

## “Collecting Baptist Hymnals: Two ‘New’ Early Nineteenth Century Sources from Upstate and Western New York”

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In 1964 Baptist church musician and hymnologist William J. Reynolds published his list of “Baptist Collections of Hymns Published in America.”<sup>1</sup> For over forty years now this list has been an important guide for those of us who collect Baptist hymnals. With the passing of Bill Reynolds this year we remember his monumental contribution to our Baptist hymn singing tradition and the significance of his Baptist hymnal list.

It was inevitable that I would collect hymnals and specifically Baptist hymnals. As a boy in the late 50’s and early 60’s I collected rocks, stamps, and baseball cards. So what would a Baptist Minister of Music eventually collect (?); Baptist hymnals of course! Three important works have guided my collecting passion:

1. Baptist Hymn Writers and Their Hymns, by Henry S. Burrage, published in 1888.<sup>2</sup>
2. The English Hymn: Its Development and Use, by Louis F. Benson, published in 1915.<sup>3</sup>
3. “Baptist Collections of Hymns Published in America”, included in Hymns of Our Faith: A Handbook for the Baptist Hymnal (1956), by William J. Reynolds, published in 1964.<sup>4</sup>

And now we have the definitive study of Baptist hymnody in North America published last year by David Music and Paul Richardson: “I Will Sing the Wondrous Story”: A History of Baptist Hymnody in North America.<sup>5</sup> Their “Bibliography and Index of Baptist Hymnals”<sup>6</sup> is now the best resource list available for those of us who collect Baptist hymnals.

Earlier this year I discovered in my hymnal collection two Baptist hymn collections from the early nineteenth century that had not been cited by Burrage, Benson, Reynolds, or Music and Richardson:

The Pilgrim's Companion: Being a Collection of Hymns In General Use In Private Circles and Conference Meetings: With a Few Never Before Published, By Jason Lothrop, Pastor of the Baptist Church in Newport, (Newport, 1827)<sup>7</sup>

A Selection of Hymns, For Conference Meetings, Designed For the Use of Baptist Churches, By Jairus Handy, Pastor of the Baptist Church, Buffalo (Buffalo, 1831)<sup>8</sup>

As we celebrate 400 years of Baptist church music we must ask who compiled these two hymn collections and what do their contents add to our knowledge of Baptist hymn singing and Baptist devotional life in the early nineteenth century?

It is interesting to note that both of these hymn collections were published in the state of New York, both were compiled by Baptist pastors serving churches in the state of New York, and both collections mention "Conference Meetings." In A History of Baptist Hymnody in North America Music and Richardson would certainly include these two hymn collections in their chapter entitled "Local and Regional Collections in the Early Nineteenth Century."<sup>9</sup>

In the first half of the nineteenth century, the growing number of Baptists in the United States and a burgeoning publishing industry combined to produce a proliferation of hymn collections. Many were intended for worship, while others were compiled to meet the needs of the various social and revival meetings that were part of a series of spiritual awakenings.<sup>10</sup>

In northern and western New York "Baptists in this period had an active devotional life beyond Sunday worship."<sup>11</sup> Thus Baptist pastors such as Jason Lothrop and Jairus Handy published regional hymn collections for local conference meetings and private social gatherings.

This paper will examine one of these newly discovered hymn collections; specifically the hymn collection compiled by Baptist pastor Jason Lothrop.

Jason Lothrop: Teacher, Poet, Printer, Baptist Pastor, Hymnbook Compiler, and Pioneer

Jason Lothrop was the sixth son born to John and Sarah Lothrop on May 16, 1794 in

Easton, Massachusetts.<sup>12</sup> John Lothrop was a Vermont farmer who had moved to Massachusetts<sup>13</sup> and his wife Sarah was a native of Wales.<sup>14</sup> Nine sons and four daughters were born to this union.<sup>15</sup> Their fourth son Reuel Lothrop was also a Baptist pastor, hymnbook compiler, and printer.

As a young man Jason Lothrop was a school teacher in New Hampshire.<sup>16</sup> Apparently, by 1815 he and his brother Reuel were jointly publishing and printing in Meredith, New Hampshire under the company name of the R & J Lothrop Firm.<sup>17</sup> By 1816 Reuel, while pastoring the Baptist Church in Sutton, New Hampshire, was also operating a small printing press in his home.<sup>18</sup> In 1814 Reuel compiled and published Hymns And Spiritual Songs, Composed On Various Subjects, In A Plain Style, With The Author's Experience.<sup>19</sup> In 1815 Jason published a compilation of letters he had written between 1812 and 1813 entitled: Letters to a Young Gentleman.<sup>20</sup> Included in this volume are "Miscellaneous Poems, Composed For The Amusement And Benefit Of Pious Youth by Jason Lothrop."<sup>21</sup> Information from this collection of poems reveals that Jason had been writing hymns as early as 1814 and that other hymns and poems "remain in manuscript" form.<sup>22</sup> The final selection in the "Miscellaneous Poems" is entitled "Hymn of Thanksgiving [COMPOSED DEC. 1, 1814]."<sup>23</sup> The first stanza of this fourteen stanza hymn reads:

To Thee, thou fountain of delight,  
We dedicate this day;  
Blessings and praise employ our might,  
Whilst we adore and pray.

It would be several years later in 1827 that Jason Lothrop would publish his hymn collection in Newport, New York.

By 1817 Jason Lothrop and his wife Susan were living in Utica, New York. The

circumstances of his move from New Hampshire to New York are unknown, but by 1818 he would be ordained as a Baptist pastor and would be called to pastor the Baptist church in Newport. Apparently he was a recognized Baptist preacher in Utica, but had not yet officially been ordained. These entries from the record books of the Baptist Church in Newport, New York reveal the sequence of events<sup>24</sup>:

- On December 20, 1817, Rev. Jason Lothrop from Utica expressed a desire to become a member of our Church.
- On June 18, 1818 the church voted unanimously to call Br. Jason Lothrop to ordination.
- Over the next several meetings he held many baptisms by immersion.
- On October 14, 1820 it mentions that he was absent by sickness.
- On January 7, 1821 Elder Lothrop's health is restored.
- Starting in March of 1821 and for several months, it again mentions that he was ill of health, absent by sickness, not able to preach, health was improving, by request of Elder Lothrop meeting was held at his house.
- In May of 1822 it again states his health was better, but in June of 1822 he requested to journey to another state to regain his health.

A list of pastors<sup>25</sup> confirms that Jason Lothrop served as pastor of the Baptist Church in Newport from 1817 to 1828. The Baptist Church of Newport had been established in 1799, six years before the actual founding of the town of Newport.<sup>26</sup> During his pastorate the church completed a stone building for its meeting place.<sup>27</sup> It was here in Newport that Pastor Jason Lothrop compiled and published his hymn collection in 1827 entitled The Pilgrim's Companion.

Sometime in 1828 Jason Lothrop and his family moved west to the village of Pulaski in Oswego County New York where he helped organize the Baptist Church and became its first

pastor.<sup>28</sup> In 1835 Jason Lothrop and his family joined the stream of pioneers pouring westward

out of New York into Wisconsin.<sup>29</sup> They settled on land in the present day town of Kenosha and of course he helped start the Baptist Church in Kenosha and served as its first pastor for about nine years.<sup>30</sup> There is much to be told about this pioneer Baptist pastor and his life and work in Wisconsin before the Civil War. He lived his later years in Kenosha, where he died in 1870.<sup>31</sup>

### The Hymns in THE PILGRIM'S COMPANION (1827)

Jason Lothrop, Pastor of the Baptist Church in Newport, New York, selected 123 hymns for his collection of hymns that he published in 1827.<sup>32</sup> There is no indication that he collaborated with his brother Reuel in writing original hymns for this collection or in the printing of this collection. The Preface to THE PILGRIM'S COMPANION is dated May 25, 1827 and the hymn book was printed by Northway & Bennett Printers in Utica, New York. The title page clearly states that the selected hymns were “in general use in private circles and conference meetings” and that a few of the hymns had “never before” been published.

In the Preface Lothrop states four specific reasons for preparing his “little volume” of hymns:

1. He states that there has been an “increasing demand” for such a collection of hymns. He describes the collection as a source of “helps to individuals, private circles, and conference meetings.” The phrase “helps to individuals” implies that the collection would also be used for private devotions. He also states that there is a need for a “greater variety” of hymns than those that are readily available.
2. He states that for “some cause” different regions of the country sing “different hymns.” He has selected hymns that “will probably meet the demands” of the Newport region. But he is quick to say that he will not be disappointed if the collection is circulated outside of his region.

3. His third reason appears to be rooted in a doctrinal controversy. Lothrop states, “Many of our popular hymns have greatly deteriorated by passing through the hands of those opposed to the scriptural doctrine of GRACE” [GRACE is capitalized!]. It could be that he is referring to the changing tide of Baptist doctrine from “limited atonement, a central pillar of Calvinist orthodoxy, and its replacement by the concept of universal atonement.”<sup>33</sup> He emphatically states that as “the compiler” he “has attempted to correct some of the abuses” by simply changing one word. Lothrop then gives his philosophy of Christian song. It is unthinkable to him that Christian singing would not match Christian prayers and Christian experience. He writes, “The language of the disciple is uniform, and his prayer, experience and creed, should speak one language.”
4. Reason four follows the thoughts presented in reason three. He has selected hymns for the Christian that “correspond” to “gospel prayers, creeds, and experience.” In his own words this has been the “leading object with the compiler.”

Lothrop does not list the author or source for any of the 123 hymns he selected for his collection. But the authors and/or sources for 110 of the hymns have been identified. As stated on the title page of THE PILGRIM’S COMPANION these hymns represent a selection of hymns “in general use” by Baptists; presumably by Baptists living in the Newport region.

The hymns selected include:

- 14 hymns by John Newton
- 8 hymns by Anne Steele
- 7 hymns by Joseph Hart
- 7 hymns by William Cowper
- 3 hymns by John Fawcett
- 2 hymns by Benjamin Beddome
- And of course 8 hymns by Isaac Watts

These familiar 18<sup>th</sup> century hymn writers form the core repertoire of local and regional collections such as THE PILGRIM’S COMPANION.<sup>34</sup> It is presumed that Lothrop was very familiar with John Rippon’s SELECTION OF HYMNS<sup>35</sup>, the first American edition of which was published in New York in 1792. Of the 110 identified hymns in THE PILGRIM’S COMPANION 39 are previously found in Rippon’s SELECTION. In each of these 39 hymns Lothrop has used Rippon’s hymn-heading titles in his own collection of hymns.

Familiar hymns from THE PILGRIM'S COMPANION include:

“All hail the power of Jesus' name!”  
“Am I a soldier of the cross?”  
“Come thou Fount of every blessing”  
“Come ye sinners poor and wretched”  
“Glorious things of thee are spoken”  
“How firm a foundation ye saints of the Lord!”  
“Jesus lover of my soul”  
“There is a fountain filled with blood”

Five hymns from the collection are by American hymn writers:

Thomas Baldwin's	“From whence does this union arise”
Timothy Dwight's	“I love thy kingdom, Lord”
John Leland's	“The day is past and gone”
Anna Beeman's	“In Jordan's tide the Baptist stands” <sup>36</sup>
Samson Occom's	“Wak'd by the gospel's powerful sound” (altered)

Lothrop also included in THE PILGRIM'S COMPANION a few hymns that were “never before published.” There are fourteen of these hymns in the collection. It is assumed that these “never before published” hymns were selected specifically for the private circles, conference meetings, and churches in the Newport region. The most interesting of these hymns is a three stanza baptismal hymn entitled “THUS IT BECOMETH US”, which is the King James Version quote of the words of Jesus at His baptism as recorded in Matthew 3:15.

Thus did our Great High Priest ordain,  
Who gave us the sacred rite,  
And thus he trod to make it plain,  
And shew'd the burden light.

“Thus it becometh us” saith he,  
To ratify God's word.\*  
Nor is the path too mean for me,  
Since it became my Lord.

This wat'ry tomb may well express  
The grave I soon must try;  
My rising too, my hopes confess,  
Of rising when I die.

\*Dr. Campbell's translation.<sup>37</sup>

This unknown writer describes baptism in the immersionist mode as “the sacred rite” and as “This wat'ry tomb.” It is a “grave” that the writer and singers “soon must try.” The second line of the second stanza continues the words of Jesus and should read “to fulfill all righteousness” from the King James Version. But Lothrop has changed this couplet to read “To ratify God's word”, using the word “ratify” from “Dr. Campbell's translation”<sup>38</sup> of the four Gospels. This made the “text more threatening to Methodists and other sprinklers.”<sup>39</sup>

Hymn 105 is a heart wrenching hymn entitled “THE DEATH OF CHILDREN.”

Ye mourning saints, whose streaming tears  
Flow o'er your children dead,  
Say not in transports of despair,  
That all your hopes are fled.

While cleaving to that darling dust,  
In fond distress ye lie,  
Rise, and with joy and reverence, view,  
A heavenly Parent nigh.

Another hymn beginning “'Tis Pride, accursed pride,” could possibly have been written by Jason Lothrop. The seventh stanza uses the words “I write”:

This moment, while I write,  
I feel its pow'r within;  
My heart it draws to seek applause,  
And mixes all with sin.

In the preface to his hymnbook Pastor Lothrop stated that he was concerned about hymns with a “deteriorating” doctrine of “GRACE.” It appears that he was attempting to hold onto a moderate Calvinistic view of grace during a time when Baptists were moving more towards the Arminian doctrine of grace. The fourth stanza of another anonymous hymn entitled “REPENTANCE FROM A VIEW OF THE MERCY OF GOD” may express his doctrinal view of grace:

New life from thy refreshing grace  
Our sinking hearts receive;  
Thy gentlest, best-loved attribute,  
To pity and forgive.

The second couplet reminds the reader of human depravity and the other lines suggest God's paramount role in the conversion process. David Singer suggests that *THE PILGRIM'S COMPANION* is a transitional hymnal in doctrinal content, "combining human depravity with universal atonement."<sup>40</sup> "Arminianism, with its doctrine of freedom of the will, places the burden of salvation on the sinner, by requiring him to accept or reject the grace offered by God."<sup>41</sup> Two couplets from another anonymous hymn selected by Lothrop express this thought:<sup>42</sup>

Convinced of sin, men now begin  
To call upon the Lord;

Come, sinners, all, hear now God's call,  
And pray with one accord;

As a teacher, an aspiring poet, and a printer, Rev. Jason Lothrop had all of the necessary skills to compile a hymn book for the Baptist Church in Newport, New York. He entitled his collection of hymns *THE PILGRIM'S COMPANION*, perhaps using the word "pilgrim" to denote his own pilgrimage west from New Hampshire to New York. Little did he know when he compiled the hymnbook in 1827 that his own pilgrimage would lead him further west to the frontier of Wisconsin. *THE PILGRIM'S COMPANION* is typical of the many local and regional hymn collections that were published by Baptists in the early nineteenth century.

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<sup>1</sup> William J. Reynolds, *Hymns of Our Faith: A Handbook for the Baptist Hymnal* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1964), xxxi-xxxvi.

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- <sup>2</sup> Henry S. Burrage, *Baptist Hymn Writers and Their Hymns* (Portland, Maine: Brown Thurston & Company, 1888).
- <sup>3</sup> Louis F. Benson, *The English Hymn: Its Development and Use in Worship* (New York, New York: George H. Doran Company, 1915).
- <sup>4</sup> William J. Reynolds, *Hymns of Our Faith*.
- <sup>5</sup> David W. Music & Paul A. Richardson, *"I Will Sing the Wondrous Story": A History of Baptist Hymnody in America* (Macon, Georgia: Macon University Press, 2008).
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 503-548.
- <sup>7</sup> Jason Lothrop, *The Pilgrim's Companion: Being a Collection of Hymns in General Use in Private Circles and Conference Meetings: With a Few Never Before Published* (Newport, NY: Jason Lothrop, 1827).
- <sup>8</sup> Jairus Handy, *A Selection of Hymns, for Conference Meetings, Designed for the Use of Baptist Churches* (Buffalo, NY: Steele & Faxon, 1831).
- <sup>9</sup> Music & Richardson, *"I Will Sing the Wondrous Story"*, 157-199.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.
- <sup>12</sup> Easton, Massachusetts Vital Records Transcription (Transcribed by John A. Maltby, 2002).
- <sup>13</sup> *Commemorative Biographical Record of Prominent Men of Racine and Kenosha Counties Wisconsin Containing Biographical Sketches of Business and Professional Men and Many of the Early Settled Families* (Chicago, Illinois: J. H. Beers & Co., 1906), 156.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>17</sup> Reuel Lothrop, *Sermons on Different, Important and Interesting Subjects: Addressed to Young People* (Meredith, New Hampshire: R. & J. Lothrop, 1815), from the title page.
- <sup>18</sup> Reuel Lothrop, *The Christian's Almanack for the Year 1817... Fitted for New England* (Sutton, New Hampshire: Jason Lothrop, 1816). From a note in the WorldCat listing.
- <sup>19</sup> Reuel Lothrop, *Hymns and Spiritual Songs, Composed on Various Subjects, in a Plain Style, with the Author's Experience* (Concord, N. H.: Printed by I. & W. R. Hill, 1814).
- <sup>20</sup> Jason Lothrop, *Letters to a Young Gentleman, A Few Moral and Entertaining Subjects; Written in Prose and Verse, for the Improvement of the Young* (Published by the Author, 1815). Jason Lothrop was living in Meredith, New Hampshire at the time of publication.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* Appended to the end of *Letters to a Young Gentlemen*.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* 31.
- <sup>24</sup> From the Record Books [up to 1822], the Baptist Church in Newport, New York. I am indebted to Eric Newman, member of the church, for examining the record books for me.
- <sup>25</sup> "Sesqui-Centennial Program" from the First Baptist Church, Newport, New York, 1949.
- <sup>26</sup> "200 Year History of The First Baptist Church of NewPort: 1799-1999 (History updated by Eric Newman, 1999).
- <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>28</sup> "Churches in Richland, N. Y.," from *History of Oswego County, N. Y., 1789-1877* (Everett & Ferriss, 18780).
- <sup>29</sup> *Commemorative Biographical Record*, 157.
- <sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>32</sup> Jason Lothrop, *The Pilgrim's Companion*.
- <sup>33</sup> David Singer, "God and Man in Baptist Hymnals 1784-1844," *American Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (Fall 1968): 16.
- <sup>34</sup> Music & Richardson, *"I Will Sing the Wondrous Story"*, 173.
- <sup>35</sup> John Rippon, *A Selection of Hymns from the Best Authors, Intended to be an Appendix To Dr. Watts Psalms and Hymns, First American Edition* (New York: William Durell, 1792).
- <sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.
- <sup>37</sup> Footnote to HYMN 101, *The Pilgrim's Companion*.
- <sup>38</sup> "Thus ought we to ratify every institution": from *The Four Gospels, Translated from the Greek*, George Campbell, 1811.
- <sup>39</sup> From an email from Dick Hulan; August 31, 2009.
- <sup>40</sup> David Singer, 26.

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>42</sup> “Convin’d of sin, men now begin”, HYMN 112, *The Pilgrim’s Companion*.