

Stradley, Thomas ^[1]

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by Richard C. Barnett, 1994

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Thomas Stradley, Baptist clergyman, was born in Woolwich, England, the sixth child of John, a junior constructor of carriages at the Royal Arsenal in Woolwich, and Sarah Wheeler Stradley. At age fourteen he was apprenticed to a blacksmith in the Royal Arsenal. He married Mary Frances Diblin in 1819. With his wife and five children, Thomas left England for the United States, arriving in Charleston, S.C., in 1828. He settled in [Asheville](#) ^[2], N.C., where his brother Peter had located in 1823, and established a blacksmith's shop near the later site of the Battery Park Hotel. In 1829 Thomas joined Peter and eleven others in the constitution of a Baptist church. After the new church was admitted to the twenty-three-year-old [French Broad Association](#) ^[3] in 1830, Thomas was ordained to the ministry and immediately became active in the association. He later played a prominent role in the Salem Association, formed in 1838, until his retirement in 1875.

Stradley was the first mountain minister to attend the newly established [North Carolina Baptist Convention](#) ^[4] when that body held its third annual session in 1833. He was one of the original agents of the *Biblical Recorder*, the journal of the Baptist Convention, and continued that association for several decades. When the convention divided the state into missionary districts, he was entrusted with the Eleventh District, one of two covering western North Carolina. He also was one of forty members of the board of trustees named in the charter of 1833 granted to Wake Forest Institute. Stradley remained on the board—the sole representative of mountain Baptists—until July 1835, when his resignation was announced. When difficulty of travel resulted in the organization of the Western North Carolina Baptist Convention in 1845 as an auxiliary of the state convention, Stradley began to play a vital role in that convention. In 1857 he was elected president and served three terms. During his presidency the Western North Carolina Convention became an independent body, voted to establish a Baptist Female College, and took charge of the Taylorsville Institute. In 1859 he was named to the board of trustees of the Female College. From 1852 until at least 1871, after which there is a gap in the records, he was one of six men who seemed preeminent in the life of the Western North Carolina Convention.

From 1829 to 1875 Stradley was pastor of the First Baptist Church of Asheville. He built a new church, seating 450, and to pay for it mortgaged his own property and traveled to New York and Boston after the [Civil War](#) ^[5] to raise funds. Throughout his ministry he was a stout champion of education, temperance, Sunday schools, and missions. He also served temporarily as pastor of numerous other churches and traveled widely in behalf of Baptist causes.

Stradley was the father of thirteen children, one of whom, the Reverend J. A. Stradley, became a well-known Baptist minister. He was buried in the Beaverdam Baptist Church cemetery, [Buncombe County](#) ^[6].

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Subjects:

[Biographies](#) ^[13]

[Religious Leaders and Clergy](#) ^[14]

Authors:

[Barnett, Richard C.](#) ^[15]

Origin - location:

[Buncombe County](#) ^[16]

[Asheville](#) ^[17]

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1 January 1994 | Barnett, Richard C.

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