Baptist associations, the Dover Association in eastern Virginia, under the leadership of Robert Semple and Andrew Broaddus, took similar action, and, because of the influence of that association and its leaders, separation of the Baptists from Campbell and those who worked with him was nearly complete.⁴² Since much of this transpired between 1825 and 1830, and since Baptist papers like the *New York Baptist Register*, to which Wiers sent an obituary in 1827 and which he likely read, were involved in controversy with Campbell, Wiers could have known about Campbell and his writings at that time without ever attending a book sale in Lewiston. Certainly, some of the Baptists in Beamsville not only knew about Campbell but considered him a dangerous enemy, as evidenced by their knee-jerk reaction to what Wiers was teaching. Whatever the case, neither Wiers nor the other church members were at all conciliatory by the time of the December 26th meeting.⁴³

Some hint of the substance of Wiers' objectionable teaching is found in the reference to his "disapproving of articles of faith." At first glance, one might suppose that this referred to long-accepted articles of faith in general use, but in late 1826 the previous minister, Thomas Morgan, obtained the Beamsville church's adoption of a new creedal statement, called *The Calvinistick (sic) Baptist Confession of Faith*, with the inscription, "Selected by Eld. T. Morgan," and printed by Hiram Leavenworth in 1826 in St. Catharines. It contained the following "Certificate": "This may certify, that the Baptist Church in Clinton, have agreed to adopt Elder Peter P. Root's Articles of Faith into their Church, as the rule of their faith and practice." It was signed, "Clinton, U.C. Dec. 1, 1826, Thomas Morgan."

Knowing how some in nearly every church react to change, one can imagine that several opposed these new articles of faith. These dissidents would have been receptive to the objections Wiers raised, which may be one of the reasons the church could not agree on what to do about him and opted to call in outside help. While the charges against Wiers do not specify what he disapproved of in these articles, it is not difficult to identify possibilities, such as the two cited below, since he was strongly influenced by Campbell.

Article 11: "Such is the criminal disposition of all by nature, that no one will believe or receive Christ, until regenerated by the special operation of the Holy Ghost."

work one of reformation rather than restoration.

⁴¹ Some of my own direct ancestors were part of one or two of the Reform churches put out of the Tate's Creek Association. Actually, the majority of the churches in that association espoused Reform views, but the minority reorganized as the Tate's Creek Association and effectively excluded the majority.

⁴² A good summary of what transpired during this time between Baptists and Reformers is found in Errett Gates, Chapter VIII, "The Separation of the Reformers from the Baptists," *The Disciples of Christ*. As Gates points out, arguments on both sides of the controversy were often heated.

⁴³ The Beamsville Baptist Church at that time seems to have been a rather contentious group. One writer has observed: "An examination of the church's meeting records reveals a quarrelsome, unruly and completely human congregation. Many meetings were devoted solely to settling disputes among members. One long-running dispute involved Susannah Overholt Singer and a Mrs. House. On several occasions, different committees were assigned to call upon either 'Sister House' or 'Sister Singer,' or both, to effect a settlement."

Article 12: “God hath chosen a particular number in Christ before the foundation of the world, who in time are called with a holy calling....”

As a result of Campbell’s influence and his own study of scripture, Wiers, as his subsequent preaching showed, had rejected these Calvinistic doctrines of predestination and of direct operation of the Spirit in conversion. The church minutes for December 26, 1829 note that “on his refusing the hand of fellowship was withdrawn from on the ensuing day.” However, in the entry about his baptism in 1827, the notation was added later that Wiers was “excluded Feb. 1830.” Perhaps the latter indicates some sort of final action, or vote, by the congregation.⁴⁴

Nothing is known about Wiers’ activities for the remainder of 1830 and all of 1831 except for a mention of his being a bondsman for his younger brother, Peter, when he married Catherine Ensley September 14, 1830 in nearby Grimsby. The record lists Peter, Daniel, and Catherine as all being residents of Clinton Township.⁴⁵ The fact that Daniel Wiers was in Clinton in the fall of 1830 suggests that he continued to make his home there. What we know for certain is that he began preaching his new views in his home area by August 1832, for he sent two reports of his work in the fall of 1832 to the editors of the *Christian Messenger*. The first was written probably in September or October and appeared in the November issue of the paper. Only an extract of his submission was printed, but it told of thirteen baptisms.⁴⁶ In November he sent a much longer summary, which seems to have been printed in full, and in which he said, “I have been trying for a short time to preach the ancient gospel.... Since the latter part of August I have immersed for the remission of sin, 15, and constituted a church upon the New Testament alone, of about 16 members.”⁴⁷ This leaves 1830, 1831, and the first months of 1832 as nearly total blanks in the record. Somehow Wiers was preparing for his brief but significant work as a church planter in his home surroundings. To whom, if any, did he turn for counsel and encouragement after his rejection by the Baptists?

Wiers and Other Early Restoration Leaders

⁴⁴ For several years after Wiers was excluded the Baptists continued their animosity against those associated with him. Five years after he had reputedly left the area, the church withdrew fellowship from Catherine House and Benjamin Culp “for leaving us and uniting with the sect calling themselves disciples” (*Minutes*, December 7, 1839).

⁴⁵ Thomas B. Wilson, *Marriage Bonds of Ontario, 1803-1834*.

⁴⁶ “Extract from Elder Daniel Wiers, Canada,” *Christian Messenger*, November 1832, p. 316. This extract was printed *verbatim* in the *Millennial Harbinger* December 3, 1832 (p. 610) and was probably reprinted from the *Messenger*. Even though Wiers had been greatly influenced by the writings of Alexander Campbell, he chose to report to Stone’s paper. The significance of this choice we will explore later.

⁴⁷ “Clinton,” *Christian Messenger*, January 1833, p. 28. In addition to those baptized, Wiers was the sixteenth member. Maria Bertran, who died in 1876 at age 89, was reportedly the first one baptized (W. K. Burr, *Bible Index*, May 1876, p. 158). Some of the baptisms were “in the vicinity of Mud Creek,” in the Tintern area. (See the obituary George Clendennan wrote about Jane Bertran, age 74, who, he says, was baptized there about the same time as his mother, in 1832 [*Bible Index*, January 1875, p., 32].) Mud Creek flows parallel to and a short distance from what was then the southern border of Clinton Township. It empties into Twenty Creek not far from William Wiers’ farm. Others listed in the church records as baptized by Wiers were Cornelius Bertran, Solomon and Elin Culp, John and Mary Culp, John and Fanny Boughner, Isaiah and Elizabeth Wardell, James McGregory, Elin Tinlin, Catharine Gilmore, Nancy Sans, John Thompson, and a Mrs. Day. Most of these people were from families who owned land in the part of Clinton Township between Lake Ontario and the escarpment.

An appropriate place to begin is to ask whether Wiers was influenced by any in Upper Canada who sooner or later accepted many of the views of Campbell. What became the Restoration Movement in Ontario had at least four contributing streams. In addition to Wiers' work on the Niagara peninsula, there was an initiative in Toronto, spearheaded by James Beaty, Sr. Also, on the north shore of Lake Ontario, east of Toronto, Joseph Ash was instrumental in starting and nourishing several churches. And what came to be the most influential nineteenth century contribution to the Restoration Movement in Ontario centered in the work of James Black and the Oliphants in Wellington County, a short distance from Guelph.

Wiers was likely reading Campbell before anyone in any of these other streams. Although Beaty and a few others began meeting as a church in Toronto by 1828-29 or earlier, they at first had little or no contact with others with Restoration leanings.⁴⁸ On October 21, 1834, Marshal B. Stone, a former Christian Connection preacher who espoused Restoration views, reported from Whitby in the *Millennial Harbinger*, "Since I wrote you last, I have had the happiness of knowing that there are a little band of reformers in the city of Toronto, about twenty in number. They have no particular teacher, but meet together every first day and attend to the ordinances of God's house."⁴⁹ If any in the Toronto church were reading Campbell's writings in the 1820s, they neither made it known nor, as far as we know, endeavored to contact others in Ontario who were being influenced by them. Consequently their very existence was a pleasant surprise to a preacher like Stone in 1834.

As to James Black, it is ironical that, even though he twice succeeded Wiers as preacher for the Beamsville Baptist Church and was surely aware of Wiers' views without agreeing with them, he did not then appreciate that within a few years he would be reading the same material and setting forth many of the same ideas. It would be two or three years after Black left Beamsville in 1830 before he even began reading Campbell, for in a letter to the elders of the Jordan church, dated December 1840, he said, "I have been for more than seven years a regular reader of Alexander Campbell's periodicals."⁵⁰ Apparently David Oliphant, Sr., who had been a subscriber to the *Millennial Harbinger* almost from its beginning in 1830, was the one who successfully introduced Black to Campbell's writings, although he had not yet fully accepted Restoration principles.⁵¹ According to Joseph Ash, Black liked Campbell's paper well enough that he soon became an agent for it, and then, as a result of the circulation of Campbell's writings and of a visit from Jacob Snure of Jordan and from Zenon F. Green, the whole congregation of which Black and Oliphant were a part exchanged the Baptist name for that of Disciples of Christ, or Christians.⁵² This was in the late 1830s – far too late to have influenced Wiers.

⁴⁸ This information is taken from "The Restoration Churches in Toronto," by Geoffrey H. Ellis. This paper was presented at the annual meeting of The Canadian Churches of Christ Historical Society, August 28, 2004 and is the best account available of the beginnings of the group led by Beaty.

⁴⁹ *Millennial Harbinger*, December 1834, p. 606.

⁵⁰ Butchart, p. 403.

⁵¹ Ellis, "Life and Times of James Black," p. 119. Oliphant was definitely an interested reader of Campbell in the early 1830s although not yet fully persuaded.

⁵² Ash, p. 74.

The other contributing stream goes back, not only to Joseph Ash, but to some early Christian Connection preachers in Ontario.⁵³ Ash himself was not immersed until 1830, by a Christian Connection minister. A short time later, when Thomas McIntyre, another Christian Connection preacher, stopped at the home of Ash's father, Ash asked McIntyre what periodicals might help him. McIntyre recommended Alexander Campbell's *Millennial Harbinger* and Barton W. Stone's *Christian Messenger*. Ash subscribed to both almost immediately and was quickly influenced by what he read.⁵⁴ By this time Wiers had been reading Campbell about two years.

Although, to our knowledge, McIntyre never accepted some of Campbell's views, he may have influenced Wiers during his transition. McIntyre came to Canada about 1825, largely in response to an urgent plea from Mary Stogdill, who had moved to Newmarket, Ontario after being baptized in Greenville, New York by David Millard, a leading Christian Connection preacher in that state.⁵⁵ McIntyre and others from the Christian Connection had remarkable success in Ontario, and by October 1831 he reported that "the church has grown from nothing to about five hundred."⁵⁶ By 1829 he was sending reports to Stone's paper and may have been reading it from its beginning in 1827. In 1829 he also became an agent for Campbell's *Christian Baptist*.

McIntyre was well aware of Wiers' difficulties with the Beamsville Baptists, for he wrote to Stone April 7, 1830, and, after telling of division among the Methodists and the Quakers in Upper Canada, he said, "There is also trouble among the Baptist brethren. One of their preachers has thrown off the sectarian yoke and is walking in the liberty of the gospel."⁵⁷ While there is no specific record of contact between Wiers and McIntyre between 1830 and 1832, after 1832 Ash, for some reason, supposed that "Bro. Wiers and his friends in Clinton were operating among and with the 'Christian Connexion church.'" ⁵⁸ He may have assumed this because Wiers sent his extended report of his new work to Stone's paper rather than Campbell's. However, if there was actual contact between McIntyre and Wiers Ash could have learned this after he became part of the Connection in 1830 and then have made his early assumptions about Wiers on this basis.⁵⁹ While we need more information, what we know suggests that McIntyre was in

⁵³ The Christian Connection (spelled "Connexion" in early writings) was the "eastern branch" of the same movement of which Barton W. Stone was a leader in what was then the western United States. Stone and most of those in the west united with those associated with Alexander Campbell in 1832 in Kentucky. Those in Ontario and the eastern United States did not go along with this union. However, many of those in the east read the periodicals of Stone and Campbell in the 1820s and 1830s.

⁵⁴ Ash, pp. 1-2. Ash also subscribed to the *Christian Palladium*, a Christian Connection publication started in 1832 in New York and edited by Joseph Badger and David Millard. Ash was not as impressed with their writings as with those of Stone and Campbell, but reading all these publications helped him understand the differences between the views of Badger and Millard on one hand and Campbell, in particular, on the other.

⁵⁵ *Christian Messenger*, September 1829, p. 259; J. F. Burnett, "Early Women of the Christian Church." Burnett includes a short article about Mary Stogdill.

⁵⁶ *Christian Messenger*, December 1831, p. 279.

⁵⁷ *Christian Messenger*, June 1830, pp. 167-168.

⁵⁸ *Reminiscences*, p. 50.

⁵⁹ About a year after Wiers began preaching Restoration views in Clinton, Ash wrote in the *Millennial Harbinger*, in a letter dated July 6, 1833, that "there are no churches nor preachers who particularly call themselves Reformers, or Disciples, they all take the name Christian..." (*Millennial Harbinger*, September 1833, p. 610). At first glance, this appears to indicate that Ash was unaware of Wiers' work in 1833, but we learn from his *Reminiscences* that he thought then that Wiers was aligned with the Christian Connection, not realizing how strongly Wiers identified with the views of Campbell. Ash would have had little reason to draw this conclusion

contact with Wiers during these critical years and encouraged him to walk “in the liberty of the gospel.” Although Wiers’ views on Restoration soon went beyond McIntyre’s, this does not lessen McIntyre’s significance during this time of transition.

Wiers and F. W. Straight

But even after allowing for the probability of moral support and even some instruction from McIntyre and other Christian Connection preachers, we have not fully explained the rapid maturation between 1828 and 1832 of Wiers’ grasp of Restoration principles. We sense how far he had progressed in a comparatively short time when we look closely at his nuanced report in the *Christian Messenger* November 27, 1832 of his work and message in Clinton Township:

To the Editors of the Christian Messenger – Truth is gaining ground in Canada – people begin to inquire for themselves. I have been trying for a short time to preach the ancient gospel, and blessed by God! my labors have not altogether been in vain. Since the latter part of August last I have immersed for the remission of sin, 15, and constituted a church upon the New Testament alone, of about 16 members – and, we trust, are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ being the chief cornerstone. We receive into fellowship all who make the good confession, viz. that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, the only Saviour of sinners, and submit to the one baptism taught by the Apostle Peter on the day of Pentecost, and who continue to justify their profession by a life of practical piety. We are surrounded by Sects, who are combined against us, and the priests and clergy are doing their utmost to prejudice the people, to prevent their searching the scripture for the truth, by teaching them that the Bible is a dead letter, and that without some special or mysterious operation, they cannot understand it. We rejoice that Christ is King in Zion, and must reign till all enemies are put under his feet. Could we but have some able and intelligent proclaimer of the ancient gospel, much good might be effected. Dear brethren, pray for us that we may not be weary in well doing, and that we may understand, and walk in the truth – that we may be Christ’s disciples indeed. Being in great haste, I conclude by subscribing myself yours, in the bonds of love and union.

DANIEL
WIERS.⁶⁰

Wiers had been reading and thinking carefully since those last months of 1829 that ended in his rejection by the Baptists. What he now believes he describes as “truth” and “the ancient gospel.” He emphasizes immersion “for the remission of sins,” which distinguishes him from the Baptists as well as all, or nearly all, that he calls “Sects,” with their “priests and clergy.”⁶¹ What has resulted from his preaching is “a church upon the New Testament alone,” that is “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ being the chief cornerstone,” rather than a church founded on human creeds and

if Wiers had not associated with the Christian Connection in those early years. Ash says that since he and the others in the Cobourg church thought Wiers and his group were part of the Christian Connection, they supposed that their congregation (organized in 1836), rather than Clinton, was the first one in Upper Canada founded on Restoration principles [*Reminiscences*, p.50].)

⁶⁰ “Clinton,” *Christian Messenger*, January 1833, p. 28.

⁶¹ The emphasis on immersion *for the remission of sins* may also have been a way to distinguish him from some in the Christian Connection. Interestingly, Solomon Rose, a Christian Connection preacher, was in Louth, the township next to Clinton, in July 1832 (*Christian Palladium*, August 1832, p. 91). Did he meet with Wiers before the latter began preaching in August? By September Rose had moved to Newmarket (*Christian Palladium*, September 1832, p. 99).

traditions. Fellowship is extended to all “who make the good confession ...submit to the one baptism ...and continue...a life of practical piety,” rather than only those with a conversion experience. The Bible is a book all can understand “without some special or mysterious operation.” Wiers had drunk deeply from the *Christian Baptist* and from scripture itself.

While it is possible that Wiers reached all these conclusions simply by reading the *Christian Baptist* and pondering it privately with prayer and an open Bible, the evidence available gives a significant role to F. W. Straight, the preacher who was with him almost from the beginning of the new church in Clinton. Joseph Ash says that Straight “assisted Wiers in preaching” and “also learned the truth by reading the same book.”⁶² Since Ash knew Wiers personally and may have discussed with him how Straight was involved, his comments carry special weight. Another witness who, according to Reuben Butchart, gave similar testimony was Lucien Moote, in a paper read in 1898 at a Niagara church gathering.⁶³ He, too, was an informed witness. His great grandfather, John Moote, had settled next to William Wiers, Sr. in 1800, and various Mootes and Wiers were next door neighbors for eighty years. Willis Wiers, a grandson of William, married Elizabeth Moote, a granddaughter of John. Lucien Moote had access to information about the relationship between F. W. Straight and Daniel Wiers both through his church ties and his family relationships.

Who was Straight? Other than Wiers and two of the congregation’s early elders, Solomon Culp and George Morris, he was the first person to baptize anyone at the lakeshore church. Five or six of the first twenty baptisms are attributed to him in the church records, which shows that Moote and Ash were correct to have placed him there almost at the very beginning. He apparently continued working there as long as Wiers did, for Ash reported on June 13, 1834 that Straight was living in Beamsville.⁶⁴ Straight’s close association with Wiers from 1832 through much of 1834 implies that they knew each other before then and may even have read and studied together before preaching their new views in Clinton Township. The tradition handed down a half century later credited Wiers with Straight’s conversion, and this may well have been true.

Straight (his first name was Freeborn) was an American, born in 1806 in Washington Co., New York, and so he was in his mid- twenties when he came to Clinton.⁶⁵ Shortly before he went there he was pastor of a church in Brockport, a suburb of Rochester, on the western border of Monroe Co., New York, but what kind of church is uncertain, although Ash says he was a Baptist.⁶⁶ We know that later in life he was a minister for the Free Will Baptists,⁶⁷ but it is more likely that in Brockport he was pastor of one of the “regular”

⁶² Ash, p. 51.

⁶³ Butchart, p. 398. Unfortunately, Butchart does not record any of Moote’s paper, but he gives Moote, rather than Ash, as his primary source for his narrative of the beginning of the Clinton church and, on the strength of Moote’s account, identifies Straight as Daniel Wiers’ “assistant.”

⁶⁴ *Millennial Harbinger*, August 1834, pp. 381-382.

⁶⁵ His approximate birth date is obtained from his cemetery record at Beach Ridge Cemetery, Brockport, Monroe Co., New York. He died December 23, 1878 at age 72. His first wife was Sarah More, a Canadian according to the 1850 census, who died March 4, 1855, at age 43.

⁶⁶ Ash, p. 51; Information about his early preaching in New York is from a genealogist of the Soules family that moved to Brockport about 1831 or 1832 and attended the church where Straight was pastor.

⁶⁷ By 1842 he had moved to Conneaut, Ohio, where he preached for a Free Will Baptist Church. By the time of the 1850 census he was back in Monroe Co., New York, at Perinton, in the eastern part of the county, and in

Baptist churches. According to a directory a few years later, Brockport had two Baptist churches and one Freewill Baptist Church, but, as we will note later, J. M. Yearnshaw was the Freewill Baptist minister in Brockport at the same time Straight was living there.

The Baptists comprised a relatively small fellowship, with about 600 members in all of Upper Canada at the time Wiers joined them. It is probably safe to assume that their numbers in western New York were similar, and for this and other reasons there were close ties between Baptists on or near the Niagara peninsula and in adjacent New York. As already noted, when the minister of the Beamsville Baptist church died in 1827, Wiers sent the obituary to the *New York Baptist Register* in Utica, which was the Baptist journal of record for much of New York and Upper Canada. Two Baptist missionaries from New York assisted in the beginning of the Vittoria, or Charlottesville, Baptist Church in the home of Oliver Mabee (mentioned in connection with the heresy trial of Wiers in Beamsville).⁶⁸ It is conceivable that Wiers and Straight, both of whom were fledgling Baptist ministers, not only knew one another but also moved together on their spiritual journey, and that this led them to work together in planting a church on the Niagara peninsula.

Wiers and His Circle of Preachers

During the two years Wiers and Straight were working together in Clinton, Wiers came in contact with additional preachers who influenced him, both positively and negatively, and it is important to learn what we can about them. Three sources help identify them: (1) early records of the church in Clinton Township, (2) the comments of Joseph Ash, and (3) an early report in the *Millennial Harbinger*. Besides Wiers and Straight, early Clinton church records name Porter Thomas, J. J. Moss, Zenon F. Green, Marshall Wilcox, William Hayden, and E. Brunson as preachers who baptized people at Clinton. (The two elders, Solomon Culp and George Morris, who baptized some converts, are also named.) Ash lists Marshall Wilcox, Porter Thomas, and J. M. Yearnshaw as the first, other than Wiers and Straight, to preach there.⁶⁹ A report from William Hayden of Ohio tells of a meeting in 1833 in Batavia, New York involving Wiers, Hayden, Scranton, Yearnshaw, Thomas, Spoor, Moss, Green, and Howard.⁷⁰ Nearly all these men can be identified.

Some of these individuals were former Free Will Baptist ministers. One was John M. Yearnshaw,⁷¹ who in the early 1830s lived in the same township in Monroe Co., New

1855 he was Moderator of the Free Will Baptist Conference in Fairport, New York, near Rochester. In March of that year his first wife, Sarah, died in Brockport. From 1855-1856 he served as a trustee of Hillsdale College, a Free Will Baptist school in Michigan, and beginning in October 1855 he served as pastor of a Free Will Baptist church in Manchester, New Hampshire. While there he married his second wife, Mariam Jenkins, in nearby Lowell, Massachusetts. By 1862 he was back in Ohio, where he and Mariam had a son. Straight died in Zorra Township, Oxford Co., Ontario, but was taken back to Brockport and buried alongside his first wife.

⁶⁸ Watt, "Vittoria Baptist Church."

⁶⁹ Ash, p. 51.

⁷⁰ *Millennial Harbinger*, December 1833, p. 616. Hayden did not give the first name of any of these men, but they can be further identified with a reasonable degree of certainty from other sources.

⁷¹ Yearnshaw was born in England, but he seems to have begun his work with the Free Will Baptists in the Massachusetts-Rhode Island area, where in the late 1820s he worked for a year or two with weaker churches (G. A. Burgess and J. T. Ward, *Free Baptist Cyclopaedia, Historical and Biographical*, pp 567-571). He moved to New York and in October 1829 was secretary at the Free Will Baptist conference in Spafford, New York, near Syracuse. After embracing the Restoration Movement, he eventually preached in southwestern Wisconsin in

York as F. W. Straight. In September 1833 he wrote a letter to the *Millennial Harbinger*, repeating information that he said he had sent the previous May but which had not been published, telling “of the progress of reform in this region.” He stated, “There are four of us who bore the name of Free-Will Baptists, that are now proclaiming the ancient gospel; and though we have almost every thing to contend against, we find that the ‘truth is mighty, and,’ we doubt not, ‘will prevail.’ Brother Thomas has the consolation of having with him a considerable number of the church in Batavia, of which he was Pastor, and has also immersed these, and in the vicinity ten others for the remission of sins.”⁷² (“Brother Thomas” was likely Porter Thomas, who preached and baptized in Clinton a short time later.) While all this was transpiring, a “Brother Frost” from Monroe County was visiting in Ohio in May and told William Hayden “three or four as able men as were in the Free Will Baptist Conference, Genesee county, have come fully into the reformation; one was excluded by the Conference, and two obtained letters of dismissal (sic). Another was expected to come out soon.”⁷³ The identity of some he alluded to is uncertain, but one was almost surely Marshall Wilcox, as well as one or two others on our list whom we cannot further identify. Wilcox was born in Connecticut in 1802 but lived near Rochester, New York by 1830.⁷⁴

This defection of preachers from the Free Will Baptists was precipitated by an attempt of some in the Free Will church to require ministers to espouse Trinitarian views. Joseph Badger, editor of the *Christian Palladium*, wrote, in regard to this controversy, “We have recently heard from different parts of the country, that several of their most intelligent ministers...have revolted.”⁷⁵ The preachers who left seemed more concerned about constraints on free enquiry than on Trinitarian views *per se*. If it had been the latter, they could have found a home with the Christian Connection in New York and New England, which by this time was moving toward Unitarianism. Many Free Will Baptists had worked with the Christian Connection in previous years, since both groups had rejected Calvinism, and so they were conversant with the plea for non-sectarian Christianity. However, as Thomas Olbricht has shown, when the Christian Connection in New York and New England began embracing Unitarian views, the two groups drew apart.⁷⁶ Under these circumstances, disenchanted Free Will Baptist ministers who retained Trinitarian views would feel more at home with Alexander Campbell and the Reformers than with Joseph Badger and the Christian Connection.

Since Straight had lived and preached in the same township as Yearnshaw and the same county in New York as Wilcox, and since by 1833 he was already working alongside Wiers and preaching Restoration views, he is our most likely candidate for

the early 1850s (*Millennial Harbinger*, October 1851, p. 598; February 1852, p. 117). By 1869 he was in Lincoln, Nebraska, where he began working with a new congregation that D. R. Dungan had organized in January of that year (Morton and Watkins, *History of Nebraska*).

⁷² *Millennial Harbinger*, October 1833, p. 525.

⁷³ William Hayden, Streetsborough, Ohio, July 12, 1833, *Millennial Harbinger*, August 1833. Frost was mistaken or misquoted about all these men being from Genesee County. Thomas was from there, but Yearnshaw was from Monroe County.

⁷⁴ Marshall Wilcox’s father, Jabez, is listed as head of the household in the 1830 census for Monroe Co., New York. The 1830 census does not list other family members, but since Marshall apparently did not marry until about 1835, he may have been living with his parents and thus was not listed separately in the census.

⁷⁵ *Christian Palladium*, December 1832, pp. 188-190; April 1833, pp. 304-306.

⁷⁶ Thomas Olbricht, “Christian Connexion and Unitarian Relations, 1800-1814,” *Restoration Quarterly*, Vol. 9, No. 3, 1966.

introducing these men and other Free Will Baptist preachers, not only to Wiers, but also to Restoration principles. Whatever may have been Straight's role, by May 1833 at the latest Yearnshaw and others broke openly with the Free Will Baptists, although they surely wrestled with these ideas for six months or more before leaving their previous church homes and so must have been exposed to Campbell's views earlier than May 1833. Soon after their conversion, three of these New Yorkers preached at Clinton and made a lasting impression. Ash recalled fifty years later that after Wiers and Straight, "The next preachers who visited that locality, preaching and doing much good, were Marshall Wilcox, Porter Thomas and J. M. Yearnshaw."⁷⁷

As mentioned, news about these preachers reached Ohio and William Hayden, who preached on the Western Reserve. Hayden, the brother of the early Restoration Movement historian, A. S. Hayden, had been song leader and exhorter for Walter Scott when he baptized about three thousand people in that part of Ohio from 1827 to 1830.⁷⁸ After working alongside Scott, William Hayden began evangelizing with Jasper Jesse Moss, who was a native of the Syracuse, New York area but who had moved to Kirtland, Ohio, on the Western Reserve.⁷⁹

Both Moss and Hayden preached in New York and Upper Canada in response to requests for help, including appeals from Daniel Wiers and Joseph Ash. Wiers wrote from Clinton November 27, 1832, "Could we but have some able and intelligent proclaimer of the ancient gospel, much good might be effected." Ash wrote from Cobourg the following summer, on July 6th: "We very much want an evangelist possessed of learning and talent sufficient to face the wisdom of the world to travel through the province to advocate the principles of ancient Christianity."⁸⁰ Moss' missionary tour began in September 1833 and took him first to his native Syracuse area, where his sister still lived. Several Baptist preachers around Syracuse had accepted Restoration principles, and he visited them to lend encouragement. Moss then took time in November to attend a meeting in Batavia with William Hayden, as well as Daniel Wiers and several western New York preachers, including J.M. Yearnshaw and Porter Thomas. (The import of this meeting will be more thoroughly examined later.) Moss then made a trip into Canada, where, according to the church records, he baptized at least two people in Clinton in December 1833. He then returned to the Syracuse area and was there in late April 1834. By late spring of that year he left the Syracuse area, apparently stopping at Batavia, New York, where Porter Thomas joined him, and then at Beamsville, where they were joined by F. W. Straight. The three of them reached Cobourg in May for a brief visit with Joseph Ash, who subsequently reported that he was expecting Moss and

⁷⁷ *Reminiscences*, p. 51.

⁷⁸ *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, p. 383.

⁷⁹ Kirtland was where Joseph Smith and the early Mormons went after leaving New York. Moss was baptized by Sidney Rigdon before Rigdon defected to the Mormons and became one of their leaders. Moss married a woman whose mother and aunt were Mormons. (The aunt was the wife of E. D. Howe, a newspaper editor who wrote *Mormonism Unveiled* [sic], the first book-length expose of the Mormons.) Moss' future mother-in-law hesitated letting her daughter marry him until she went to Smith for counsel. He claimed a revelation that said Moss would be converted to Mormonism and that she could give her consent with perfect safety. Moss later converted his mother-in-law from Mormonism. (M. M. Moss, editor, "Autobiography of a Pioneer Preacher," *The Christian Standard*. This edited version was published in installments beginning in December 1937.) Moss moved first to Oregon and then to Washington, where he died in Seattle in 1895.

⁸⁰ *Christian Messenger*, January 1833, p. 28; *Millennial Harbinger*, September 1833, p. 472.

Thomas to come again in early July. Moss' May visit in Canada is confirmed by Moss himself, who wrote Hayden on June 1st and told him he had been in Canada recently. He reported that forty-one had been immersed and prospects were good. During this last tour Moss likely preached again at Clinton and baptized several more people.⁸¹ Probably Moss and Hayden were Wiers' first visitors from the Western Reserve, where the Restoration cause had advanced so rapidly.

The Impact of Howard and Green

But requests for workers, like the appeals Wiers and Ash made in 1832 and 1833 respectively, can bring unwanted responses (although Ash made his appeal after the first undesirable preacher came). Two who came were renegades who had been expelled from the Christian Connection in the Rochester area for immoral conduct. The first was Benjamin Howard, a man who, according to Ash, had "great oratorical powers." Howard came to Cobourg in April 1833 where Ash lived, and he began preaching on the streets of the town. As a reader of the *Christian Palladium*, Ash had learned that Howard had been disfellowshipped for "immoral and unchristian conduct" in 1825, both as a minister of the gospel and as a Christian, by the Eastern New York Conference of the Christian Connection. When he moved to the Rochester area after 1825 he gained the confidence of many of the people there under false pretences, but in August 1831, after they learned the truth about him, they exposed him. He then formed his own conference, made up of himself and one other minister.⁸²

Ash tried to warn others, but he was unsuccessful in this at first. Howard not only continued preaching in Canada, but he also brought Zenon F. Green from New York to work with him. Green, who came to Canada sometime in 1833, had been expelled by the Christian Connection for drunkenness and other inappropriate conduct.⁸³ After Ash continued opposing these men, Howard left and by 1837 was in Nova Scotia, but Green stayed several years, preaching in Prince Edward County and on the Niagara peninsula.⁸⁴ Wiers had met him in Batavia, New York in November 1833, and Green was in Clinton by 1834 and preached in the area for several years afterwards.

Green was a very persuasive speaker, and large numbers of people were baptized by him. Because of his speaking ability and the number of converts he made, he had a loyal following, and preachers like Moss, Hayden, and perhaps even Wiers for awhile, endorsed him. When Ash exposed Howard in the pages of the *Millennial Harbinger* as "a man of bad character," representatives of the Port Hope (Hamilton Gardens) church, five miles from Cobourg, sent a full endorsement of Howard and Green to the same paper and blamed McIntyre and the Christian Connection for maligning the two men. They pointed

⁸¹ Moss' travels can be traced from various reports that he, Hayden, and Ash submitted to Christian journals. See *Millennial Harbinger*, July 1834, pp. 330-331, 333; December 1833, p. 616; August 1834, pp. 381-382; *Christian Messenger*, August 1834, pp. 241-243.

⁸² *Christian Palladium*, January 1832, pp. 227-228; March 1833, pp. 288-290. Although the *Palladium* notices do not name the other minister in Howard's new conference, it was likely Zenon F. Green.

⁸³ *Christian Palladium*, January 1832, pp. 226-227; August 1833, pp. 127-128. Green, like Howard, misrepresented his standing as a minister with the Christian Connection. The *Palladium* reported that Green had been ordained by one "nominal deacon" and by Howard.

⁸⁴ Ash, pp. 3-4.

out that these men had baptized between seventy and eighty people, and they added that “the prospects in this country are as good now as they ever have been.”⁸⁵

After Moss and Hayden met Howard and Green, Hayden told Campbell that, as far as he and others knew, there was some mistake in the report Ash had sent about Howard. Campbell then promised to make further inquiry about the matter and to communicate the result. Three months later, in March 1834, after receiving the letter from the Port Hope church, Campbell went so far as to say, in reference to Ash’s strictures, that “the statement published some time since came to us from an individual who might have been deceived.”⁸⁶ But three months later he had second thoughts and wrote, “Recent intelligence from Canada and some places in the United States concerning these gentlemen (Howard and Green), relative to their standing, as noticed some time since in the Harbinger, create strong suspicions that all is not as it should be. We are promised some documents on this matter soon. As there have been so many notices of them creating suspicions, it is their duty and the duty of the brethren to have the matter decided forthwith.”⁸⁷

This controversy over Green and Howard had serious repercussions in the early 1830s, affecting relations not only between the Christian Connection and the Reformers in Upper Canada but also among the Reformers themselves, both in New York and Canada. By 1834 the Christian Connection had twenty-seven churches and seventeen “traveling elders,” plus about twelve who were not ordained. The number of members is not given for that year, but in 1833 there were 1200 members in Canada.⁸⁸ Ash, in a letter to Campbell July 6, 1833, said that although there were “no churches nor (sic) preachers that called themselves Reformers, or Disciples, most of the Christian preachers (Ash’s way of referring to those in the Christian Connection) of my acquaintance are decidedly in favor of the principles you write upon, and ever have been since their conversion.”⁸⁹ This gave Ash hope that when the Annual Conference met in Whitby in June 1834 steps toward union with the Reformers could be agreed upon. Ash was elected clerk at the conference, and after much of the other business had been conducted, one of his friends offered a resolution, which was promptly seconded, to replace conferences with informal annual meetings like those conducted by the Reformers in Ohio. This was intended as the first of several motions removing obstacles to union between the Christian Connection and the Reformers in Upper Canada, for it was thought that if this motion passed the others would be agreed upon in due course. When the vote resulted in a tie, the chairman cast the deciding vote against the resolution. Confusion ensued and the conference broke up abruptly for that year.⁹⁰

Had it not been for the controversy over Green and Howard during the previous fourteen months, the vote likely would have gone in favor of union, since only one more vote was needed to pass the resolution. After Green and Howard were expelled from the Christian Connection in New York, they had allied themselves with the Reformers.

⁸⁵ *Millennial Harbinger*, September 1833, p. 472; December 1833, p. 616.

⁸⁶ *Millennial Harbinger*, December 1833, p. 616; March 1834, p. 144.

⁸⁷ *Millennial Harbinger*, June 1834, p. 288. These were Campbell’s last words on this matter in the pages of the *Harbinger*, but he may have pursued it further through private correspondence.

⁸⁸ *Christian Messenger*, August 1834, pp. 241-243; Ash, p. 4.

⁸⁹ *Millennial Harbinger*, September 1833, p. 472.

⁹⁰ Ash, pp. 4-5.

Almost as soon as these men arrived in Canada, Ash and many in the Christian Connection opposed them. Thomas McIntyre⁹¹ wrote Joseph Badger, editor of the *Christian Palladium* in New York, telling him, “Benjamin Howard has made his appearance here, and has gone to preaching; and inasmuch as you have driven him into Canada, I want you should come over and drive him back again.” Badger tried to do this, at least through warnings in the *Palladium*, but failed. Instead, Howard sent for Green to come and assist him.⁹² While this report did not speak directly to the attitude that those in the Christian Connection had toward union with the Reformers, it is probable that at least some of them would not want union with anyone who supported disreputable preachers like Howard and Green.

The difficulties with these two men explain the letter Moss wrote to McIntyre and Ash July 1, 1834, “trying to calm the troubled waters about Howard and Green.” Ash mentioned the letter in connection with the interest of “Bro. Wiers and his friends in Clinton” in a union in Canada like the one in Kentucky in 1832 between the Christians (associated with Stone) and the Reformers.⁹³ But Moss was unable to effect reconciliation, since unfavorable reports about Howard and Green were becoming more frequent.

The involvement of Howard and Green in the work of the Reformers in Upper Canada and western New York was also a problem within the ranks of the Reformers themselves. Certainly this was true of the attitude of Ash after he left the Christian Connection. Wiers also had problems with them after awhile. This whole situation seems to have been, in part at least, the occasion of the previously-mentioned gathering of preachers sympathetic with the Restoration plea near Batavia, New York November 2-4, 1833. The meeting took place while Hayden and Moss of Ohio were both visiting in the area, and it was described by Hayden as being “much like those in the Western Reserve.”⁹⁴ Most of the speakers can be identified. Wiers came, plus at least two of the preachers who had left the Free Will Baptists shortly before this – Yearshaw and Thomas. Green and Howard attended, as well as one of their supporters, Elder William Scranton, from Rochester.⁹⁵ Of the nine men present, the only one who remains unidentified was a man named Spoor. Otherwise, all of them are known to have sympathized with Campbell’s views and can be identified as Reformers. We also know that Wiers had other dealings with all of them except possibly Scranton and Spoor. Hayden called it “a very delightful meeting,” but he also said that “we exhorted each other to love and bear with each other, to be long suffering and kind, while holding forth ‘the truth’ to enlighten, warm, and quicken the world.” This suggests that all was not well but that Hayden was hopeful everyone would get along better after the meeting than at least some of them had in the past.⁹⁶

⁹¹ The *Harbinger* report from which this is taken called him “Thomas Medire,” but this is likely an error, either from difficulty in reading the handwriting in the report or because the authors did not know the correct spelling of McIntyre .

⁹² *Millennial Harbinger*, March 1834, p. 144. This information was sent to the *Harbinger* by friends of Howard and Green, and some of it may be a paraphrase, slanted in favor of these men. Nevertheless, the report illuminates the controversy.

⁹³ Ash, p. 50.

⁹⁴ The implication was that this meeting was not like the conferences of the Christian Connection.

⁹⁵ Scranton was identified in the report from the Port Hope church in the *Millennial Harbinger* March 1834, p. 144 as having come there from New York to attest to Howard’s good character.

⁹⁶ *Millennial Harbinger*, December 1833, p. 616. Hayden penned his letter November 16, 1833.

Hayden and Moss returned to Ohio and continued to serve effectively there, while most of the others were left on the Niagara frontier for the time to try to work together. Howard left Upper Canada soon after this and from 1837 until at least 1841 he preached effectively in Nova Scotia, where, to our knowledge, no questions were raised about his character.⁹⁷ He may have been the same Benjamin Howard who eventually affiliated with a group of German background, called the Church of God. There is record of him speaking at one of their eldership gatherings in 1848 and of his preaching at a number of churches in Pennsylvania and Maryland.⁹⁸ We have no way of knowing why he may have left the Restoration Movement or whether he reformed morally.

Yearnshaw, as already noted, soon moved on to other fields but remained true to Restoration principles. What happened to Thomas, Scranton and Spoor is not known. This leaves Green and Wiers, along with two others who did not attend the Batavia meeting but were very much a part of Wiers' circle – Wilcox, who was one of the early preachers in Clinton, and Wiers' co-worker, Straight – to be accounted for. Green, as has already been mentioned, stayed in Canada for several years. Although he baptized many people and helped begin several churches, he continued to have problems with alcohol and was excluded by churches in Prince Edward County, Toronto, and Jordan. Eventually he left Canada for Rockford, Illinois, where, according to Ash, he had to flee before he was lynched. He ended up dying what Ash called an “obscure death” in Michigan.⁹⁹

Wilcox eventually left New York but continued with the Restoration Movement. By 1843 he was preaching at Stow, in Summit County, Ohio, about ten miles from Streetsboro, where William Hayden lived. Later he moved to Michigan, near Lansing, where he was preaching in 1850.¹⁰⁰ Straight, as mentioned before, was preaching for the Free Will Baptists in Ashtabula, Ohio by 1842, and he apparently remained with that denomination for the remainder of his life. What happened with him remains a mystery, for his earlier decision to leave the Baptists and to work with Wiers in Clinton could not have been an easy one. Did he become disillusioned? Was it somehow related to the difficulties with Green?

The Mystery of Wiers

We know somewhat more about what happened to Wiers. After his initial success in Clinton Township and his visit in New York with like-minded preachers, he went to see Ash in 1834, apparently before the Whitby Conference of the Christian Connection in June of that year. Ash found him upbeat and trying to be cooperative with the Christian Connection, in hopes of leading them, as Ash put it, “further into the truth.” Wiers showed Ash the prospectus of a monthly paper that he wanted to publish to set forth the claims of the “ancient gospel.” However, Ash said that after the Whitby Conference decided against union, “we became discouraged and saw that our battles must be fought on new ground.” But then something happened, for, as Ash says, “Wiers left Canada and I never heard any more from him. It appears that prior to this he (Wiers) had become acquainted with Z. F. Green and Ben Howard, ...for in a letter to me dated Beamsville,

⁹⁷ Butchart, pp. 97, 131, 342, 347, 352, 353, 358, 359, 370. Locales where he preached included Halifax, West Gore, and Shubenacadie.

⁹⁸ C. H. Forney, *History of the Churches of God*, Division I, Chapter VII.

⁹⁹ Ash, p. 52.

¹⁰⁰ *Summit County Court Marriage Records*, Book 1; 1850 census for Clinton Co., Michigan.

Sept. 1, 1834, he states that he has no confidence in ‘Green and Howard.’ He says as respects Howard and Green, it is my opinion that they ought not to be fellowshipped as Christian preachers without a satisfaction and reformation of life.”¹⁰¹

Wiers, of course, knew Green and Howard well by the time he wrote this letter. Green sometimes preached at Clinton, where he baptized far more people in the church’s early days than anyone else – eighty-eight of those baptized were immersed by Green. While the list is not precisely chronological, the fact that forty of Green’s baptisms are named before the last of the fourteen by Wiers suggests that Green baptized a large number while Wiers was still there.¹⁰² Green was also an unusually capable and persuasive speaker. Ash said years later, “He (Green) had a remarkable talent. Few men can keep an audience of hearers while he is showing their faults, follies, and bad doctrines; but he would do it. He mesmerized his hearers so they could not stay away.”¹⁰³ While we do not want to recklessly charge Wiers with petty jealousy, we have to allow for the possibility that feelings like this may have colored his view, especially since Wiers had first preached in Clinton and then Green came along and obtained a substantial following.

But this was not the fundamental problem. Subsequent events proved that Green had never dealt appropriately and satisfactorily with the demons that plagued him. Soon others saw Green for what he really was and had to deal with him. As we have seen, at least three Canadian churches, including Jordan, which was an outgrowth of Wiers’ pioneering work, excluded him, and his problems continued even after he left Canada. In addition to his moral difficulties, Green eventually became enamored with some of the speculative teachings of Dr. John Thomas,¹⁰⁴ Alexander Campbell’s one-time associate who defected to found the Christadelphians.¹⁰⁵ Thus, there were valid and sufficient reasons for Wiers’ lack of confidence in Green.

However, there is cause to wonder how Wiers handled the situation, especially if most of the Clinton church sided at first with Green. Even those of us most in sympathy with Wiers in his dispute with the Baptists five years earlier may question the way he handled controversy then. Did he really threaten, as charged, to “wage war against the sentiment of the church”? Was he stubbornly unwilling to resign as preacher when the church had decided it did not want him to continue? Even after granting that his conscience would not permit him to yield in some matters to the Baptists in 1829 we can detect indications

¹⁰¹ Ash, pp. 49-50.

¹⁰² One of Daniel Wiers’ own relatives, Elizabeth (his cousin William’s wife), was baptized by Green. The only other Wiers on the list of those baptized at Clinton and Louth in the early years was Magdalane (sic), who could have been Daniel’s sister, mother, or aunt (the widow of William Wiers, Sr.), since all three had the same name. These were the only close relatives of Daniel who were baptized during that period. He was more effective in influencing friends and neighbors than relatives.

¹⁰³ Ash, pp. 52-53.

¹⁰⁴ Ash, p. 50. Ash observed that “the brethren in P. E. Co. or Niagara district are not at all chargeable with his hypocritical life. He spoke to them God’s truth (on first principles) which they received into good and honest hearts, and were excellent Christian people.” Probably some whom he baptized in Prince Edward County and at Jordan were among those who later had to take action against him. One of the early leaders at Jordan, for example, was Jacob Snure, who was the last man on the list of those baptized by Green at Clinton.

¹⁰⁵ It had to have been at least 1834 and possibly later when Green began teaching Thomas’ speculative theories, for Thomas was not baptized until 1832 or 1833 (by Walter Scott), and he did not begin his journal, *Apostolic Advocate*, in which he propagated his theories until 1834. (See the article on John Thomas in *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*.)

of stubbornness and impetuosity where conciliation may have been possible. Had he outgrown these traits by 1834?

What then happened to Wiers? Did he give up preaching? Many have had to deal with hypocrites like Green. Perhaps he was not able to convince others in Clinton of the kind of man Green was, but there were other places to work and preach. Did he become discouraged when Straight defected? Or did Straight defect after Wiers became discouraged? The reality is that we do not know the answers to these questions.¹⁰⁶ Nevertheless, Wiers remains for us the man who first set forth in Upper Canada Restoration views like those of Alexander Campbell and whose lasting legacy is two churches, Beamsville and Jordan, which have not only lived for 175 years but have also remained influential until the present day. Some people, like Wiers, plant, and others water, and those indebted to him for his pioneering work by now number in the thousands.

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¹⁰⁶ There was a Daniel Wiers in Colborne, a village on the north edge of Simcoe in Norfolk County in 1856. A list of “Physicians and Surgeons” in various communities in the county includes “Daniel Wiers, Botanie, Colborne” (*Map of the County of Norfolk, Canada West*, published by George C. Tremaine, Kingston, C. W., 1856). He was also listed in the 1861 census for Windham Township, District Four, along with his wife and children. He was fifty-one at the time and hence born in 1810 – too young to have been the Daniel Wiers who was executor of his father’s estate in 1825 and also too young to have become minister of the Beamsville Baptist Church in 1827. His wife, Helen, age forty-seven, was born in Canada West (the designation for Ontario after 1841), and their oldest daughter, Margaret, age seventeen, was born in the United States. There were three younger children, ages twelve, ten, and three, who were all born in Canada West.

Addendum to “Daniel Wiers in the Maelstrom of the Early Restoration Movement on the Niagara Frontier”

by Edwin Broadus

Since presenting my paper, “Daniel Wiers in the Maelstrom of the Early Restoration Movement on the Niagara Frontier,” at the 2007 meeting of the Canadian Churches of Christ Historical Society, significant new information about Wiers has come to light. Some of this was published in the CCCHS *Newsletter*, Vol. 3, No. 3-4, Winter-Spring, 2008, and I welcome the opportunity to present this and other new information in this addendum.

It can now be stated with assurance that Wiers, the son of Conrad and Magdalen Wiers, was born in late 1804 or early 1805 in Clinton Township in Lincoln County on the Niagara Peninsula.¹⁰⁷ Wiers grew up on his parents’ farm between Beamsville and Vineland, and after a brief membership with the Presbyterian Church in Beamsville he joined the Baptists in the same town in 1827. Early that year, when he was twenty-two years old, he accepted that church’s invitation to be its minister. A year later he was replaced by James Black, and we now know more about why this happened. During his first year as minister, to the consternation of the church he publicly voiced his doubts about the validity of creeds and Calvinistic doctrines such as predestination. With the church’s approval, he decided to study at the Baptist Theological Seminary at Hamilton, New York, with “the hope that his location in that seminary would reclaim him from his new theory.”¹⁰⁸ But after six months at the school he was more firmly established than ever in his views, and after the church trial described in my previous paper Wiers was excommunicated by the Baptists at the end of 1829.

About six months after Wiers’ excommunication, David Marks and Freeborn W. Straight, itinerant Freewill Baptist evangelists from western New York who went on preaching tours in Upper Canada, stopped to visit him at his home in Clinton. They had never met Wiers before this visit, but as they were traveling through southwestern Ontario and were still 100 miles from Clinton, they heard about him and the action the Baptists had taken against him. When Marks and Straight visited with Wiers they learned more about his troubles with the Beamsville Baptists. Marks wrote that he had been told that the church’s severe action “was designed to convict and reclaim him,” and they supposed that “in a few days he would learn obedience.” But as time went by, Wiers showed no desire to apply for reinstatement, and, in Marks’ opinion, the Baptists had to accept the fact that they had “expelled not only the best scholar they have in the province of U. C. but a young man of gravity, candor, innocence and piety rarely equaled.” Marks was clearly impressed with Wiers, and he further described him as “a person of few words, unusual gravity, and

¹⁰⁷ David Marks, letter written from Putney, New York, July 26, 1830, *The Morning Star*, August 25, 1830. Marks states that Wiers was born and reared in Clinton. His approximate birth date is established from the 1861 census and from his death record, which states how old he was when he died. See Footnote 16.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.* The seminary at Hamilton, New York eventually became part of Hamilton University, which in turn became Colgate University. In an anniversary publication of Hamilton University in 1870, Wiers is listed as a former student.

considerable education and talent.” (Marks was about twenty-eight at the time and estimated Wiers’ age as perhaps twenty-six or twenty-seven. Actually, Wiers was twenty-five. Marks’ fellow preacher, Straight, was twenty-four.)

According to Marks, Wiers told them “that a conviction of the Scriptures being a perfect law, sufficient for the government of the church, led him to reject all the disciplines and articles of men, and to search the Bible to find the doctrine that it teaches. The result was, a rejection of the doctrines of Calvinism, and the embracing of his present sentiments.” When he saw that his views were similar to those of the Freewill Baptists, Wiers said that he wanted to attend the next Free Will Baptist Yearly Meeting in western New York. He did this in August and while there preached for them. At the Elders’ Conference the next day, he proposed joining them. The conference then appointed six elders to visit Clinton to hold a two-day meeting.¹⁰⁹ Whether they did this, we do not know, but we are told that Wiers was subsequently ordained as a Freewill Baptist minister.¹¹⁰

Wiers’ new friendship with Straight proved significant, for the latter would be remembered as the man who worked most closely with Wiers when he began a Restoration church in Clinton. Straight had close Canadian ties, not only because he and Marks often preached there, but also because both men had met and married women in Upper Canada. Soon after his meeting with Wiers, Straight began preaching in Batavia, New York, where he baptized several people, organized a Freewill Baptist Church, and served as its first minister.¹¹¹ There is good reason to believe that during this time he and Wiers continued to stay in close contact with one another.

Wiers’ activities between August 1830 and August 1832, when he began preaching and baptizing for the remission of sins, are uncertain. Marks says that in 1830 Wiers had preaching appointments, apparently in the vicinity of his home. The *Freewill Baptist Register* listed him in 1830-31 in his home township of Clinton and in 1831-32 in Dunwich Township in Elgin County, Upper Canada, where there was a Freewill Baptist church and where Straight’s in-laws lived. He and Straight were also members of the Bethany Quarterly Meeting in New York and presumably saw one another at gatherings there. It is also possible that during this two-year period the two preachers made their legendary purchase of Alexander Campbell’s publication, *Christian Baptist*, at an auction in Lewiston, New York.¹¹² During this time Wiers also had opportunity to meet two other Freewill Baptist ministers who would soon join him in advocating many of the distinctive views voiced by Campbell. John M. Yearnshaw moved from Rhode Island to western New York soon after the summer of 1830, and Porter Thomas, who once preached in Vermont but then went for

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*; Marks, “Holland Purchase Yearly Meeting,” *The Morning Star*, September 29, 1830.

¹¹⁰ *Freewill Baptist Register*, 1832, p. 43. According to the *Register*, Wiers was ordained sometime during the year ending September 1, 1831. He is listed as “ordained” and a member of the Bethany Quarterly Meeting, while living in Clinton. He is listed one last time in the 1833 *Register*.

¹¹¹ David Marks, letter written from Parma, New York, *The Morning Star*, September 29, 1830; *Freewill Baptist Register*, 1832, p. 43; *Freewill Baptist Register*, 1833, p. 50.

¹¹² In my previous paper on Wiers, I argued that Wiers must have obtained Campbell’s periodical at an earlier date, since he was accused at his 1829 “heresy trial” of “recommending Campbells (sic) Testaments and writings to others.” However, he may have been aware of some of Campbell’s views and of his Bible translation from other sources before obtaining copies of Campbell’s *Christian Baptist*.

awhile to Michigan before succeeding Straight as the preacher for the Batavia, New York church, was in western New York by the end of 1832.

Wiers began preaching and practicing baptism for the remission of sins in August 1832 and by doing this effectively severed his ties with the Freewill Baptists. Sometime by the latter part of 1832 Straight also openly espoused the views of Alexander Campbell. David Marks wrote, after he met with the Batavia church January 27, 1833, “The church appeared to be in a good state though they had been affected and tried by the course pursued by their late pastor, Elder F. W. Straight, who, appearing to lose his humility, embraced the peculiar and cold hearted sentiments of Alexander Campbell. That water baptism is regeneration – that unless a man be immersed he cannot be a Christian – that the Holy Spirit does not strive with the world – and that in these days, no man is called of God to preach the gospel.”¹¹³

Straight was replaced as pastor in Batavia by Porter Thomas, who was meant to undo the damage done by Straight to the Freewill Baptist cause in that place but who soon joined ranks with Straight, Wiers, and Yearnshaw. Thomas and Yearnshaw changed their views by May 1833. In September of that year Yearnshaw sent a report to Campbell’s *Millennial Harbinger*, referring to an unpublished letter he had written in May and repeating what he had apparently said then: “There are four of us who bore the name of Free-Will Baptists, that are now proclaiming the ancient gospel.” He reported Thomas had also brought with him a considerable number of members of the church in Batavia.¹¹⁴

Recriminations followed the defection of at least some of these preachers. As already noted, David Marks publicly expressed his disappointment in the course taken by his former co-worker, saying that Straight, “appearing to lose his humility, embraced the peculiar and cold hearted sentiments of Alexander Campbell.”¹¹⁵ After Thomas left, some old charges against him in Vermont in 1830 were revived.¹¹⁶ Yearnshaw spoke more vaguely of “anathemas, excommunications, and slanders.”¹¹⁷ Nothing has been found about action against Wiers by the Freewill Baptists, other than deleting his name from the *Freewill Baptist Register*,¹¹⁸ although removal of the names of all four men may imply that action was taken against them at the Yearly Meeting.

All this sheds new light on the beginnings of the Restoration Movement on Ontario’s Niagara Peninsula. We now know more about how the Freewill Baptists

¹¹³ David Marks, “Journal of David Marks,” Second Series, Canandaigua, New York, February 27, 1833, *The Morning Star*, March 21, 1833. Straight’s defection was surely bitter for Marks, who had helped train him as a preacher and who had frequently traveled with him on preaching tours.

¹¹⁴ J. M. Yearnshaw, September 17, 1833, *Millennial Harbinger*, October 1833, p. 525. My previous paper identified these four as Straight, Yearnshaw, Porter, and possibly Marshall Wilcox. But Wilcox was a former Methodist exhorter from the Rochester area. The fourth former Freewill Baptist minister was, as we now know, Wiers.

¹¹⁵ Marks, “Journal of David Marks,” Second Series, Canandaigua, New York, February 27, 1833, *The Morning Star*, March 21, 1833.

¹¹⁶ “Report,” *The Morning Star*, February 6, 1834. This report brought up accusations made against Porter June 11, 1830 in Vermont, charging him with failure to pay his debts there.

¹¹⁷ Yearnshaw, *Op. Cit.*

¹¹⁸ The four men were not listed in the *Register* in 1834, which included the year beginning in September 1833. It was not until 1847 that Straight was again listed (p. 51), after his return to the Freewill Baptists.

helped Daniel Wiers during a period of transition, for Wiers told Marks that prior to meeting him he had not known of any others who shared his opposition to Calvinism. The Freewill Baptists also supplied Wiers with some of his best and earliest co-workers. From Marks' evaluation of Wiers we have reason to believe that he was a man of considerably more talent than we may have previously supposed and not nearly as disputatious as he seems in the Baptist church records. The involvement of these ministers also explains the traditional view that the work on the peninsula was begun by New Yorkers.

More has also been learned about what may have happened to Wiers after he left the Beamsville area in 1834. He is listed in the 1856 atlas for Norfolk, Co., Ontario and in the 1861 census for Windham Township in the same county.¹¹⁹ According to the atlas and the census, he was a "botanic" or "botanie" physician, practicing a form of alternative medicine involving, in part, the use of herbs. Sometime earlier he had married Helen Tinlin, the daughter of James and Ann Tinlin. Helen was born on the Niagara Peninsula in 1814 and was almost certainly the Elin Tinlin whom Wiers baptized when he was preaching in Clinton Township.¹²⁰ We do not know when Daniel and Helen married, but it was likely by 1843 at the latest, for the census states that their first child, Margaret, was born in the United States about 1844. By the time their second child, Rhodesia, was born about 1849 they were back in Canada. Possibly they were in the United States in 1844 for him to study medicine, for there is indication that he had a professional diploma. In June 1850 "Daniel Wiers and others, freeholders, and others, of Upper Canada," filed a petition with the Canada Legislature "praying the removal of all disabilities from unlicensed Practitioners of Medicine, or that a diploma from their own sect be considered sufficient."¹²¹ He was also a subscriber in 1854 to the *Quarterly Homeopathic Magazine*, published in Cleveland. (Homeopathy was closely related to botanic medicine.)

The 1861 census listed Daniel and Helen and their two oldest children as Bible Christians. This was a church that was an offshoot of the Methodists and that originated in the British Isles. The district (one of five) in the township in which the Wiers lived had fifty members of this denomination, according to the census report, although there is no way of knowing how many of these were merely nominal adherents. Like other Methodists, the Bible Christians rejected Calvinism. As their name suggests, they also put great emphasis on make the Bible their only basis for Christian doctrine and practice. Eventually the group, in Canada at least, returned to the main Methodist fold.

¹¹⁹ This possibility was dismissed in my previous paper because of my erroneous reading of his age in the 1861 census. He was fifty-seven, not fifty-one, as a reexamination of the census report has disclosed, which approximately coincides with David Marks' estimate of Wiers' age in 1830.

¹²⁰ Helen's maiden name is found in the marriage record of Daniel A. Wiers, whose parents are listed as Daniel Wiers and Helen Tinlin (*Michigan Marriages, 1863-1925*, Vol. 2, p. 287). Daniel A. was the Wiers third child, according to the 1861 census. Helen's parents were immigrants from the United States. The record of her baptism is found in the early records of the Clinton Disciples, which are in the possession of the Jordan Church of Christ.

¹²¹ *Journals of the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Canada, Vol. 9 (1850)*, pp. 59, 69. The petition was laid on the table by William Hamilton Merritt, who represented the counties of Lincoln (the county where Wiers grew up), Welland, and Haldimand.

By 1858 the Wiers family had determined to leave Canada, and on May 1st of that year patents for a total of 200 acres in Oceana Co., Michigan were issued to “Daniel Wiers of Norfolk Co., CW.” On March 10, 1862 “Daniel Wiers of Oceana Co., Michigan” obtained approximately 151 acres of additional land, indicating that between these two dates the family moved from Canada. On September 26, 1869 Daniel Wiers died in Berlin Township in Ionia County, Michigan and was buried in nearby Saranac Cemetery. According to Michigan records he was sixty-four years old.¹²² (Oceana County is north of Grand Rapids and Ionia County is between Grand Rapids and Lansing.) In 1870 Helen and the three youngest children were listed in the census in Ionia County, suggesting that sometime between 1862 and 1869 the family moved there from Oceana County.¹²³ The 1872 *History and Directory of Ionia County, Michigan* lists Helen and her son Daniel living in Berlin Township. Apparently the husband and father had not continued in his medical practice, for when he died, the record of his death lists farming as his occupation. Almost nothing has been found about the family’s church membership in Michigan.¹²⁴ After Daniel Wiers’ tortuous spiritual pilgrimage during his earlier adult years, the question of what may have been his more mature settled convictions begs an answer – one that we can hope that someone somewhere can provide in the future.

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¹²² See *Michigan Deaths, 1867-1897*, p. 253. The record of his death suggests Wiers was born between September 27, 1804 and September 26, 1805, while the 1861 census, which was dated in February and which listed persons’ ages on their next birthday, indicates that he was born between March 1804 and February 1805. Taking the two records together, we conclude he was born between the latter part of September 1804 and February 1805. When he first met David Marks and Freeborn W. Straight in June 1830, he was twenty-five years old. The record of Wiers’ death states that his parents were Conrad and Magdalane Wires (sic), which, along with the Michigan land records already cited, proves that the Daniel Wiers of Lincoln Co., Ontario, Norfolk Co., Ontario, and Ionia Co., Michigan were one and the same.

¹²³ Helen’s second daughter, Rhodesia, and her son, Daniel A., are each listed in the 1861 Norfolk County census and in the 1870 Michigan census. The name of the youngest child is spelled “Eisobella” in the earlier census and something like “Enessia J.” in the latter one, although the census report is hard to read. The discrepancy is difficult to explain, since both names evidently refer to the same child, listed as age three in 1861 and age eleven in 1870. (The Canadian census listed the ages each person would be on his or her next birthday.)

¹²⁴ There is a later hint about Helen’s possible church membership when, in 1893, a Congregational minister officiated at her marriage in Ionia Co., Michigan to an 82-year-old butcher named Moses Plant.