

**022 BARROW, DAVID – [REV. DAVID BARROW]**

**Publisher**

**Norfolk**

Baptist minister who published a single religious pamphlet in Norfolk in 1798.

While Barrow's contribution to the Virginia printing trade is slight, it represents a key event in the development of American anti-slavery literature. Barrow had preached among the Baptist congregations of Southside Virginia since 1774; however, as the region's economy became ever more dependent on enslaved labor in the post-Revolutionary era, he began preaching against the spread of slavery among those congregations, seeing the institution as the end result of a sinful love of money. In 1784, he emancipated those few slaves that he owned and encouraged other Baptists to do the same. The effect of his exhortations was to split the Southside faithful into factions, one supporting his antislavery views, and one opposing them. As tensions grew, Barrow eventually determined that he could no longer live proximate to slavery or to slaveholders, including those in his own Mill Swamp Church in Isle of Wight County. So in 1795, he set out for western Virginia and the new state of Kentucky in search of a setting where his large family could prosper without resort to slave-based farming. Finding such a place in Montgomery County, Kentucky, he announced his resignation of his pulpit in February 1798, and relocated immediately to Kentucky.

Barrow laid out the reasons for his decision in a sixteen-page pamphlet issued from the Norfolk press of Charles Willett (445) and James O'Connor (317) shortly thereafter: his oft-cited *Circular letter: Southampton County, Virginia, February 14, 1798*.

Once settled in Kentucky, Barrow became pastor of the Mt. Sterling Church and intensified his anti-slavery preaching. Controversy ensued, and he was expelled from the primary Baptist association there. Many adherents and ministers followed him in forming a new antislavery association of Baptists; this led, in turn, to the formation of a Kentucky Abolition Society in 1808. He continued to agitate for emancipation until his death in 1819, and so is now recognized as one of the more important early antislavery leaders in the country.

***Personal Data***

Born: Oct. 30 1753 Brunswick County, Virginia  
Married: April 6 1773 Sarah Gillam @ Southampton County, Virginia  
Died: Nov. 14 1819 Mount Sterling, Montgomery County, KY  
Children: Twelve children born in Southampton County, Virginia between 1774 and 1796.

Sources: Imprint (Bristol B10229); Semple, *History & Progress*; Taylor, *Virginia Baptist Ministers*; Sprague, *Annals (Baptists)*.