

ELEAZAR CLAY
1ST BAPTIST MINISTER
OF
CHESTERFIELD CO., VIRGINIA
Researched and written by Dennis Nofsinger
presented June 12, 1961

Introduction:

In the waning years of the colonial period a new religious influence entered Chesterfield County and was to find drawn into its ranks a stalwart and zealous leader, Eleazar Clay. Eleazar Clay⁽¹⁾ was the first local Baptist minister in Chesterfield County, and through his untiring work and generous donations Chesterfield Church, the first Baptist church in Chesterfield, was established. Mr. Clay was the member of a distinguished family and achieved⁽²⁾ prominence in his own right. The importance of the impetus which he gave to the Baptist movement in Chesterfield cannot be overemphasized. It is hoped that this paper will give new information on his life and present for the first time as complete a story as possible, using all known sources of material.

Eleazar Clay, His Honorable Heritage

Eleazar Clay was born on August 4, 1744, the son of Charles and Martha Green Clay. Very little is known about his early life. The Epitaph on his marble⁽³⁾ tombstone states that he "went into the French and Indian War in March, 1758". The enlistment of a fourteen year old boy is no mean accomplishment, and certainly this attests to the strong character that was later to show itself in the trials of religious persecution.

The Clays of Virginia trace their ancestors in the New World to "Captain" John, 'the English Grenadier', who arrived at Jamestown a few years after the planting of British America.

Charles Clay, the first of Henry's ancestors born in the New World⁽⁴⁾, fought with Bacon's frontier⁽⁵⁾ democrats in Virginia's Great Rebellion of 1676. His revolt against Charles the 2nd's royal Governor, like that of his grandson, Baptist John,..... was significant of the family's temperament⁽⁶⁾ and position; the democratic, strong willed Clays of colonial Virginia were prosperous yeomen farmers, of the upper middle class, but not of the ruling gentry⁽⁷⁾.

Charles Clay had a son, Henry, 1672-1760, who lived and is buried in Chesterfield County, and was the great grandfather of Henry Clay the Statesman. Henry Clay the first, married about 1708-09, Mary Mitchell, daughter⁽⁸⁾ of William and Elizabeth Mitchell. They lived on the farm later owned and occupied by Eleazar Clay, and located on the west side of Swift Creek. Henry died at "The Ralles" August 3, 1760. The inscription⁽¹⁰⁾ on an historical marker south of Swift Creek on Bailey's Bridge Road, reads "Henry Clay, the elder born 1672 Chesterfield County, was the great grandfather of the statesman, his tomb 1/4 mile east bears the inscription in memory of Henry Clay who died at dinner with his children and grandchildren at an annual festival given them on August 3, 1760". In a portion of Eleazar Clay's will, he gives to his son Matthew "the remainder of my tract of land on which I live, except four square polls (sic) of land around my grandfather Henry' Clay's grave".⁽¹²⁾

John Clay, Jr., grandson of the first Henry Clay was the father of the Honorable Henry Clay and the Reverend Porter Clay.⁽¹³⁾ When John Clay, in 1765 married fifteen year old Elizabeth⁽¹⁴⁾ Hudson of Hanover, he lived in neighboring Chesterfield, on the Southside of the Richmond and the James River. There he became a Baptist exhorter, a leader of lowly and despised dissenters from the politically and socially elect Church of England.

Eleazar Clay's father⁽¹⁵⁾ Charles was the uncle of John Clay Jr. Charles Clay son of Henry and Mary Mitchell Clay was born January 31, 1716⁽¹⁶⁾ and died in Powhatan County, Virginia, February 25, 1789, He married Martha Green, November 11, 1741. Among their eleven children⁽¹⁷⁾ attention will be called to Eleazar Clay⁽¹⁸⁾ Baptist minister born August 4, 1744, Charles Clay, Episcopal minister, born December 24, 1745, Henry Clay (not one of the Henry's previously named) born March 5, 1745, and died in 1777 in Trenton, New Jersey, while a soldier of the Revolution; Matthew Clay born March 25, 1754, a patriot in the Revolution and a member of Congress; Green Clay, General Green Clay of Kentucky, born August 14, 1757.⁽¹⁹⁾

Eleazar married three times, the first to Jane Apperson,⁽²⁰⁾ then Elizabeth Whitehead, widow of E. Swepton, or Swepson, and late in life, February 13, 1826, Phoebe Newby, who survived him a few years. Eleazar Clay had ten children by his first wife. His known issue⁽²¹⁾ includes Phineas Clay, buried standing erect in a tomb⁽²²⁾ located in Chesterfield County near the junction of US Route 360, and Ottersdale Road; Colonel Samuel Clay, a justice of Chesterfield died January 11, 1831 age 52 years and married March 3, 1802, Martha Burfoot; Matthew Clay married Miss Turpin, Lavinia Clay married Robert Aikin, Jane Clay married October 2, 1797, Edward Trabue, a Revolutionary soldier who fought at Guilford Courthouse and was present at Gates' defeat; Dorcus Clay married Mr. Graves, Cynthia Clay married Daniel Sullivan of Danville, Virginia.⁽²³⁾ Ann Clay who married John Coates Russell son of General William and Tabitha Adams Russell of Culpepper County, Virginia; Martha Swepton Clay, born March 30, 1789⁽²⁴⁾, died 1824, married December 4, 1803, Lawson Burford⁽²⁵⁾.

ELEAZAR CLAY GAINS PROMINENCE IN CHESTERFIELD

Eleazar moved to Chesterfield County in October, 1765. October 1, 1765, Charles Clay and Martha, his wife, deeded to their son⁽²⁶⁾ 425 acres on the north side of Nuttree Run and north side of Swift Creek, "land willed to me by my father Henry Clay."⁽²⁷⁾ Where Eleazar spent his childhood, acquired his education, and established his means of livelihood is unknown.

Many interesting deeds concerning Mr. Clay are found in the county records. The largest single transaction, as to price, occurred October 2, 1781, William Bowman and his mother, Mary Bowman of Manchester Parish deeded twenty seven acres with all appurtenances, and bounding Clay's line for 17,500 British Pounds, indeed a considerable amount.⁽²⁸⁾

The will of Eleazar's father Charles Clay, is at Powhatan Courthouse, dated October 28, 1788, it reads: " I give and bequeath unto my son Eliza (sic) Clay his heirs and assigns forever... every part of my estate which he at this time has in possession."⁽²⁹⁾

The most influential member of the Chesterfield Church was Eleazar Clay, said to have owned property worth \$100,000.00⁽³⁰⁾ by totaling the number of acres of land purchased by and deeded to Mr. Clay, and approximate estimate of his actual holdings is obtained.

From April 1769 to June 1802, Eleazar Clay had received approximately 4,400 acres mostly situated in Chesterfield County and valued at about 30,850 British Pounds according to purchase price. By 1820 he owned about 6,000 acres. His real estate alone would place him far above the \$100,000 mark. In his later years, he gave much of his property to his children.⁽³¹⁾

On the date of their marriage, Eleazar Clay and Phoebe Newby signed a mutual agreement that neither should lay claim to the others property after either had died.⁽³²⁾

The old Clay home site is located near Bailey's Bridge Road, which leads from US 360 from Richmond. Riding west on Route 360 from Richmond, Bailey's Bridge Road is located on the left, a few miles past Courthouse Road.

In a letter contained in the Virginia Baptist Historical Society's Clay folder, dated October 16, 1935, and addressed to Judge Daniel Grinnan, Edwin B. Cox tells of a hand-wrought hinge from the Clay home which burned December 5, 1919. He requests to present it to the Virginia Historical Society.

The writer visited the Eleazar Clay home site May 16, 1961 and talked with Mrs. A. S. Marks, Jr., the present owner and occupant of the property on which half of the home site and the Clay family graveyard remain. According to Mrs. Marks, whose father-in-law was the owner and resident of the Eleazar Clay home at the time that it burned, the Clay home contained sixteen rooms and was divided into north, east and west wings. Moss green wooden shingles covered the roof, and a winding stairway reached to the second story. At the time of the Marks' occupancy the house contained a basement, and a porch ran around the whole structure. When Mr. Marks bought the property, posts for manaculating slaves could be seen on the grounds lying on the crest of a hill which gently slopes through the woods down to Swift Creek.

The crypt of Eleazar Clay reposes in the graveyard near the home site, two of Eleazar's wives Elizabeth and Jane are also buried on the property.

One June 14, 1802, Arthur Akin and Elam Lockett sold to Mr. Clay for 800 British Pounds, twenty-five acres of land lying on both sides of Swift Creek on which a grist mill, Lockett's Swift Creek Mill, was located. A large millstone from one of the Clay Mill's now rest in the Marks yard.⁽³³⁾

Eleazar Clay's will was probated May 5, 1838, in Chesterfield. In the will, actually dated May 25, 1835, he bequeaths, "to my wife Pheobe, my man Sam Bowman, ... my executors are to build her a small dwelling house or furnish her with \$25.00, as she may choose." To his son Phineas he leaves "that part of the tract of land on which I live, lying above a line, beginning at a corner pine on Clark's line, then due North crossing Swift Creek to my line on Nuttree run, except the land I had of Robert Akin and Pleasant Akin, my mill on Swift Creek with the appurtenances, and the negroes I possessed him with, to Matthew "the remainder of my tract of land on which I live, lying below Phineas Clay's line already described.... my mill on Nuttree Run, and my mill on Parish's branch, and following negroes." He left land to his grandsons, Robert Akin, Eleazar Akin, William, Edward Tarlton Akin, and Monson Burfoot. Phineas was executor of the estate, which was divided nine ways to the other heirs.⁽³⁴⁾

An inventory taken July 11, 1836, lists the names of twenty-seven slaves. Many household items were auctioned at sale, an account of which was made October 12, 1836.⁽³⁵⁾ Among some of the items were a set of surveyor's instruments, the family Bible, Crudens Concordance, Benedicts History of the Baptist, Robertson's History, Buckan's Medical Book, six odd lots of books; among the more interesting effects is the mention of a dozen silver teaspoons. From a statement by Robert H. Winfree, mentioning Clay Cheatham⁽³⁶⁾ as a living descendant of Eleazar Clay, Clay Cheatham is named as the son of Mrs. Frank Branch Cheatham, deceased, of Chesterfield, who had the Clay silver spoons said to have been used by preachers imprisoned in Chesterfield jail. Other living descendants listed are Charles Clay, Beach P.O., Chesterfield County, Mrs. George Harris, Midlothian; Mrs. Jacobs and her daughter Mrs. Eanes.⁽³⁷⁾

Mr. Clay held a respected position in the county. His character was staunch, and certainly his wealth and family position proved useful tools for religious strife.

Eleazar Joins the Baptists

Joseph Anthony and William Webber were arrested by Chesterfield County officials in 1771 for itinerate preaching. In 1810 Robert Baylor Semple wrote: "No county ever extended⁽³⁸⁾ its opposition to and persecution of the Baptists farther than this, yet in few counties have Baptist principles prevailed more extensively than in Chesterfield." "The chief persecutor, however, was Colonel Archibald Cary,⁽³⁹⁾ a prominent churchman, who was determined to stamp out Baptist heresy in his county. From the old Debtor's Jail, a building of white oak hewn logs, crammed with mortar and securely weather boarded, Webber and Anthony preached to the people who flocked to hear them. When the magistrate forbade the preachers the liberty of the jail yard, they preached from the window of their cell to the crowds who gathered outside." "One of the subjects of this good work, and intimate friend of Elder Clay⁽⁴⁰⁾, became deeply concerned on his behalf, and having called to see him, was made the instrument of again awakening his mind to consider the value of eternal things. He soon saw and felt his need of Christ; and found peace in believing."⁽⁴¹⁾

It seems Mr. Clay had heard the Baptist preachers some years before up in Halifax. However, he had not at that time identified himself with that religion.⁽⁴²⁾

Clay was baptized in August of 1771, "His sincerity and firmness were indicated by the fact, that while he was at that time in prosperous worldly circumstances and possessing much influence in society⁽⁴³⁾ and while the Baptists were held in almost universal contempt, he nevertheless determined to identify himself with them."⁽⁴⁴⁾

He immediately entered the ministry, preaching three times on the day of his conversion. It is most likely that Elder Clay was very active in nourishing the⁽⁴⁵⁾ Baptist faith from the time of his conversion until the establishment of Chesterfield Church in 1773.

He often makes mention of having sent his wagons,⁽⁴⁶⁾ containing beds and supplies for the Baptist ministers in prison in Chesterfield jail, and of the success attending the preaching of the gospel to crowds who visited the prisoners. At one time a revival broke out at the jail, and several professed religion.

Elder Clay sent to Buckingham County for one Elder Chastain to come down and baptize the converts. This, I think, was done in the night. One of the prisoners being sick on one occasion, and needing a stimulant, Elder Clay brought a "jug" of wine and carried it to the jail. The jailer told him it was against orders for the prisoners to have wine. Elder Clay writes: "I greased his paw and got it in."⁽⁴⁷⁾

"Nine of the converts (won by John Weatherford's preaching from Chesterfield jail) asked for Baptism, but there was no one in the County free to administer the ordinance. On July 21, 1773, Rev. John Williams, pastor of the Baptist Church in Cumberland (later Powhatan), received the following letter from Eleazer (sic):

Dear Brother William:

I have long looked for you to come down to see us and the prisoners. We would be glad to see you soon, for we wish you to baptize those that are now waiting for an opportunity. The Lord is carrying on a glorious work in our community, especially below the Court House. Let Brother Watkins know that the Lord has not passed by Mrs. F., but as some believe has placed her name in the Lamb's Book of Life. The preaching at the prison is attended in vain, for we hope that several are savingly converted, while others are under great distress and are made to cry out, "What shall we do to be saved?" Time fails at this opportunity to tell all. The brethren daily look for you to come, they talk much about you. Remember me to all the Christian brethren.

The grace of our lord Jesus Christ be with you all

Amen"

On August 22, 1773, the following members formerly belonging⁽⁴⁸⁾ to the Church of Christ in Cumberland having resolved a Di-----from-----Church for that purpose, were Constituted into a Church, to be known by the name of Chesterfield Church-- present Rev. John Williams and William Webber, the Constituents were Eleazer (sic) Clay and Jane his wife, John Clay and Elizabeth his wife..... in all 20."⁽⁴⁹⁾

The Church was organized in Eleazar Clay's barn, 1/2 mile South of the meeting house which would be erected and first occupied on August 14, 1775. Not only did Mr. Clay furnish a place for the inception of the Church,⁽⁵⁰⁾ but through his effort and financial support this meeting house was built.⁽⁵¹⁾

"At a church meeting held Saturday, September 11, 1773, at Clay's arber (sic), Mr. Eleazer (sic) chosen a Delegate and in case of failure Br. John Clay to represent church in association meeting"⁽⁵²⁾

On January 1, 1775, the church unanimously agreed to ordain Eleazer (sic) Clay as a Teacher and Elder (sic). The following Monday Morning they "took in the Experience of El. Clay's Negroes and Baptized Tary and Nell."⁽⁵³⁾

Eleazar Clay was ordained as pastor of the Chesterfield Church at a great meeting held May 27 and 28, 1775, and also sent as a delegate to the Dover Association.⁽⁵⁴⁾

The church minutes for April 8 and 9, 1775, mention the dismissal of Elizabeth Clay by letter. On June 11, 1775 John Clay was dismissed by letter. As is well known⁽⁵⁵⁾ John Clay moved his family to Hanover County where Henry Clay was born in 1777.⁽⁵⁶⁾

Of special interest are the minutes of the meeting held June 11, 1775. Numerous baptisms performed by Eleazar Clay are listed and the Rev. Clay is named a delegate to the Association of Baptist Churches meeting at DuPuy's meeting house, Powhatan County.⁽⁵⁷⁾ The former division of the Virginia Association into two districts, one above the James River and the other below, was dissolved at this August meeting in 1775. "The object of this union seems to have been that they might more effectually cooperate for abolition of hierarchy in Virginia."⁽⁵⁸⁾

In 1791, Eleazar gave an acre of land to a Baptist Church on the road leading to Milton Parish's Branch to Manchester at George Hancock's corner.⁽⁵⁹⁾

The Rev. Clay preached at Second Branch, an arm of Chesterfield, regularly until he was enfeebled by age. In 1802, he planted Salem Church in Chesterfield County.⁽⁶⁰⁾

The following account is invaluable for its relating of actual incidents which occurred in Mr. Clay's time.⁽⁶¹⁾ "Some years ago, the executor of the will of Matthew Clay, son of Rev. Eleazar Clay.....placed in my hands part of a diary kept by elder Clay, containing an account of many remarkable events of his day. This diary was burned with my library whilst I was Professor at Alleghany College, just before the war. I had copied it, however, into a blank book, which I loaned to Rev. George B. Taylor for his fathers benefit."⁽⁶²⁾

I still mention, from memory, a few incidents recorded by him..... On one occasion he went to see a neighbor, who had become concerned about his soul's salvation and wished to be instructed. He rode to the house, and going in, asked some of the 'ladies' if Mr.....was at home. They told him he was plowing in the field. They wished to know the object of his visit. Elder Clay replied that he had called to converse with him on the subject of religion. They became enraged, abused him violently, charging him with having come to 'put the devil in Bill' and threatened to scald him with boiling water if he did not leave the house immediately. Elder Clay left, but accomplished the object of his visit by and interview in the field. Bill professed religion.

Elder Clay related that a minister, whose name I cannot now recall, was whipped by of a magistrate, at Osborne's, a place near Bermuda Hundreds, for preaching the gospel. His coat was taken off, and the stripes could be counted by the blood drawn through his shirt..... Preaching in Chesterfield at a private house on one occasion, a man, whose name he mentioned, rode into the yard, and asked for Mr. Clay. Being told that Elder Clay was preaching in the house, he remarked: "I have come to cow-hide him". Someone bore the message to Elder Clay who replied: "I am the son of Charles Clay, and fear no man. If I have to go out after him, I will give him one of the worst whippings he ever had in his life" The 'gentleman' did not accomplish his object.

Elder Clay attended a meeting below Richmond, at one time, and having some persons to baptize, inquired for a suitable place. Being directed to a stream, and taking the candidate into the water, he had not proceeded far before they both began to sink into quicksand. They had to swim to save themselves from drowning. On getting out, the man or men who had directed them could not be found. I think it was at the same place that a large snake was turned loose in the meetinghouse during preaching.

He mentions the fact that a man was killed on one occasion by lightening, whilst on his way, with a warrant in his pocket, to arrest a Baptist minister for preaching. The names of the parties were mentioned in the diary.⁽⁶³⁾

Perhaps it might seem strange that Eleazar was never imprisoned as some other contemporary Baptists. However, "Eleazar Clay was one of the few men of some wealth and influence who joined the Baptists when they were still a despised sect. (64) "Colonel Cary, the chief magistrate of the county, was asked, on one occasion, why he permitted Elder Clay to preach unmolested, whilst he had other arrested, lodged in jail and punished. Col. Cary replied: " Mr. Clay had a livelihood, but those others were taken under a vagrant law."⁽⁶⁵⁾

From the time of the formation of Middle District Association in 1783, until the early 1800's, Eleazar Clay generally acted as Moderator.⁽⁶⁶⁾

At the annual convention at DuPuy's, August 1788, the General Committee passed a resolution, "Resolved that a committee of (ten members) five persons on each side of the James River be appointed to forward business respecting a seminary of learning. This committee was composed of the ablest and most influential Baptists of the Commonwealth." Eleazar Clay was among those from the Southside of the river. However, this committee never accomplished its assignment.⁽⁶⁷⁾

The General Committee appointed Clay, along with others, in March 1788, and in 1790, to petition the General Assembly on the sale of vacant Glebes.⁽⁶⁸⁾

In 1793, the Committee recommended Hymns and Spiritual Songs by E. Clay, and published in Richmond.⁽⁶⁹⁾

"For a period of thirty years there were within the Middle District Association two distinct parties. The majority, led by the veteran minister, Rev. Eleazer (sic) Clay, were opposed to cooperation with the State and national Missionary, Bible, Temperance and Education Societies. The attitude of the majority was quaintly expressed by Mr. Clay when, in the 1820 meeting of the Association, Dr. Robert Baylor Semple urged the Middle District Association to unite with the General Meeting of Correspondence. Declining to put to question to a vote, moderator Clay replied for the Association by saying " I do not believe that a General would put up with a soldiers wages". By this statement he indicated his fear the general organization might attempt to dictate to the churches and his belief that membership in religious bodies should not be based upon a stated financial contribution."

In Semple's History,⁽⁷⁰⁾ mention is made of a prominent minister, who, being appointed to attend a meeting in Richmond for the purpose, I think, of forming a General Association, refused to go, and that a motion was made in the Middle District Association, sitting at Tarwallet Church, in Cumberland County, Virginia, to censure said minister for not complying with the wishes of the body. In Elder Clay's diary he mentions this circumstance. He himself was the minister, and was at that time Moderator of the Association. When the motion was made, Elder Clay vacated the chair, saying that he could not put a cote censuring himself. He resigned as Moderator. The motion was put by a temporary chairman, but was afterwards reconsidered and withdrawn, and Elder Clay resumed his seat as Moderator. Elder Clay was opposed to forming a General Association at that time.⁽⁷¹⁾

An original letter in the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress, dated December 9, 1787, written in Rev. Clay's own hand and addressed to Robert Carter of Westmorland, reads:

Dear Dr.,

Being told my the Brethren in Richmond that you were sometime ago asking after the form of Marriage Catechism(sic) the committe (sic) had printed, having a few left have sent you half a duzen (sic) by Dr. Asa Hunt, from New England, who has spent some time among us in preaching. I think it would be for God a glory for him to go by land home and preach in the churches if means could be had. I not knowing who to recommend him to as properly as your, hearing Mr. Lunsford is gone to Kentuckey (sic) rest.

Dr. Br. Yours in the Gospel

Eleazar Clay⁽⁷³⁾

"During his visit to the South, Mr. Backus became acquainted with Rev. Eleazar Clay, who resided in Chesterfield County, Virginia, and described him as a 'wealthy and most agreeable Christian'..... the acquaintance then formed was kept up by frequent correspondence." The following letter dated March 29, 1799 was received by Issac Backus from Rev. Clay,

Aged and Reverend Brother:

.....In the church which I serve we have a great calm. Are not such times more to be dreaded, then when the billows are near bursting over our heads? Or has not God set one over against the other, that we may learn to fear him, who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will? In some of the churches of our district God has grandted precious revivels: To wit, in the churches of brother Saunders and brother Flowers. Other ingatherings are small, iniquity abounds, deism prevails, and the spirit of the world comes in like a flood on every side... God has at last touched the hearts of our rulers, and they have listened to our memorial, doing away all we asked for.... So that all the clouds which threatened religious liberty with us are blown over. The Lord grant, that neighter we nor our posterity may forget his favors, bestowed so freely on us..... From your history, you were not then free from the hand of power; may God grant your request, after all your labors and toils, and an abundant entrance into his heavenly kingdon, is the prayer of your unworthy friend and Christ's servent in the Gospel,

Eleazar Clay"⁽⁷⁵⁾

"Elder Clay did not travel extensively beyond the limits of his own county. There, however, he labored faithfully. For several years before his death he became so infirm as to be unable to attend his regular appointments, or even to leave the house. During this long confinement he evinced strong trust in God and attachment to the doctrines of the gospel. Whenever he was visited by friends, and especially by young ministers, he never failed to impart some wholesome counsel, the results of his own long experience. To a young ministering brother, who was introduced to him, before he was seated, and while holding his hand, he said, in substance, " I am glad to become acquainted with you, and especially to know you have entered the vineyard of the Lord, and design to labor for him in the great work of the ministry. Let me now advise you never to use ardent spirits. I have seen its baneful effects in the church, and among preachers of the gospel, and would warn every young minister against it."

“Although at the age of sixty he could with difficulty see to read even with his spectacles, yet for several years before his death his eyesight was entirely restored. He became more and more attached to the word of God, and besides reading in the Old Testament, it made it a regular practice to read the New Testament through once every month. As he advanced to the termination of his course he manifested an increasing spirituality of mind. In prayer he enjoyed much. The writer will never forget an interview which he was privileged to have with this aged saint, a few months previous to his death. There was a remarkable vividness about his conceptions; and his memory in reference to the history of the church in the days of his youth seemed to be unimpaired. He entered with spirit in conversation on the value of the great atoning sacrifices, and the necessity of Divine influence to bring the heart to rejoice in it. In alluding to his experience in spiritual matters he manifested deep feeling. He said, with tears rolling down his furrowed cheeks, that he had never known so much of the sweetness and richness of the Word of God as since his confinement to the house; that he had enjoyed secret prayer more than ever. During his conversation he remarked: 'If Christians did but know how to prize communion with God, they would more habitually enjoy it; and that he felt more real happiness during one hour spend in meditation and prayer, than the world knew in a lifetime spent in the pleasures of sin.'

The author of this sketch again called to see him, hoping to enjoy the delightful opportunity of listening to his instructive conversation, but he had been the previous evening attacked by severe illness and was unable to speak. Within a few days he breathed his last. He died May 2, 1836, in his 92nd year.

Elder Clay possessed naturally a strong mind. In his manners he was inclined to bluntness, but in all his intercourse with men, it is said he made it his great business to recommend the subject of religion".⁽⁷⁶⁾

A few hundred feet east of the home site in a grove of ancient cedars and elms lies the tomb of Eleazer Clay, along with other family graves. Dug into a small hill and hewn of rough rock, the crypt of Eleazar dominated the periwinkle covered graveyard. A granite Slab, nine feet long, five feet wide and one foot thick, covers the raised rock sides of the crypt. County tradition says that it took eight oxen to haul this slab onto the grave. The grave was opened by vandals who later sealed the opening with concrete at the base of the headstone, in which is scratched "opened in 1925, closed in 1926, found nothing but bones." A Marble headstone about six feet tall bears his epitaph:



In Memory of
 Rev'd E. Clay
 Born Augt. 4, 1744
 Went into the French and Indian War in March, 1758
 Made a profession of the Christian Religion in Augt. 1771
 became a member of the Baptist Church and Commenced
 Preaching the everlasting Gospel of Jesus Christ the same year.
 And continued as is believed an Humble follower of Jesus to his
 Death which was 2nd May, 1836. Aged 91 years 8 mo and 28 Days"

Footnotes

1. This is the spelling according to Mr. Clay's signature
2. Religious Herald September 5, 1872, in the Va. Baptist Historical Society.
3. Smith, the Honorable Zachary F. and Mary Rogers Clay, *The Clay Family*. John P Morton & Co., Louisville, 1899.
4. *ibid* p. 64
5. Henry Clay the statesman
6. Great-grandson, Smith and Clay op. cit. p. 79
7. Bernard Mayo, Henry Clay (Houghton Mifflin Co. Boston. The Riverside Press, Cambridge, 1937 p.2
8. Smith and Clay, op. cit... pp 66, 69
9. *ibid*, p. 69
10. *ibid*
11. *ibid*
12. Chesterfield courthouse Will book 13 p.396
13. Smith and Clay op. cit, p.72
14. *ibid* p. 90
15. Mayo, op. cit., p. 2
16. Smith and Clay op. cit. p. 72
17. *ibid* p.76
18. *ibid*
19. *ibid* p.86

20. *ibid* p. 20
21. *ibid* p. 83
22. source lost
23. letter from Mrs. O. J. Mallory, 713 Oak St. Farmville, Va.
24. *ibid*
25. Smith and Clay, *op cit*, pp. 83,84
26. Religious Herald, March 4, 1858, in the VA. Baptist Historical Society.
27. Smith and Clay, *op. cit.* p. 77
28. Chesterfield Courthouse, Grantee Book K10, p. 48
29. Powhatan Courthouse, Will book 1, p. 173
30. Blanche Sydnor White, The History of the Middle District Association, 1784-1958 p. 10
31. Chesterfield Courthouse, Grantor Bks. 21, pp. 646, 711; 22, pp. 661, 663; 23 pp 168, 169
32. Chesterfield Courthouse Grantee Bk. 26, p 359. 33. Chesterfield Courthouse, grantee bk 16 p. 23
34. Chesterfield Courthouse Will bk. 13, p 396
35. Chesterfield Courthouse Will bk 13 p, 502
36. *Ibid*, p. 553
37. Clay Folder in Virginia Baptist Historical Society.
38. Chesterfield Co. Order Book 4 p. 489
39. White *op. cit.*, p. 10
40. *Ibid* p. 7
41. J.B. Taylor Virginia Baptist Ministers, Phila., Lippincott and Company, 1859 p. 208
42. Robert B. Semple, A History of the Rise and Progress of the Baptists in Virginia, Richmond, Va., Pitt and Dickinson, 1894 p. 270
43. Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 208
44. *Ibid*
45. Religious Herald, the Pioneer Ministers of Virginia, August 29, 1872
46. Source lost
47. Religious Herald *op cit*, August 29, 1872
48. White, *op cit* p. 9
49. The Church Book for Chesterfield Church, *op. cit.* p 1
50. Chesterfield (Rehoboth) Baptist Church, Chesterfield Co. Minutes 1834-1856, 1891-1892, in Virginia State Archives, pp 456, 457 (Photostat)
51. Religious Herald, *op cit.* September 5, 1872
52. Chesterfield Church Book, (1773-1788), *op. cit.* p. 2
53. *Ibid*, p. 4
54. *Ibid*
55. *Ibid*
56. *Ibid* p. 5
57. *Ibid*
58. Lw. Moore, a History of the Middle-District Association (Richmond, Va. Virginia Baptist Historical Society, 1886) p. 7
59. Chesterfield Courthouse deed bk 11, p. 752
60. Moore, *op.cit.*p.51
61. Semole, *op.cit.* p. 254
62. According to Little's Imprisoned Preachers and Religious Liberty in Virginia, p 215 (Lynchburg, Va., J.F.Bell Co.,Inc. 1938) The Diary was later lost in a Richmond bank building. (copy)
63. Religious Herald, *op. cit.* (August 29, 1872)
- 64., 65. source lost
66. Semple, *op cit.* p.262
67. Robert B. Howell, D.D., Early Baptists of Virginia (Phila., The Bible and Publications Society, 1876) p. 122, 123
68. Garnett Ryland, The Baptists of Virginia 1699-1926, (Richmond, Va. Whittet and Shepperson, 1955) p. 130, 131
69. *Ibid*, p. 159
70. White *op. cit.*p. 19
71. Religious Herald, *op. cit.*, (August 29, 1872)
72. Robert Carter of Nomini Hall, was a wealthy planter of the Virginia Aristocracy, he became a Baptist and remained so for fifteen years. See Gewwhr, *op. cit.* p 20 and pp258-259
73. Original in "Carter Papers", Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress
74. Issac Backus was a well known New England Baptist minister.
75. Alvah Hovey, D.D., The Life and Times of Issac Backus (Boston, Gould and Lincoln, 1858) pp, 293-294
76. Taylor, *op. cit.*, p.208