The year was 1780. The place - Sycamore Shoals, across the mountains from North Carolina - near present day Elizabethton, Tennessee. The event - a gathering of settlers at Fort Watauga. The purpose - to engage and defeat British Colonel Patrick Ferguson. Among these fearless men was Reverend Samuel Doak, Presbyterian Minister - Scholar - Indian Fighter - Husband - Father - and one of the revered Over Mountain Men. Before the men departed, Samuel Doak spoke this prayer which has now forever become part of American History:

SAMUEL DOAK’S FAMOUS SERMON AND PRAYER
AT SYCAMORE SHOALS MUSTER SEPTEMBER 1780

"My countrymen, you are about to set out on an expedition which is full of hardships and dangers, but one in which the Almighty will attend you.

"The Mother Country has her hands upon you, these American Colonies, and takes that for which our fathers planted their homes in the wilderness—OUR LIBERTY.

"Taxation without representation and the quartering of soldiers in the homes of our people without their consent are evidence that the Crown of England would take from its American Subjects the last vestige of Freedom.

"Your brethren across the mountains are crying like Macedonia unto your help. God forbid that you shall refuse to hear and answer their call—but the call of your brethren is not all. The enemy is marching hither to destroy your homes.

"Brave men, you are not acquainted with battle. Your hands have already been taught to war and your fingers to fight. You have wrested these beautiful valleys of the Holston and Watauga from the savage hand. Will you tarry now until the other enemy carries fire and sword to your very doors? No, it shall not be. Go forth then in the strength of your manhood to the aid of your brethren, the defense of your liberty and the protection of your homes. And may the God of Justice be with you and give you victory."

"Let Us Pray"

"Almighty and gracious God! Thou hast been the refuge and strength of Thy people in all ages. In time of sorest need we have learned to come to Thee—our Rock and our Fortress. Thou knowest the dangers and snares that surround us on march and in battle.

"Thou knowest the dangers that constantly threaten the humble, but well beloved homes, which Thy servants have left behind them.

"O, in Thine infinite mercy, save us from the cruel hand of the savage, and of tyrant. Save the unprotected homes while fathers and husbands and sons are far away fighting for freedom and helping the oppressed.

"Thou, who promised to protect the sparrow in its flight, keep ceaseless watch, by day and by night, over our loved ones. The helpless woman and little children, we commit to Thy care. Thou wilt not leave them or forsake them in times of loneliness and anxiety and terror.

"O, God of Battle, arise in Thy might. Avenge the slaughter of Thy people. Confound those who plot for our destruction. Crown this mighty effort with victory, and smite those who exalt themselves against liberty and justice and truth.

"Help us as good soldiers to wield the SWORD OF THE LORD AND GIDEON."

"AMEN"

The sermon and prayer of Samuel Doak are used through the courtesy of Mrs. Rollo H. Henley, Washington College, Tennessee. It is taken from the scrapbook of her father, J. Fain Anderson.
In the early history of religion in Greeneville, three names stand out above all others: Samuel Doak, Hezekiah Balch, and Charles Coffin, all Presbyterians. They dominated the religious scene for over fifty years.

*Samuel Doak, D.D.* “The apostle of learning and religion in the West,” was the title given to Rev. Samuel Doak, who was born August 1, 1749, in Augusta County, Virginia. When only sixteen, he began the study of Latin with a Mr. Alexander.

Doak, with little money, had a great thirst for knowledge and struggled manfully with difficulties until qualified to teach in a classical school.

In 1773, he entered Princeton College, then under the presidency of Dr. John Witherspoon, and graduated in 1775. Having chosen the ministry as his profession, he connected teaching with a study of theology, first under the Rev. Robert Smith, who then had a noted classical school at Piquia, Pennsylvania; afterwards under the Rev. John Blair Smith, at Hampden-Sydney College, Virginia, and finally under the Rev. William Graham, of Timberridge, Virginia. During this teaching and studying for the ministry, he married Miss Esther H. Montgomery, daughter of the Rev. John Montgomery, of that State. He was licensed by the Hanover Presbytery, October 31, 1777. Desirous of preaching in the frontier settlements where there was the most need, he labored sometime in Southwestern Virginia, and for about two years at the Fork of the Watauga and Holston rivers, in Sullivan County, Tennessee. He then removed farther westward, seeking an eligible location for the work he desired to perform, and located at Salem, on the waters of the Little Limestone, early in 1780. An incident apparently accidental, but really providential, led to this location. As he was riding along through the forest which then covered the place, he met with some settlers who were felling trees. Learning that he was a minister, they requested that he preach a sermon to as many as could be immediately called together; this he did, using his horse as a pulpit and the shady grove as a sanctuary. The sermon pleased them. They entreated him to tarry longer. He yielded and was induced to remain. Here he purchased a farm on which arose three log buildings to shelter his family, church and school. These were truly of primitive architecture. The church and school buildings stood on rising ground, shaded by grand old trees of the primeval forest, quite near each other and only a few yards west of the Salem Church.

Being well educated and having taught in several classical schools, and in Hampden-Sydney College, he immediately gathered the pioneer families under his ministry and their children under his tuition; thus furnishing in the wilderness two of the greatest advantages for progress and prosperity which any community can enjoy. In 1784, he obtained a charter for his school from the Legislature of North Carolina, under the name of “The Martin Academy,” named in honor of Governor Martin of that State. In 1785, he obtained another charter from the State of Franklin, when its Legislature met in Jonesborough.

From the minutes of the General Assembly of 1797, it appears that Salem congregation was formed by Dr. Doak in the year 1780, and that he became settled as its pastor in 1782; in the same year (1780), he also formed the congregations of New Providence, Carter’s Valley and Mount Bethel, over the last of which Dr. Hezekiah Balch became the settled pastor in 1783. The organizations of Upper Concord, New Bethel, and Hebron are also ascribed to Dr. Doak.
Thus while he both preached and taught at Salem, he made many preaching tours to destitute settlements, forming congregations and affording supplies to others until they could enjoy the labors of settled ministers.

Of his labors in Martin Academy for about eleven years after it received its charter, little is known. On July 6, 1795, Doak's school was chartered by the Territorial Government under Governor Blount, as Washington College, in honor of George Washington, over which Doak continued to preside with distinguished honor and success until 1818. In 1785 Doak, being still a member of the Hanover Presbytery, presented a petition signed by Charles Cummings, Hezekiah Balch and himself, to the Synod of Philadelphia, praying that they, being the only ministers then west of the New River of Virginia, should be organized into a new Presbytery, to be known as the Abingdon Presbytery. The petition was granted and the new Presbytery met for the first time at Salem Church, not on the first Tuesday of August as appointed by the General Assembly, but on the first Tuesday of October, 1785, Mr. Doak being the Moderator.

Besides the hardships, Mr. Doak and his family encountered the perils of the wilderness. The Cherokees were still hostile and both he and the male members of his church often attended services armed with rifles and guarded by sentinels. Once while he was preaching a man rode up to the church shouting, “Indians! Indians! Ragdale's family are murdered!!” Mr. Doak closed his sermon, and having offered a brief prayer for protection, set off with the men in pursuit of the enemy.

At another time, he was compelled to go thirty miles towards Abingdon for family supplies. While he was away his wife had notice of the near approach of Cherokee warriors barely in time to snatch up her child and flee into a place of hiding from which she witnessed the flames that consumed their home.

Salem Church shared largely in the fruits and effects of the great revival which prevailed generally in East Tennessee from 1784 to 1792, in which the church was enlarged and strengthened and the pastor greatly encouraged. This work of grace was greatly needed in those troublous times, to arrest the tide of reckless irreligion which had been the result of frontier life and the demoralizing effects of revolutionary and Indian warfare.

When Dr. Doak resigned his presidency of Washington College in 1818, he removed from the scene of his long arduous labors, to the bounds of Mount Bethel Church in Greene County, and there united with his son, the Rev. Samuel W. Doak, in conducting a classical school which afterwards became Tusculum College. At the time of his resignation he had presided over Martin
Salem Cemetery Limestone, Washington County, Tennessee

Academy about twelve years and over Washington College twenty-three years, or about thirty-five years in all, and had preached in Salem Church thirty-eight years, a part of the time in connection with his sons and other ministers. He had educated and sent out into Tennessee and the adjoining States a very large proportion of the ministry and other professions who moulded the character of the early population and founded their civil and religious institutions, so that perhaps no other man in his wide sphere and in his day was more useful.

As an instructor of youth he was well qualified to teach, able to rule well, diligent, popular and successful. His forte as a teacher lay in Latin, Greek, and metaphysics. His familiarity with the classics was such that he was in the habit of hearing recitations without a book and with his eyes closed as if fast asleep, but when a mistake was made the scholar was sure to find him wide awake.

After the example of his old preceptor, the Rev. William Graham, of Liberty Hall Academy, he taught mental philosophy chiefly by lectures, an epitome of which he wrote out, and required each student to write a copy. This epitome of twenty-three “Lectures on the Philosophy of Human Nature” was published in a small volume by his son and successor, Dr. John Whitefield Doak.

Dr. Samuel Doak was a man of medium height, short neck, large and powerful frame and inclined to be obese. His hair was sandy, his eyes blue and the general expression of his countenance was grave; his demeanor dignified and his appearance always commanding and in later life quite venerable.

He always refused to sit for his portrait, but the students of one of his literary societies obtained one by the ruse of keeping him engaged in conversation while an artist did the work unseen by him. This was afterwards taken to Philadelphia and a number of lithographed copies were made. He is represented sitting cross-legged in an arm chair, with his short breeches, long stockings, book in hand and a Scotch cap on his head.

His doctrinal creed was thoroughly Calvinistic, and he held it with a firmness and a tenacity worthy of a Scotsman. He was, therefore, the determined and persevering opposer of Dr. Balch and his adherents in the great Hopkinsian controversy.

His sermons were usually well prepared and instructive, his delivery earnest and impressive. There was an unpleasant harshness in his voice, yet its very power roused and retained the attention of his hearers.

He resided during the last twelve years of his life at Tusculum, teaching in the Academy and preaching as opportunity and advancing age would permit. His death occurred on December 12, 1829, and he was buried in Salem Church-yard, surrounded by the remains of multitudes who had enjoyed the benefits of his labors. His first wife died July 3, 1807, and he afterwards married Mrs. Margaret McEwen. She was reputed to be a very worthy woman, and the following anecdote told by Dr. Ramsey shows she was a heroine.

During the life of her first husband, the family had taken refuge in 1785, in Houston’s Station, when it was attacked by 100 Indian warriors, and defended by a few brave riflemen, who kept loading and firing as rapidly as possible, while the women were melting lead and moulding bullets. While thus engaged an Indian ball struck the wall near Mrs. McEwen and bounded back upon the floor. She quickly snatched it up and having melted and moulded it, gave it to her husband, saying, “Send it back again as soon as possible. It is theirs, let them have it.”
Sons of the American Revolution [S.A.R.] Plaque
Washington College is on the National Register of Historic Places
[Although no longer an accredited institution, non-credit courses are still offered to the Public.]

Samuel Doak House, Tusculum University Greene County, Tennessee
In 2018, Tusculum College received University designation.
[Photo courtesy of Tusculum University]