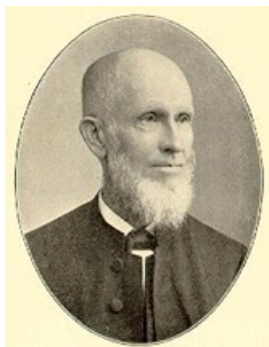


Betts, Alexander Davis ^[1]

Betts, Alexander Davis

by Louise C. Smith, 1979; Revised by SLNC Government and Heritage Library, June 2023

25 Aug. 1832–15 Dec. 1918



Alexander Davis Betts.
Image courtesy of UNC

Chapel Hill Libraries. ^[2]Alexander Davis Betts, Methodist ^[3] minister and Confederate ^[4] chaplain, the son of Temperance Utley and William Betts, was born in Blockersville (now Stedman), Cumberland County ^[5]. At the age of seventeen, when he was playfully trying to ride a young steer, he was thrown and sustained an injury that left him with a physical disability. At the nearby Summerville Academy he began a classical education, and he entered The University of North Carolina ^[6] as a member of the class of 1855. He received the A. B. degree and a few years later the M.A.; in 1895 the university honored him with the degree of D.D. Betts remained a loyal friend to the university and attended University Day and commencement a number of times. In 1882 he wrote a hymn for University Day ^[7], and he was a trustee from 1879 until 1895. Shortly before graduation day in 1855, Betts married Mary E. Davis of Chapel Hill, adopting her maiden name as his own middle name in her honor.

In Chapel Hill, Betts was converted to Methodism in 1853, and there he was licensed to preach in 1855. For a brief time, however, he taught in a Pittsboro academy. Soon afterward he became "supply" minister to the Methodist church ^[8] in Martinsville, Henry County, Va. In gratitude for his warm reception there, he named his newborn son Henry for the county.

Before the Civil War ^[9], Betts served churches in Sampson County ^[10], Smithville (now Southport), Elizabethtown, and Smithfield. After the war he served in many places, as Methodist ministers customarily do. Among his assignments were churches in the counties of Anson ^[11], Brunswick ^[12], Carteret ^[13], Craven ^[14], Duplin ^[15], Guilford ^[16], Harnett ^[17], Jones ^[18], Nash ^[19], and Wilson ^[20]. In 1908 he was superannuated but continued his work by preaching upon invitation and working with schools and prisons in various parts of the state.

After the death of his first wife (5 Sept 1879), Betts in 1881 married Priscilla M. Debnam. Six of his eleven children were living at the time of his death: the Reverend W. A., J. R., Sallie, Dr. J. S., Mrs. L. P. Wokins, and Mrs. R. L. Davis.

On 25 Oct. 1861, Betts was commissioned chaplain of the Thirtieth North Carolina Regiment; he served throughout the Civil War. General Robert E. Lee ^[21] is said to have spoken of Betts on one occasion as "that model chaplain." Betts kept a journal, published in 1904 as Experiences of a Confederate Chaplain ^[22] (Piedmont, S.C.), in which he recorded detailed and moving accounts of his work.

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Additional Resources:

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