Many men made tremendous contributions to the Restoration Movement in the 1800s. Two who stand out in the minds of historians are John Allen Gano and Tolbert Fanning.

JOHN ALLEN GANO

When B. A. Abbott listed the eight most prominent men who gave temper, direction, and pace to the early Restoration Movement, he included among them John Allen Gano (1805–1887), an associate of Barton W. Stone. He referred to Gano as the “indefatigable evangelist.” Gano deserves to be included among the most successful of the pioneer preachers of the Restoration. He is reported to have baptized more than ten thousand people and established a great number of congregations of the Lord’s church.

John was born in Georgetown, Kentucky, to Richard M. and Elizabeth Ewing Gano. In his teens, Gano attended a school that was operated by Barton W. Stone, the pioneer gospel preacher. In his classes, Stone not only taught secular subjects, but he also taught his students the Bible. In commenting on Stone’s effectiveness, J. M. Powell said, “With his invincible logic flowing from a heart of love, he influenced a number of outstanding men to become a part of ‘the good cause.’ Among those stalwarts that he enlisted was John Allen Gano.”

At age twenty-one, Gano obtained his license to practice law. He was on his way by steamboat to Texas to set up his practice when he became very ill. The captain, not wishing to have a death on his boat, put him off on the lower Ohio River. A compassionate family took him in and nursed him back to health. During this period of recuperation, Gano determined that he would be a gospel preacher.

Gano’s family was associated with the Baptists, but John had never become a member of the Baptist Church. He heard both Barton W. Stone and Thomas M. Allen preach the gospel of the New Testament. In 1827, Gano attended a gospel meeting and was so moved by the message Thomas M. Allen preached that he responded, confessed Christ, and was baptized.

As devout Baptists, Gano’s sisters were concerned about his religious convictions. They sent for a well-known Baptist preacher, Jacob Creath, Sr., to reason with him. Creath traveled a distance of seventy miles in order to bring Gano back into the Baptist fold. John Gano’s son, Richard, later described that meeting:

Entering his room and finding him seated at a little table with his Testament, Mr. Creath said, “Brother John, I am glad you have determined to devote your life to the service of Christ, but I think you had better have taken your stand with the church of your fathers; your family have been identified with the Baptist Church for probably a hundred years, and your grandfather, John Gano, was an eminent Baptist minister and chaplain in the Revolutionary War under George Washington, and immersed General Washington during that war.” John A. Gano replied, “If you will show me in this Book,” laying his hand upon the Testament, “where it says, ‘Deny yourself, take up your cross and follow your grandfather,’ I will follow mine while I live; but I read it, ‘Deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Christ,’ and I intend to follow this teaching if it separates me from all the kindred on earth.”

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1B. A. Abbott, The Disciples, An Interpretation (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1924), 20.
3Ibid., 223.
4Ibid.
5Ibid.
Creath was an honest man and this discussion had such an impact on his life that he would never be the same again. Richard Gano wrote,

They spent twelve hours in conversation and the old minister was so impressed that he returned the next day and they renewed the conversation, and Jacob Creath, Sr., became convinced and soon after came out publicly and took his stand with the church that has no book or creed but God’s Word and will wear no name but the name of Christ, the only position on which the friends of Christ can ever be united, and John Allen Gano went with all his might to preaching the Gospel of Christ and had success in winning souls to Christ unequaled in that state. 6

In 1827, Gano married Mary Catherine Conn. The ceremony was performed by Barton W. Stone. As a wedding gift, the parents of Mary Catherine gave the young couple a valuable farm near Centerville, Kentucky.

From 1827 to 1836, Gano traveled and preached with Thomas M. Allen. When Allen returned to Missouri in 1836, Gano began traveling and preaching the gospel with John T. Johnson. This association continued until Johnson died in 1856. Many churches were established during these two periods.

Gano became critically ill in the fall of 1887. His last words, spoken to J. S. Sweeney, were “I am almost home.” He died on October 18, 1887, at the age of eighty-two. His funeral was conducted by J. W. McGarvey.

TOLBERT FANNING

Earl West wrote in his history of the Restoration Movement, “Unquestionably, the most influential preacher in the Southland before the War between the States was Tolbert Fanning. There were other great men, of course. . . . but for lasting influence Tolbert Fanning towers above them all.” 7

When Fanning was eight years old, his parents moved to Alabama and settled in Lauderdale County, where he remained until he was nineteen years old. His father raised cotton, so young Fanning spent much of his time in the cotton fields. He attended school from three to six months each year. He acquired a fondness for study early in his life and excelled in his studies.

Fanning received his early religious training from his mother, who was a member of the Baptist Church and was considered an intelligent woman. He also heard preachers speak occasionally. Since his teaching came from Baptists, Fanning at first accepted the doctrine that a person cannot do anything toward his own salvation. In fact, he was taught that he could not even understand the Bible without a special illumination from the Holy Spirit. Fanning was spiritually burdened under this hopeless Calvinistic teaching. When he was sixteen years old, he began to give attention to two preachers who claimed to be “Christians only,” E. D. Moore and E. J. Matthews. These men encouraged him to read the New Testament and find for himself the will of the Lord. As he did so, his understanding of the plan of salvation took the place of his gloomy doubts.

According to H. Leo Boles, Fanning attended a gospel meeting in 1827 near Florence, Alabama, conducted by James E. Matthews. After hearing a sermon on “The Gospel and Its Conditions,” young Fanning made the good confession of his faith in Jesus and was baptized immediately into Christ. 8

Earl West wrote a different account of Fanning’s conversion. He said that B. F. Hall had come from Kentucky into Lauderdale County to preach. Fanning, age seventeen, was present on Sunday evening and heard the lesson. When the invitation was given, Fanning came forward and made the confession, but he was not baptized until the next morning by James E. Matthews. 9

Although the accounts vary, the end result was the same. That event completely altered the life of Tolbert Fanning. His next two years were spent primarily in studying the Scriptures and attending school. On October 1, 1829, he left home for the purpose of preaching the gospel to all who would listen to him. He was only nineteen and was inexperienced, but he was determined to preach Jesus Christ. His earnestness and zeal—along with his clear, logical manner of presenting the truths of the gospel—attracted thousands of people to attend his meetings. Large numbers were delivered from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light. 10

Fanning entered Nashville University in 1831. Before his graduation in 1835, Fanning was able to preach in several locations.

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6Ibid.
9West, 108.
10Boles, 151.
made preaching tours with Alexander Campbell in Ohio, Kentucky, New York, and Canada. At Perryville, Kentucky, he debated Nathan Lewis Rice, a denominational preacher. The debate was successful for Fanning, and it meant a great deal to the cause of truth in that area.\textsuperscript{11}

In 1837, Fanning married Charlotte Fall, the sister of Philip S. Fall, another early preacher of Restoration principles. That same year, he opened a female academy in Franklin, Tennessee. He taught in the academy and also preached in the Nashville area through 1839. Then he moved about five miles from Nashville, where he directed another female academy until 1842. In 1843, Fanning spent most of his time preaching on tours through Alabama and Mississippi.

Fanning established Franklin College and was elected the first president of the school in 1844. He also taught in the school for the next seventeen years and then resigned for the purpose of raising money to enlarge the school. That same year, 1861, the Civil War began, cancelling any plans for expansion. In 1865, the college building was destroyed by a devastating fire. After that, Fanning purchased the property of nearby Minerva College, which was renamed “Hope Institute.” Both Fanning and his wife taught in the school.

While he was president of Franklin College, Fanning began publication of the \textit{Christian Review}, which later became the \textit{Christian Magazine}. His first article in this paper concerned denominationalism. He wrote, “While we have the Bible, we can see no authority or plausible reason for the existence of any church not designated and portrayed in the New Testament. . . .”\textsuperscript{12} When publication ceased, Fanning became the senior editor of the \textit{Gospel Advocate}. In 1866, he and David Lipscomb were listed together as editors.

Later, Fanning began publishing a monthly journal called \textit{The Religious Historian}. In this journal he discussed the vital subject of church government. As a preacher, teacher, and writer, Fanning was always clear and sound.

Lipscomb said of Fanning, “It was not unusual for him to spend his day in the classroom, then conduct his business interests on his farm for several hours, and then sit up and write until midnight or later, and then get up in the morning to start the routine all over again.”\textsuperscript{13}

Fanning was a man of the Book. Religiously, he was opposed to anything he could not find authorized in the Bible. He was against man-made organizations such as missionary societies, using instrumental music in worship, and denominationalism. He was bold and courageous in speaking out against error. He was, without question, one of the most effective men of God in his generation.\textsuperscript{14}

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{11}Ibid., 152.
\bibitem{12}Ibid., 153.
\bibitem{13}Ibid., 154.
\bibitem{14}This lesson was adapted from V. Glenn McCoy, \textit{Return to the Old Paths, A History of the Restoration Movement} (Yorba Linda, Calif.: McCoy Publications, 1998), 283–92. Used with permission.
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