

North Springfield Baptist Church of North Springfield, Vermont, in Which J. R. Graves Was Baptized

By Wayne Camp

I suppose if there is any one man that could be called "**Mr. Landmarker,**" it would be J. R. Graves, author of **Old Landmarkism, What Is It?** Of course, J. M. Pendleton would be close up there with him as would A. C. Dayton. According to William Cathcart, at the age of 15 years, Graves was baptized into the fellowship of the North Springfield Baptist Church of North Springfield, Vermont. This church was started out of the First Baptist Church of Chester, Vermont. But, the First Baptist Church was not formally and officially organized by the First Baptist Church of Bellingham, Massachusetts. Their only link to the Church in Bellingham, Massachusetts, is the fact that, after he visited Chester and determined to work there, he returned to Bellingham and the FBC of Bellingham ordained Aaron Leland a "Travelling Minister" on June 20, 1787. [While this would satisfy some, others would unchurch the First Baptist Church of Chester and thus unchurch the North Springfield church and thereby repudiate the baptism of J. R. Graves. As Bro. Larry Killion has said and I agree, "I think we would have to be meticulously rigid and very nit picky to unchurch Bro Leland . . ." RWC].

In July, 1787, Elder Aaron Leland and his wife, Joanna, left Bellingham, MA, and travelled to Chester, VT, where Joanna took sick and died shortly after their arrival. Leland had been invited to come to Chester, VT, "to preach with us" by a petition of fifteen citizens, none of whom were Baptists.

On August 9, 1789, two years after arriving in Chester, the Chester Baptist Church was formed in covenant by the 10 people Leland had gathered during his two years there. On October 3, 1789,

the church in Bellingham, Massachusetts, dismissed Bro. Leland from its membership sending a letter of recommendation to the church in Chester, VT. On January 14, 1790, the Chester church received the letter and formally voted to "receive Elder Aaron Leland as a Minister of this church according to the above recommendation." The entire text of this letter is in the records of the church. Bro. Leland pastored this church for 43 three years. It was his first and only pastorate.

The current pastor of the First Baptist Church of Chester, Vermont, Eld. Tom Charlton, writes, "The Bellingham, MA, church did not directly form the Chester, VT, church. However, on invitation from citizens of Chester [none of whom were Baptists, RWC], Aaron Leland did travel here and in his life had a lasting influence on the community."

The Old Landmarker himself, the great Baptist, J. R. Graves, was baptized in the North Springfield Baptist Church which was formed out of the First Baptist Church of Chester, VT, which was not directly, or formally, formed out of another Baptist Church. There is no indication that Graves ever renounced his baptism and sought re-baptism. If it had been the contention of this Old Landmarker that every church must be formally started by another Baptist Church or it is not scriptural and could not, therefore administer scriptural baptism, surely he would have repudiated his baptism.

[Editor's Note: The information for this historical sketch has been gathered from three sources. (1) I have a copy of a lengthy letter in hand from the current pastor of First Baptist Church of Chester, VT, containing information that was based on the church minutes and other historical sources, which was sent to another brother who sent it to me and others. (2) An article on J. R. Graves, Pages 466-468 of ***The Baptist Encyclopedia***, by William Cathcart. (3) An article on Eld. Aaron Leland from ***The Baptist Encyclopedia***, Page 682. Though I found nothing additional, I also read quickly

through ***J. R. Graves: Life, Times, and Teachings*** to check and see if it mentioned a rebaptism of Graves]

Brotherly in Christ,

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