

The Reverend Samuel Waite

First President of Wake Forest College | by [Bud Miner](#)

Samuel Waite, Rev. 1789-1867 (Joseph⁶, William⁵, Benjamin⁴, Samuel J.³, Samuel², Thomas¹) In 1809 he joined the Baptist Church at Middletown, VT, where his family had moved after residing in nearby Granville, Washington, NY, and Tinmouth, VT. He became pastor at Sharon, MA, in 1816, and was ordained there in 1818. On June 17, 1818, at Sharon, he was married to Sarah, the daughter of Deacon Jonathan Merriam. While studying, in 1813, at Salem Academy, Washington County, NY, he had become convinced that a preacher must have "strength to meet the infidel on his own ground, and this strength at this day must be derived from study". Accordingly he became a theological student in Philadelphia and then a student and tutor, 1822-26, in Columbian College (now George Washington University, Washington DC), which the organized Baptists were endeavoring to establish. Columbian College probably could not award degrees at that early date but because of his work he received the A.M. degree from Waterville College, ME, in 1825. A trip southward with President William Staughton in search of funds for Columbian College in 1826-27 resulted in his acceptance of a pastorate at New Bern, NC, in 1827. Deeply impressed with the sad condition of the Baptists, he participated actively in the organization of the North Carolina Baptist state convention in 1830, and when no other acceptable person would serve, he became its general agent. He toured the state in a covered wagon for two years, 1830-32, at a salary of about a dollar a day, out of which he supported the wife and child who accompanied him, and effectively educated the Baptists in cooperation. When the state convention determined to establish an institution for educating ministers Waite was again called into service, and he toured the state for one more year, spreading the news and collecting funds and serviceable articles. In February 1834, Wake Forest Manual Labour Institute was opened, and Waite, as the principal, accepted a varied assortment of boys as pupils. A farmhouse served for classrooms; former slave cabins as dormitories; a tent as dining-hall. He also directed them in working the community farm that was to help support the school and the pupils. A competent faculty was gradually assembled, the manual labor aspect abandoned, and a new building erected. In 1838 the Institute became Wake Forest College, and Waite was its president until 1846; thereafter he was president of the Board of Trustees. Without reputation for eloquence or great scholarship, he laid well the foundations of the school among a very plain but aspiring people. Between 1850 and 1860 he wrote "Origin and Early History of Wake Forest College," published in the Wake Forest Student. After a happy pastorate at Yanceyville he was president of Oxford Female College from 1851 to 1856. His last years were spent in Wake Forest at the home of his only child. Excerpted from *Dictionary of American Biography*, Scribner's, 1963.