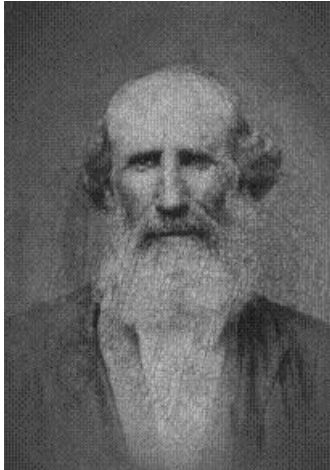


Free Will Baptist ^[1]

Free Will Baptist

by Michael R. Pelt, 2006

See also: [Baptists](#) ^[2]; [Free Will Baptist Children's Home](#) ^[3]; [North Carolina Baptist Historical Collection](#) ^[4]



Rufus K. Hearn. Image courtesy of Mount Olive College.

^[5]The *Free Will Baptist* ^[5] is a Christian publication founded in 1873 by the [General Conference of Original Free Will Baptists in North Carolina](#) ^[6]. Up to that time the church had functioned without the benefit of a news medium other than the printed minutes of the annual conferences. Following the distribution of a prospectus, Robert Ellis began to publish weekly issues of the *Free Will Baptist Advocate* at Fremont. After a year, he began publishing the paper at Toisnot (now Elm City) and changed its name to *Toisnot Transcript* ^[7], a change that brought dissatisfaction to many, with the result that the publication had to be suspended about 1877. The general conference reactivated it with a new editor and manager who published it under its original name. Because of a lack of support it was again suspended in 1879.

When the conference was convened in 1880, church elder Rufus K. Hearn was asked to submit a plan for successfully publishing a Free Will Baptist newspaper. He urged the conference to obtain full ownership of the printing press, hire an editor, and publish the paper at the expense of the conference with the support of individual subscriptions and contributions from churches. The conference adopted Hearn's plan and hired him as editor, and he began publishing the paper at Fremont, dropping the word "Advocate" from its name. The next year he moved to New Bern and published the paper there. Although the conference was asked to contribute toward expenses, there was never enough money to balance the account. In 1886 a committee recommended that the printing press be loaned to Hearn with the provision that he publish the paper "as a Free Will Baptist organ at his own expense." Hearn continued to publish it on these terms until February 1889. In that year a stock company was formed, and the conference conveyed its interest in the printing press to the Free Will Baptist Publishing Company.

The company assumed the responsibility of publishing the paper, moving its base to the town of Ayden in 1894. From that date until modern times, the *Free Will Baptist* has been published in Ayden. In addition to serving the Free Will Baptists of North Carolina, it has been the church paper for this denomination throughout much of the South from the beginning of the twentieth century. It was instrumental in the formation of the General Conference of Free Will Baptists in the United States in 1921 and later in the merger of this organization with another group to form the [National Association of Free Will Baptists](#) ^[8] in 1935. When the North Carolina Convention withdrew from that organization in 1962, the paper's subscription base was reduced. Because of increased printing costs, in January 1982 the *Free Will Baptist* became a monthly magazine, focusing primarily on the programs and interests of North Carolina Free Will Baptists.

Reference:

Michael R. Pelt, *A History of Original Free Will Baptists* (1996).

Image Credit:

Rufus K. Hearn. Image courtesy of Mount Olive College. Available from <http://www.moc.edu/index.php/fwbmagazine> ^[5] (accessed June 8, 2012).

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