It was a cold day in February, 1739, when Duncan Campbell stood up to speak before the Presbytery of Inverary, Scotland. Three years before, in 1736, Duncan, Alexander MacAllister, and Dugald and Daniel McNeill had sailed off to explore the wilds of North Carolina. They had returned with even wilder tales of a beautiful land, fertile and free, “where two crops a year can be made, and you can eat apples off the trees with your hands behind you.” The tales had excited the imaginations of the poor people of Argyle, the Kintyre Peninsula, and the Isles, Jura and Islay, and before long the Argyle Colony had been incorporated, and plans were made to sail in the summer of 1739.

But they did not wish to sail without a minister. At one of their meetings they voted to extend a call to the Rev Mr Robert Fullarton, pastor of the parish Kirk at Glassary, “being well persuaded”, as Duncan put it, “that he is well qualified for being a minister to a young colony... in a barbarous and distant part of the world.” (He was speaking, of course, of North Carolina).

But Presbytery hemmed and hawed, and dillied and dallied, and argued about proper procedure. And a delegation from the parish Kirk at Glassary appeared to protest this pulpit committee trying to steal their preacher. And Mr Fullarton did not appear too anxious to go - though the parish Kirk at Glassary was no flowery bed of ease in those days either. Finally, we are told in the minutes of Presbytery “They put off consideration of the affair.”

The emigrants sailed without a minister.

“They put off consideration of the affair!” One wonders how often that phrase is used in Presbytery minutes to disguise some weak attempt to duck the will of God, and seek the easy way out.

Or our modern American phrase: “They appointed a committee.”

But the Argyle Colony, being Scots, were stubborn, and in 1741 Duncan Campbell was back again, speaking “for himself and the Argyle Colony settled at Cape Fear (sic) in North Carolina, showing their earnest desire for having a minister soon settled among them, where there is a considerable number from our bounds already settled, and a prospect of a great number of the poorer sort yet to follow, and who are in deplorable circumstances for want of Gospel ordinances, there being but two or three ministers in the whole province, and these of a poor character, who besides have not the (Gaelic) language spoke and only understood by the major part of the colony.”

Duncan Campbell was wasting his time. Presbytery did nothing, and the Argyle Colony never bothered the Presbytery of Inverary again. Instead they looked northward, to the Synod of Philadelphia.

That these early settlers of the Argyle Colony were Presbyterians
is a foregone conclusion. They were the first trickle of a steady stream of Highland Scots that would reach flood proportions by the time of the American Revolution, and continue to flow unabated for well over a century. From Argyle at first, later, beginning about 1770, from the Isle of Skye.

The well-to-do came first, and took up the best land. The "poorer sort" followed as their servants and their tenants, working for years to pay the cost of the trip over.

They brought their customs and their language with them. Even the slaves spoke Gaelic. The story is told of the Scotswoman who stood on the deck as her boat pulled into Wilmington, and saw on the shore her first Negroes. "Who are they?" she asked the captain, who stood beside her. "Oh, everyone turns black like that after a few months in this climate," he answered. As she disembarked, she was delighted to overhear two men conversing in Gaelic. Assuming they were fellow Scots, she drew nearer, only to discover that their skin was black. She turned back toward the ship, but was stopped by a large, friendly colored lady, who embraced her and greeted her with "Ceud Mile Fiałte!" (One hundred thousand welcomes). She rushed up the gangplank and demanded that the captain take her back to Scotland. "Immediately, if not sooner!"

Why did they come? Simply because they were poor, and wished to better their worldly condition. The land in the Highlands was not too fertile to begin with, and the population, due to a variety of factors, had increased so rapidly, it was simply not able to support them. North Carolina held out the lure of land. Land, in the Highlands, was a status symbol, and here the most humble could acquire huge tracts for next to nothing.

Then there was Culloden, that bloody battle that destroyed the Highland way of life forever. The Clan system in the Highlands of Scotland was a family affair. "Clan" means "children." The Highland Chief controlled the land, and felt a father's responsibility for his tenants. The tenants, in turn, tilled the land, and fought for their Chief. Each Clan was both a family and an army.

But Culloden destroyed all that. Clan welfare was forbidden. The Highland Chief moved to Edinburgh, or even to London, and became a "cultured gentleman." He looked upon himself as a landlord, and an absentee landlord at that, rather than a father. New methods of agriculture were introduced, and the land was cleared of excess people.

Why did they come? In 1792 a band of emigrants were asked that question as they were about to leave for North Carolina. They listed three reasons (1) poverty; (2) oppression of landlords; and (3) encouraging letters from friends already settled in America.

They brought no ministers with them. Nor did they bring their Gaelic Bibles. There was no Gaelic Bible available at that time. But they did bring their Gaelic Shorter Catechisms, and their Gaelic Psalters, and they fed the flame of their devotion at the family fireside. And they wrote letters to Philadelphia requesting a preacher.

Finally he came. In 1775 the Synod of Philadelphia sent Hugh McAden, a young minister, on a reconnaissance to scout the countryside and report back. What he found, he recorded in his JOURNAL, which is preserved in
part for us in Foote’s SKETCHES OF NORTH CAROLINA. In South Carolina he heard of an old gentleman who had complained to the Governor of South Carolina on one of the Governor’s infrequent visits to the backwoods, that he had “never been to a fair, seen a minister, or heard a sermon, in all his life.” “Tch, tch,” said the Governor, and promised to send one, so he might see one, and hear one before he died. The minister came, preached, took up an offering, and hurried back to civilization. And that was all the preaching ever heard in upper South Carolina before McAden’s visit.

Things were just about as bad in the Old North State, along the Cape Fear. One of McAden’s stops was the home of Alex McKay near the present Longstreet Church. News of his coming spread like wildfire. From far and near they came, and listened with rapt and undivided attention to a sermon of which most understood not a word - for McAden had no Gaelic, and his congregation knew no English. Yet they were so happy that a minister had finally put in an appearance they stayed around to celebrate. They remained around the house, drinking, brawling, bagpiping, and singing all through the night, keeping him awake. “They were very much obliged to me for coming,” he noted in his JOURNAL, “and highly pleased with my discourse, though alas I am afraid it was all feigned and hypocritical.”

On another occasion he called the Highlanders “the poorest singers I ever heard, in all my life,” though it is not certain whether he was referring to their congregational singing or their nocturnal singing.

One wonders just what, and how much, he told the Rev James Campbell when he returned to the cultured confines of Pennsylvania. Whatever it was, he excited Campbell’s imagination, and in 1756 or 1757 he came down, settled at the Bluff, and began to minister to the Highlanders in their native tongue. He organized Bluff, Longstreet, and Barbecue Churches, and served as their sole pastor until 1770, when John MacLeod came over from Skye. Representatives of the three communities contracted with him to be their pastor October 18, 1758, for “the sum of a hundred pounds in good and lawful money of North Carolina.”

James Campbell earned his one hundred pounds a year, serving a vast territory that covered most of the present counties of Cumberland, Harnett, Hoke, Moore and Lee, with occasional side visits to Raft Swamp in Robeson, Purity in South Carolina, and, “other destitute settlements.”

What kind of preacher was James Campbell? According to his grandson, the Rev D. A. Campbell, he was a practical preacher, “expounding and explaining chapters or portions of the Scriptures...the Shorter Catechism he prized, and made it the duty of all to teach to their children.”

He conducted two services at each appointment: one in Gaelic, and, for the under-privileged, the other in English. This practice was continued by his successors for well over a century. The last Gaelic sermon preached at Barbecue was by the Rev John Campbell Sinclair, in 1865. But even later, at Big Rockfish Church, the Rev James Stedman Black proclaimed the Glorious Gospel in the warm accents of the mother tongue.

And here is as good a place as any to say a few kind words about Gaelic. Gaelic (which the Scots pronounce gal-lick, not gay-lick) is a descendant of the ancient Celtic spoken by the Galatians of the New Testament, and the
Gauls of France. Indeed, those who speak Gaelic believe it was the language of Adam and Eve in the Garden, and of all men prior to the confusion of tongues at Babel. There is a little poem:

When Adam first his Eve did meet,
Bright and fresh as morning dew,
The first words that he spoke to her
Were “Cia mar a tha thu an diugh?”

(“Cia mar a tha thu an diugh?” pronounced keemer uh ha-oo un jew, means “How are you today?”) It is a beautiful language, and we are poorer for having lost it.

About 1770 the emigration fever reached the Isle of Skye, and thousands of MacDonalds, MacLeods, MacQueens and others set sail for a new home in a new land. So intense was the passion to emigrate there was even a popular dance tune, “Dol a dh’iarraidh am fortan do North Carolina” (Going to seek a fortune in North Carolina). Flora MacDonald, the Scottish heroine, came in 1774 with her husband, Allan, and stayed at Cameron Hill with her half-sister, Annabella, while her husband went west to look for land. While there she attended Barbecue Church.

Before that, in 1770, the Rev John MacLeod, the great-great-grandson of Sir Roderick MacLeod, better known as Rory Mor (Big Rory), thirteenth Chief of the Clan, arrived with a large group of emigrants from Skye and relieved Campbell of some of the burden of the three churches. John was a polished orator, given to fancy flights of poetical speech, which didn’t sit too well with the no-nonsense Scots of Barbecue. What was even worse to his congregation, their minds honed razor-sharp on the SHORTER CATECHISM, he didn’t stick to his Bible. One Sunday morning, someone actually interrupted his sermon to argue with him. Soon the whole church was in an uproar. Exasperated, he snapped, “I would rather preach to the most fashionable and polished congregation in Edinburgh than to the little critical carls of Barbecue!” “Carli” is a Scottish word meaning “Boor.”

Came the Revolution, and the two pastors took opposite sides. Campbell espoused the American cause, MacLeod that of the Crown. The people were split also. Generally the older settlers were Revolutionaries, the more recent ones Loyalists. Most of the Barbecue congregation favored Independence - but not all. There was the Sunday morning that Campbell prayed for the success of the American arms. After the service he was approached by an old Tory Scot, McAlpin Munn, who said, or words to this effect, “Meenister, if ever ye pray again as ye did the day, the bullet is molded and the powder is in my horn tae insert it in your head! By the way, I enjoyed your sermon this morning. They get better every Sunday.” The minister knew his people well enough to recognize this as a sincere warning, given in love by an honest man who saw clearly ahead a duty he wished desperately to avoid. Campbell was an honest man too, and would not allow another to dictate the content of his prayers. Better for him to step aside and let his younger associate carry on.

James Campbell never preached again at Barbecue. Indeed, he quit preaching altogether—until that day he happened to overhear a woman cursing. This was not so common then, and he was shocked. When he rebuked her
she answered, "Is it any wonder the devil makes the mouth of the woman to swear when he can stop the mouth of the preacher?" Her words pierced his heart, and he resumed the ministry. But this time in Guilford, a safe distance from McAlpin Munn, and his bullet, and his powder horn.

Incidentally, McAlpin Munn’s old bullet mold and powder horn are still in existence. But then, so are preacher Campbell’s old churches.

Meanwhile, the Scots on the Cape Fear were making history. The Tories among them raised a regiment and started out for Wilmington. They never made it! Defeated at Moore’s Creek, their leaders were taken prisoners, and the private soldiers were released to return home and live peacefully.

John MacLeod was arrested "on suspicion of his having acted inimical to the rights of America," but they could not prove it, and had to release him. Apparently he returned to his pulpits to preach the Kingdom of God, and also the Kingdom of George 111. When last we hear from John he is in New York in January of 1778, reporting to the British authorities there that he has two hundred and seventy loyal Highlanders in North Carolina eagerly awaiting a summons to fight for the King. According to tradition he later sailed for Scotland, but his ship was never heard from again, and was presumed lost at sea. Foote describes him as "a man of eminent piety, great worth, and popular eloquence."

Two Communion Goblets are still preserved by the Old Bluff Church, with the inscription, "For the Presbyterian Congregations in Cumberland County, under the care of the Rev’d John MacLeod. April 21, 1775."

In 1780, feeling his life was fast drawing to a close, James Campbell returned home to die, accompanied by the elders of the churches in Guilford he had served so well. Meanwhile, his eldest son, James, Jr., had returned to the Bluff to recover from wounds received in the War. Not finding his father, he started out to Guilford. Just beyond the Little River he came upon a little company of men kneeling in prayer by a log. As he drew near he recognized the voice of his father. He and his elders were about to part, he to continue on the Bluff, they to return to Guilford. But first they would have one last prayer with their beloved minister. One is reminded of Paul’s farewell to the Ephesian Elders: "And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down and prayed with them all. And they all wept sore...sorrowing most of all for the words that he spake, that they should see his face no more" (Acts 20:36-38).

James Campbell died that same year, and was buried near his home, beside his wife.

When James Campbell first came to the Barbecue community he preached in the homes of the people, and later, perhaps, in some temporary, makeshift shelter. It was not until 1765 or 1766 that a permanent place of worship was erected. This was a plain, unpretentious log building, but twenty seven feet square, and unencumbered with flying buttresses, grinning gargoyles, and lofty steeple. Could you see it today you would say, "But it just doesn’t look like a church."

The building had no chimney, for the worshippers inside did not believe in being comfortable in church. There was no piano or organ there, for they did not believe in using instrumental music in the worship of God. Nor
were there hymnbooks. They didn’t believe in hymns, either. Their hymnbook was the Bible, and they sang the Psalms of David, which had long since been rendered in verse form and set to music. There was no carpet down the center aisle, if there was a center aisle, and no upholstered pulpit furniture. But the love of God was there, and this was enough for them.

At the door of their church one morning they found the body of a stranger, frozen to death. He had tried to gain access during the night, but the door was locked. He was the first person to be buried in the Barbecue Cemetery, and ever since the church of Barbecue Church has been left unlocked.

In the spring of 1965 our Barbecue Young People cleared off the old site and found one of the sills still there, with four old handmade nails in it, and the rotting remains of another. They were parallel to each other, twenty seven feet apart, and each twenty seven feet long. The sill and nails have been removed to our present building for inclusion in our Heritage Room, and the old church site has been marked with a cairn.

Cairn is a Gaelic word that has come to mean “a heap or pile of rocks used as a memorial.” The Highland Scots were too poor, most of them, to afford expensive memorials, so they borrowed an idea from the Old Testament and erected cairns instead. They can be seen throughout the Highlands, as memorials to the dead, and making sites of historical importance. In pre-Reformation times it was the custom, when passing the burial place of a loved one, to place a rock on his grave and say a prayer for the repose of his soul. The saying, “Cuiridh mi clach ’nad Charn” (I will add a stone to your cairn) still speaks of friendly intent, and promises that one’s memory will be kept alive.

It is said of the early settlers that often as a group of them were leaving for America, they would pause at the top of the hill and turn for one last look at the glen that had been their home, and the home of their fathers from time beyond memory. Then each would take a rock, and together they would erect a cairn as a silent reminder to all who would pass that way in later time that once they had lived there, but lived there no more.