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**Cover: W. N. Chaudoin, L. D. Geiger, S. B. Rogers, C. M. Brittain, C. H. Bolton, H. Lindsay, Sr., J. H. Maguire, H. Bennett, D. Stringer, John Sullivan**

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## INTRODUCTION

***Jerry M. Windsor***  
*Secretary-Treasurer*  
*Florida Baptist Historical Society*

### **Welcome to the Sixth Issue of *The Journal of Florida Baptist Heritage***

Baptists are usually better at planning, working, and striving than they are at celebrating. In our resource collection we have book upon book that dissects Baptist controversies over the last two hundred years, but we have very few pages of thanksgiving, praise, and celebration.

We Baptists know more about John Calvin and law than we do John Newton and grace. We easily recite the Roman Road verses but seldom memorize a *Psalm* of forgiveness and joy.

Now here we are. It s time to celebrate. From Richard Johnson Mays (1808-1864) to the Mays family gathered at Madison for our Sesquicentennial service (November 20, 2004) let s celebrate. From W. B. Cooper (1807-1878) to John Sullivan let s celebrate. From Key West to Pensacola, its time for joy. Favored Florida has been blessed, so let us praise God from whom all blessings flow.

We have had nine Executive Directors of the Florida Baptist State Convention and one interim. This journal of joy and thanksgiving puts a spotlight on these men and their ministries.

Dr. Joel Breidenbaugh wrote about William N. Chaudoin. John Shaffett, the Director of Library Services at the Baptist College of Florida, wrote about L. D. Geiger. It was my responsibility as Secretary-Treasurer to write on S. B. Rogers, and Dr. Lulrick Balzora, a current FBHS board member, researched C. M. Brittain. Don Hepburn of the

Florida Baptist State Convention, gave us an excellent article on C. H. Bolton and Homer Lindsay, Sr., our only interim Executive Director. I wrote on John Maguire, and Bill Sumners, Director of the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives in Nashville, presents an article on the work of Harold Bennett. R. C. Hammack, Senior Vice President of the Baptist College of Florida, wrote on Dan Stringer, and Tom Kinchen, President of the Baptist College of Florida, wrote about John Sullivan.

Jan Cunningham is the one who makes this office work. She is a can-do, on-task person and the Florida Baptist Historical Society is fortunate to have her expertise and her hard work ethic. Melissa Campbell is a tremendous help with her secretarial and people skills. Jan put the journal together and she and Melissa did the design work. Hank Frisbie of Bartow Printing Company is also a good friend to have aboard in this project.

This volume is a keeper. The writers did a good job, favored Florida has been blessed. Let s celebrate.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Maguire', written in a cursive style.



W. N. CHAUDOIN:  
PIONEER, PREACHER,  
AND PRESIDENT OF  
FLORIDA BAPTIST WORK

***Joel R. Breidenbaugh***

*Pastor, Cornerstone Baptist Church  
Panama City Beach, Florida*

Dr. William Newell Chaudoin (1829-1904) served as the President of the Florida Baptist Convention (1880-1903, excluding 1886-1888) and as the first Corresponding Secretary and Treasurer of the State Board of Missions (1881-1901), a position likened to today's executive secretary. His lengthy tenure helped pave the way for both missiological and educational endeavors for which Florida Baptists have been known. A look at Chaudoin's family background, spiritual journey, ministry, and leadership as the "Father of the Convention" will demonstrate the significant impact he has had on the driving force behind what Florida Baptists do today.

#### Family Background

Much of what we know of W. N. Chaudoin's life comes from the pen of E. H. Rennolds, Sr., early editor of the *Florida Baptist Witness*. Rennolds writes,

Dr. Chaudoin is of French descent, and is a great grandson of Francis Chaudoin [1720-1799], a Huguenot, who emigrated from France and settled in Chesterfield county, Va., about the middle of the 18th century. His oldest son, Lewis Chaudoin [1754-1845], was a soldier in the American Revolutionary and afterward a member of the famous Powhatan Church, in the county of that name, and was one of fourteen preachers which that church sent out prior to 1810. He faithfully preached the gospel in the Old Dominion for nearly 60 years, and died January 4, 1845. Andrew Broadus, Sr., preached his funeral discourse, and highly eulogized him.

John Mims Chaudoin [1785-1856], oldest child of Lewis and his second wife, Katurah Mims, moved to Robertson County, Tennessee, and married Miss Sarah Calthorp there, and he too, preached the Gospel faithfully in Middle Tennessee. Here his sixth child, William N., was born, August 10th, 1829, twenty miles north of Nashville.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, W. N. Chaudoin was at least a third-generation gospel preacher.

### Upbringing, Conversion, and Family

Limited to meager resources, John Chaudoin could not provide much formal education for his son William, except for the Old Field schools. During these childhood schooldays, William's classmates, weary of pronouncing his French name, labeled him Bill Shad.<sup>2</sup> Later in life, William estimated that his formal education probably did not exceed two years. His fondness for books and his personal studies, however, enabled him to teach a primary school when he was eighteen.<sup>3</sup> Years later, when serving on the Committee of Education of the Florida Baptist Convention, Chaudoin gave a report, remarking that he had an opportunity of attending college, did not embrace it, and has had a life time to regret it. Education makes any man more efficient.<sup>4</sup>

As to his spiritual journey, William N. Chaudoin was converted at age sixteen, in the spring of 1846, under the ministry of William F. Luck and W. D. Baldwin in Davidson County. He was baptized by the former and entered into the fellowship of New Bethel church. He immediately commenced taking part in prayer meetings, and soon received impressions that he ought to preach. But being naturally timid, and lacking in education, he fought these impressions for two years, and then yielded, preaching his first sermon on April 2, 1848.<sup>5</sup> He preached this sermon in the same house in which he found Christ.<sup>6</sup> The following March, New Bethel licensed W. N. Chaudoin to preach the gospel.<sup>7</sup>

On May 6, 1850, he married Miss Caroline Amanda Frensley (1835-1907), with whom he lived 54 years of unalloyed happiness.<sup>8</sup> Though they had no biological children, it appears Caroline adopted Robert Roe Chaudoin (1876-1960), William's first cousin, perhaps sometime after William's death. The bloodline filled with gospel ministry in the Chaudoin family continued beyond Robert, who married Jane Ann (Johnson) Cockshutt (1875-1947) in 1900. Their only daughter, Annie (1905-1972), attended Stetson University as a Religious Education major, and she married Mr. Cecil Crissey (1905-1996) in 1928, who also attended Stetson as a ministry student.<sup>9</sup>

### Early Ministry

During his young adult life, W. N. Chaudoin made his living teaching school while laboring as a volunteer missionary. He was ordained by Elders W. S. Baldry, W. D. Baldwin, and William Brumberlow in February 1851 at the request of Marrowbone church, fifteen miles from Nashville, where he had been serving as a supply preacher. Chaudoin began his first pastorate at the Second Baptist Church of Nashville in 1853. While serving this church and conducting revival meetings, Chaudoin contracted a pulmonary infection and never recovered from it. In the spring of 1854, he was confirmed an invalid, and his friends thought he would soon pass away with tuberculosis.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, about 1856 or 1857, [Chaudoin] was appointed Agent for the Bible Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, and for a year

worked in Middle Tennessee and North Alabama, and then was sent to Georgia and Florida, where he labored another year. <sup>11</sup> His physicians advised him to move south to a warmer climate. Thus, by 1857, Chaudoin and his wife moved from Nashville to Macon, Georgia.

The move to Georgia was also prompted by his election as the first Secretary and Agent of the Georgia Baptist Bible and Colporteur Society. A short time later, Chaudoin worked as principal for the Georgia Academy for the Blind in Macon. In 1858, Chaudoin began serving again as a pastor, this time in southwestern Georgia.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps the greatest artifact from



William N. Chaudoin

Chaudoin's life—his personal diary—comes from this time period. Covering some four months of his life as a pastor near Albany, the Diary tells of his preaching to white Baptists on Sunday mornings and to black Baptists in the afternoons. Chaudoin's personal Bible reading and study, which he attempted to do daily, enhanced his walk with the Lord. When inclement weather or his own sickness prevented him from regular ministry, however, he honestly admits his own failures: It has rained nearly the whole day, without any intermission. Did not pretend to go to meeting. Another Sabbath is passed and I have not attended the sanctuary. No effort for my Master today. <sup>13</sup> A few weeks later, he comments, My wife suggested to me that I was perhaps too wild, or cheerful at times for one of my calling. . . I try to be cheerful, and avoid levity, but perhaps fail in seeing the boundary between the two. <sup>14</sup>

After the Civil War broke out in 1861, he traveled to camps in Virginia and preached to the soldiers. From 1865-1870, Chaudoin accepted several pastorates throughout southwestern Georgia, where he preached with great acceptability and success. <sup>15</sup> Apparently, sometime around 1870, he began a two-year stint in Georgia as an agent for the Home Mission Board (known then as the Domestic and Indian Mission Board). By 1871, he was promoted to District Secretary for Georgia, Alabama and Florida, a position he held until 1879, when he became a



general missionary for Georgia, commissioned by the State Board of the Baptist Convention.<sup>16</sup> Rennolds writes, While living in Georgia he was a regular correspondent of the Baptist State organ, the *Christian Index*, and often wrote for the Sunday School papers.<sup>17</sup> At this time, Chaudoin came up with his own catchy nickname, remembering what his schoolmates had called him. Thus, many came to know him affectionately as Uncle Shad, and his wife as Aunt Carrie.

### Florida— Father of the Convention

Because of Chaudoin's ongoing sickness, he had to spend many winters in Florida. Around 1880, he decided to make his home in this balmy climate, and purchased a small orange grove at LaGrange. . . and the quiet little village has long since come to be regarded as a mecca of Florida Baptists.<sup>18</sup> LaGrange Church was organized in 1869 in Brevard County and carries the distinction as the oldest church between New Smyrna Beach and Key West and the oldest Protestant church between St. Augustine and Key West.<sup>19</sup>

The Florida Baptist Convention of 1880 elected Chaudoin as its President and, at the same time, the newly organized State Board of Missions elected him as its Corresponding Secretary and Treasurer—he accepted the latter the following year. The next twenty-three years saw him serving the convention in some capacity. He is rightly dubbed the Father of the Convention, for the convention really became active during his service. Rennolds captures a glimpse into Chaudoin's commitment to the work in Florida: There being no available funds to pay his salary, the Home Mission Board, knowing that money given to employ such a man was well invested, generously agreed to pay his salary for the first year, after which the State Board became self-supporting, though the salary paid him was quite small.<sup>20</sup> By the mid-1880s, the State Board was paying Chaudoin \$600 plus traveling expenses.<sup>21</sup>

Indeed, to outline Chaudoin's work for twenty-three years in Florida is to write its denominational history [up to that time]. Others have done well, but he excelleth them all.<sup>22</sup> During Chaudoin's tenure as

President and Corresponding Secretary-Treasurer, several significant aspects stand out.

## Preaching

Although Chaudoin is known for his leadership and missionary spirit, his gift for proclaiming God's Word may be his most remarkable trait. The *East Coast Advocate* records that in spite of his poor health, he did a good deal of evangelistic work along with his other work, and was regarded by many as one of the ablest preachers and one of the most successful evangelists in all that part of the state.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, one writes,

Perhaps no one of our ministers has warmer feelings, or a more devout spirit when pleading for his divine Master in the pulpit; in consequence, he is always welcomed; yet he is not, by any means, a man of learning or of extraordinary parts. He has the unction of the Spirit, and gifts, however, which rank him among the very best of our preachers. With no great homiletical skill, with no special knowledge of rhetoric or logic, and not profound in theology, he is, nevertheless, a good preacher, and anybody can listen to him with profit. His evident sincerity, and his warm, genial, earnest and affectionate manner, disarm criticism, and incline every one to give him a favorable hearing. He gets right at the heart, and no man can hear him without being deeply impressed. Although his early opportunities were so limited, he still may be said to hold a better position in the pulpit than multitudes of those who have enjoyed the best advantages. He is a plain, unaffected, humble man, making no high pretensions of any kind; yet there is many a high-born, high-bred and highly-taught ecclesiastic, who, with all his polish and all his distinction, would be greatly promoted by exchanging places with him. Doubtless this is due to divine power bestowed, and to that unction which is from on high.<sup>24</sup>

Another writer claims, If [Chaudoin] was notable for one characteristic as a preacher above another, it was this. He never said a thing which was without its delicious kernel of truth. He never spoke simply for effect. He substantiated every proposition with the best of logic. He was always just. He was always fair. He never temporized. He was always sincere.<sup>25</sup>

Dr. J. F. Forbes concurs, but adds that Chaudoin was a strong and effective preacher, but his greatest and most effective proclamation of Jesus was in his own daily life; from which the very Spirit of Christ exhaled as a perfume continually.<sup>26</sup> Chaudoin obviously excelled as a preacher.

## Missions

Second, the origin of the State Board of Missions occurred in 1880. While this board came into existence just before Chaudoin was elected as its head, he took the reins and guided the board into new areas of mission and education. Concerning the former, Chaudoin helped pave the way into expanded mission efforts, both nationally and internationally. Certainly, he did not draw a line between home and foreign missions, considering them as one unit, because it is all the Lord's work.<sup>27</sup>

Chaudoin put his money where his mouth was, pledging significant amounts to missions many of his years as President. When each Baptist from his own Santa Fe River Association gave on the average \$1.06 to missions in 1882, Chaudoin pledged \$10.<sup>28</sup> The next year he pledged \$50 and his wife pledged \$10!<sup>29</sup> Anyone reading through the convention minutes during Chaudoin's tenure will notice frequent pledges of \$5, \$10, \$25, \$35, and even \$50 by William or Caroline Chaudoin.

One of the key people groups reached during this time was the Cuban population in Key West and Tampa, as well as the island of Cuba itself. While William F. Wood was an early missionary to the Cubans, Chaudoin pushed missions through financial contributions and annual promotions in his report.<sup>30</sup> Reporting on the new mission venture in 1885, Chaudoin writes, The new work. . . for the Cubans at Key West, has been successful beyond expectation. The little one has, or soon

will, become a thousand. Noting the twenty-eight baptisms by Elder Wood, Chaudoin adds, The work at Key West has developed the fact that the island of Cuba is now open to us. . . . From what we have learned we can truly say, It is the Lord s doings, and wonderful in our eyes. <sup>31</sup> Throughout all of his work, Chaudoin simply stayed true to his missionary calling.

### Education

Third, Chaudoin s lack of educational opportunities instilled within him a strong desire to see others have the chance to receive formal training. His pledges to The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and DeLand College (which became Stetson University) establish his high view of ministerial education. Uncle Shad and Aunt Carrie often pledged between \$5-25 to sustain students at Southern Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. His heart, however, remained close at home supporting Stetson. He pledged \$250 in 1886 for an endowment at DeLand College! Subsequent years brought pledges between \$50-125 for the endowment at Stetson.<sup>32</sup> Suffice it to say that Chaudoin did as much as he could so that no other ministers would lack educational opportunities.

### Financial Giving

Fourth, Chaudoin helped set the tone for financial contributions during an era when much of the South was still recovering from the Civil War. Not only did Chaudoin regularly support missions and education, but he also gave freely and frequently to other needs in the convention. For instance, he pledged \$104 between 1883-1884 to the church building department—designed to help repair churches damaged by strong storms, among other things.<sup>33</sup> From 1880-1885 alone, Chaudoin helped the entire convention move from giving \$100 a year to more than \$1000 annually to foreign missions.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, he pledged \$10 to the *Florida Baptist Witness* from 1898-1899.<sup>35</sup> Having experienced childlessness during their more than fifty years of marriage,

William and Caroline gave \$25 for an orphanage in 1901.<sup>36</sup> While others gave more money to Convention causes during Chaudoin's tenure, few sacrificed as much as he and his wife in supporting the Lord's work.

### *The Florida Baptist Witness*

Fifth, the origin of the state paper—the *Florida Baptist Witness*—happened under Chaudoin's leadership and was actually named by him. Chaudoin credits the paper's origin to two young pastors' efforts in the 1860s—one from Thomasville, Georgia, and the other from Monticello, Florida. Though their efforts never materialized, further work occurred from 1873-1875. Again, this paper, called *The Florida Baptist*, ran short of funding and was, thus, discontinued. Chaudoin's service during the 1870s as the editor of the Florida section of *The Christian Index* (Georgia's Baptist paper) then paved the way for the Baptist state paper which would continue till this day.<sup>37</sup> Beginning in 1884, the Convention approved the publication of the paper, which had a four-fold purpose: (1) to increase the ethical tone of Floridians, (2) to promote New Testament principles, (3) to encourage the missionary spirit, and (4) to rouse people in educational matters for their children.<sup>38</sup> Chaudoin served several of the early years either as an associate editor or one of the editors—all-the-while leading the Convention as President and heading the State Board of Missions as Corresponding Secretary-Treasurer.

### Overall Leadership

Finally, for more than two decades, Chaudoin provided excellent and stable leadership for the Convention. S. M. Provence comments about him: As a master of assemblies he was distinctly unique. He stood alone. Never dull, never at a loss, with a clear vision and a level head, he could get more work and more religion and more enthusiasm and more fun out of a Baptist Convention than any man I ever saw.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, Dr. L. D. Geiger—Chaudoin's successor as Corresponding Secretary and Treasurer—says, He was great as a leader. He was a born leader. . . . He was great in loyalty to the truth. I believe he would have gone to the stake for the truth.<sup>40</sup>

Moreover, Chaudoin gave Florida Baptists servant-leadership wherever service was needed. While serving as President and Corresponding Secretary—including leading the State Board of Missions and working as an editor/assistant editor of the *Florida Baptist Witness*—Chaudoin filled numerous positions on committees and boards, including committees on Credentials (1880), Nominations (1880), Deceased Ministers (1888), and as a trustee of Stetson University (1886-1903).<sup>41</sup> Chaudoin's effective leadership was evident to all, for unable to serve as President from 1886-1888 due to illness, President H. M. King declined re-election in 1889 and nominated Chaudoin once again for that position, the latter being elected by acclamation.<sup>42</sup>

Furthermore, a great spirit of harmony existed in the Convention during Chaudoin's tenure, largely in part to his own spirit. Historian Earl Joiner writes,

Upon Chaudoin's retirement a significant change in the Convention atmosphere is almost immediately discernible. Whether the shifts in Convention administration reflected the changed atmosphere or were the cause of it is not clear. However, the peace and harmony of the last decades of the 19th century and the beginning years of the 20th century were often interrupted by controversy, strife and economic difficulty.<sup>43</sup>

Having led the Convention as President for twenty-one years, no one since has served as president so many times. Moreover, a pattern was broken, for no one since has served as president and executive secretary at the same time.<sup>44</sup> Clearly, when Chaudoin retired and passed away, Florida Baptists not only lost a dear friend, they lost their leader.

### Conclusion

William Newell Chaudoin's influence in Florida Baptist life was both great and godly. All who met him, or knew of him, confessed his great stature. Though Chaudoin received little formal education, Stetson University conferred on him its very first honorary doctorate of

divinity degree in 1893. As another gesture of appreciation, Stetson named one of its dormitories Chaudoin Hall in honor of Uncle Shad and Aunt Carrie.<sup>45</sup>

At the 1901 convention, due to his failing health, Chaudoin announced his retirement as Corresponding Secretary. The convention immediately elected him as Secretary Emeritus and resolved that we bow in grateful acknowledgment of the mercy and goodness of God in sparing him so many years for the work he has done among us, because he had served the Convention for so many years with great self-sacrifice and distinguished ability, and has, by his wonderful personal magnetism, fine generalship and sweet spirit, held the work together so long, sometimes when disaster threatened to destroy it.<sup>46</sup>

Two writers who knew Chaudoin quite well penned fitting tributes to the man loved by many Florida Baptists. Rennolds, who served several years beside Chaudoin as Secretary of the Convention, summarizes,

The work of the Board grew under his wise management, in its collections, in its missionary operations, and in its hold upon the people, till it became a great power for good in the land, and it is safe to say that no other man, known to us, could have built such a mighty enterprise, within the same time that he did, and it will forever stand as a living monument to his devotion, faith, energy, tact, skill and constructiveness. Not only the State Board, but the Convention itself, with all its auxiliaries, and its varied departments, is what he made it, and but for the evolution of his magic hand and heart and brain. From one end of the State to the other men and women and children have learned to love him, and have revered and admired him, and been provoked to noble sacrifices and willing efforts to aid in the extension of the Redeemer's kingdom.<sup>47</sup>

Though the words were written one hundred years ago, they still ring true.

The editor of the *East Coast Advocate* of Titusville, Florida, the local newspaper of LaGrange, observes that during Chaudoin's era,

He was better known, and, without doubt, more universally loved than any other Baptist minister in Florida. He was one of the wisest leaders that any cause ever had, and much of the prosperity that has attended the mission work is due to his able superintendency, seconded by the co-operation of the board of missions that always had absolute confidence in him, and has always stood by him. . . . Viewed from any standpoint, Elder Chaudoin was conceded to be a great man. He was deeply spiritual, full of faith and the Holy Ghost, yet having in the highest degree the courage of his convictions, genial and companionable, wise and conservative, tactful and resourceful, having a big brain which has been highly cultivated by reading and observation, a frail body, but a soul which is bigger, if possible, than the body, a sagacious leader, and effective preacher, a loyal friend, a true man.<sup>48</sup>

In closing, let the reader hear the words of Dr. Chaudoin himself and his vision of Baptist work among those in need in the sunshine state:

Hundreds of saints will yearly come here to pass from this land of sunshine to the climes of glory, but they need the brighter sunshine of the Gospel to cheer them in their last hours. Thousands in the years to come will resort here, cheered by the delusive hopes of the consumptive, but will never return. Christian people must send Christ's ministers into every place, carrying to these and all others the hope of the Gospel which is not delusive.<sup>49</sup>

Florida Baptists have not forgotten this charge nor will we forget the legacy of Uncle Shad.



END NOTES

<sup>1</sup>E. H. Rennolds, Sr., William Newell Chaudoin, *Florida Baptist Witness*, 27 January 1904, 9. There seems to be some conflicting accounts of his birthplace, sometimes listed as Robertson County and other times as Davidson County. Both border one another, so certainty is nearly impossible. Many of the dates and genealogical information comes from Chaudoin Family History, compiled by Dr. John T. Manning.

<sup>2</sup>Rennolds, 9.

<sup>3</sup>Obituary record in the *East Coast Advocate* (Titusville, Florida), 29 January 1904, 4; quoted in Manning, Chaudoin History.

<sup>4</sup>*Minutes*, Florida Baptist Convention (hereafter, FBC) (1875), 29.

<sup>5</sup>*East Coast Advocate*, 4; quoted in Manning, Chaudoin History.

<sup>6</sup>Rennolds, 9.

<sup>7</sup>*East Coast Advocate*, 4; quoted in Manning, Chaudoin History.

<sup>8</sup>Rennolds, 9.

<sup>9</sup>Cecil served as a former printer, editor, and pastor, his last pastorate being at Militana Baptist Church in Lantana. He also pastored many other Baptist churches in Central Florida. He was a clerk of several Baptist Associations. He was a former recording secretary for the Florida Baptist Convention. Crissey served on the administrative staff at Stetson University, where he was a professor from 1943-1948, Manning, Chaudoin History.

<sup>10</sup>*East Coast Advocate*, 4; quoted in Manning, Chaudoin History.

Apparently, the ordaining church is also called Charity Baptist Church (W. N. Chaudoin: Pioneer Leader, *Florida Missions Today*, Spring 2004, 4).

<sup>11</sup> W. N. Chaudoin, in *History of the Baptist Denomination in Georgia with Biographical Compendium and Portrait Gallery of Baptist Ministers and Other Georgia Baptists* (Atlanta: Jas. P. Harrison & Co., 1881), 120.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>*William N. Chaudoin Diary, 1858-1859*, entry for Dec. 26, 1858. The *Diary* details some of his pastoral duties (almost entirely personal matters) at a church in Dougherty County, Georgia.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., entry for Feb. 21, 1859.

<sup>15</sup>Rennolds, 9.

<sup>16</sup> Chaudoin, in *History of Baptist Denomination in Georgia*, 121. Rennolds, for some reason, omits Alabama from this district (Rennolds, 9). Interestingly, the 1872 FBC Annual lists him as the District Secretary for the States of Georgia, Florida, and South Carolina (*Minutes*, FBC, [1872], 16).

<sup>17</sup>Rennolds, 9. Chaudoin served as editor of the Florida department of *The Christian Index* (Chaudoin, in *History of Baptist Denomination in Georgia*, 121).

<sup>18</sup>Rennolds, 9.

<sup>19</sup>It appears that LaGrange Church either began as a community church or became a community church made up of members from various denominations, such as Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Episcopal (see *The Historical LaGrange Church* in Manning, Chaudoin History; Mary Lou Culbertson, *Oldest Church between Smyrna and Key West*; quoted in Manning, Chaudoin History. See also John Maguire, to H. C. Garwood, 13 August 1959, transcript in the hand of Joel Breidenbaugh, Florida Baptist Historical Society Collections, Ida J. McMillan Library, Baptist College of Florida, Graceville.

<sup>20</sup>Rennolds, 9.

<sup>21</sup>*Minutes*, State Board (3 January 1883); quoted in Edward Earl Joiner, *A History of Florida Baptists* (Jacksonville: Convention Press, 1972), 63.

<sup>22</sup>Rennolds, 9.

<sup>23</sup>*East Coast Advocate*, 4; quoted in Manning, Chaudoin History.

<sup>24</sup> Chaudoin, in *History of Baptist Denomination in Georgia*, 120.

<sup>25</sup>W. A. Hobson, Dr. W. N. Chaudoin, *Florida Baptist Witness*, 1904, 3.

<sup>26</sup> Dr. Forbes on Dr. Chaudoin, *Florida Baptist Witness*, 4 February 1904.

<sup>27</sup>*Minutes*, FBC (1897), 49-50.

<sup>28</sup>*Minutes*, FBC (1882), 30.

<sup>29</sup>*Minutes*, FBC (1883), 38.

<sup>30</sup>For information on Woods involvement with Cuba, see Jerry Windsor,

Don't Give Up Cuba, *Florida Baptist Witness*, 1 April 2004, 5. For Chaudoin's support, see *Minutes*, FBC (1885), 10; *Minutes*, FBC (1895), 29; and his annual reports beginning in 1885.

<sup>31</sup>*Minutes*, FBC (1885), 43.

<sup>32</sup>*Minutes*, FBC (1886). See also, *Minutes*, FBC (1899), 23; *Minutes*, FBC (1900), 26; and *Minutes*, FBC (1903), 54.

<sup>33</sup>*Minutes*, FBC (1883), 12; *Minutes*, FBC (1884), 29.

<sup>34</sup>*Minutes*, FBC (1885), 43-44.

<sup>35</sup>*Minutes*, FBC (1898), 29; *Minutes*, FBC (1899), 25.

<sup>36</sup>*Minutes*, FBC (1901), 23.

<sup>37</sup>W. N. Chaudoin, Origin of the Witness, *Florida Baptist Witness*, 9 January 1895.

<sup>38</sup>*Minutes*, FBC (1885), 24.

<sup>39</sup>S. M. Provence, W. N. Chaudoin, *Florida Baptist Witness*, 18 February 1904, 3.

<sup>40</sup>L. D. Geiger, Funeral of Dr. Chaudoin, *Florida Baptist Witness*, 27 January 1904.

<sup>41</sup>See *Minutes*, FBC (1880); *Minutes*, FBC (1888); and *Minutes*, FBC (1889).

<sup>42</sup>*Minutes*, FBC (1889), 11.

<sup>43</sup>Joiner, *History of Florida Baptists*, 100.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, 99-100.

<sup>45</sup>H. C. Garwood, Chaudoin, William N., in *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists*, vol. 1 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1958), 249.

<sup>46</sup>*Minutes*, FBC (1901), 55. Chaudoin's retirement salary was set at \$600 and \$400 for Caroline after his death (*ibid.*, 20).

<sup>47</sup>Rennolds, 9.

<sup>48</sup>*East Coast Advocate*, 4; quoted in Manning, Chaudoin History.

<sup>49</sup>Fifth Annual Report of the State Board of Missions, *Minutes*, FBC (1885), 45.

L. D. GEIGER:  
EXECUTIVE SECRETARY  
OF THE FLORIDA  
BAPTIST CONVENTION  
1902-1909



***John E. Shaffett***  
*Director of Library Services*

At the Florida Baptist Convention which was held at Gainesville Baptist Church in 1910, special mention was made of the late Executive Secretary of the Convention, Dr. L.D. Geiger.

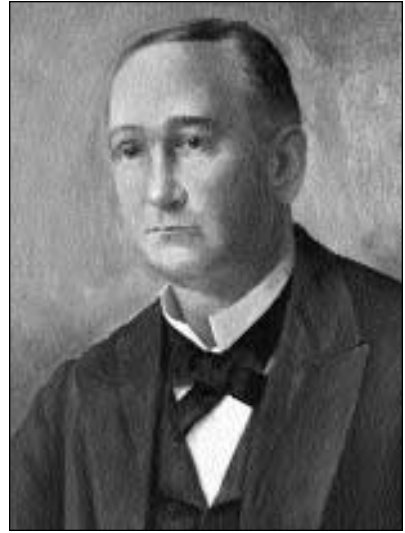
Writing this report, we could but lay down our pen and bow our heads in sorrow—tears unbidden flowed down our cheeks as we began the list with the name of our late secretary, Dr. L.D. Geiger. That man of God, beloved everywhere, strong of body, powerful in intellect and profound in consecration, upon whom had fallen too great a burden—whose heart beat out its life in its zeal for the Master. <sup>1</sup>

Lorenzo Dow Geiger was born on October 18, 1854, in Old Town, Marion County, Florida. His parents were Abraham Elias and Sarah Ann Geiger. He lost his father to the Civil War, and had to shoulder a good bit of responsibility because he was the eldest of several children.<sup>2</sup>

The Civil War interrupted his early education. A few years after the war, he went to live and work with Jesse Willis of Williston, Florida. He worked while attending school and his formal education was limited, but he made up for this deficiency by studying diligently and pursuing studies on his own. This experience of limited opportunity for formal education motivated Geiger to be diligent, self-disciplined, and to apply himself to learning with whatever sources were available. Based on the

later reports of his preaching and denominational work, he had been successful in educating himself. Hard work, self-discipline, and diligence became a regular characteristic of his life. It is clearly evident that the hardships he had to overcome helped him to become a better servant of Jesus Christ.

L.D. Geiger's commitment to education was demonstrated in his denominational work. This commitment to education was matched by his commitment to missions which he shared with his fellow Baptists in Florida. The Florida Baptist Convention commitment to education and



L. D. Geiger

missions had been evident since its origin. This commitment resulted in the organizing of a Pastors' Conference that would meet prior to the Florida Baptist Convention. The purpose of the Conference was to educate ministers through various methods. Geiger was instrumental in the establishment and the work of the Pastors' Conference. He had suggested as early as 1885 of a need to train ministers to do the work of the ministry. It seems that by 1889, Geiger's idea of a conference where ministers could share ideas and educate one another received wide support from many ministers. At the Annual Convention of 1889, a Pastors' Conference was organized, a committee was appointed, and a program was prepared.<sup>3</sup>

A set of objectives was set up for the Pastors' Conference:

- (1) to awaken deeper interest in the study of the Scriptures,
- (2) to encourage mutual improvement, mental and spiritual, and
- (3) to devise methods for improving the work of the church<sup>4</sup>

The Conference consisted of prepared position papers; open discussion, and sermons, sometimes preached for purposes of criticism.<sup>5</sup> L.D. Geiger was often a participant at these meetings. In 1896, Geiger lectured on the harmony between the doctrine of election and missions. It seems almost certain that Geiger's struggle to get a theological education motivated him to provide means to educate other ministers. His life as a whole, shows him to be involved in the training of ministers.

Geiger was converted to Jesus Christ and baptized into the fellowship of the Buttonwood Baptist Church at the age of seventeen. Two years later, he was licensed and ordained to preach by the same church.<sup>6</sup>

On November 17, 1875, Geiger married his cousin, Mattie Geiger. They eventually had six children, four sons and two daughters. He was a bi-vocational minister until 1884. During this early ministry, while he pastored many small churches, he also worked as a farmer. Geiger became well-known and respected in the state of Florida. He became a successful pastor and evangelist, serving churches in Micanopy, Leesburg, Ocala, Brooksville, and Lakeland. He also served as an associate editor of the *Florida Baptist Witness* for several years. Additionally, he was editor and proprietor of the *Orange County Citizen*.<sup>7</sup>

Shortly after his ordination to the ministry, Geiger joined the Campbellites. His involvement with this group is described in the following manner by his historian James Semple.:

Dr. Geiger never made but one failure in matters important. Soon after he was ordained, a Campbellite preacher came through the country making a plea for Christian unity. Bro Geiger's great love for peace and harmony so manifest through all of his life, got the better of his judgment and he went into the Campbellite church. . . . He soon discovered that the church that had set itself about the task of uniting all Christians into one church was itself divided. . . . He also discovered that the doctrine that had looked so plausible at first would not bear a Scripture test. He came back to the Baptist Church with the testimony that the ten years spent in the Campbellite church had

been utterly thrown away. From the day of his return to the Baptist fold he has never. . . departed to the least degree from the Orthodox Baptist faith at a single point, and his grasp of theology was hardly short of wonderful.<sup>8</sup>

After returning to the Baptist fold, Geiger pastored some small country churches and also some influential, larger churches. He also grew in the esteem of Florida Baptists. He was widely recognized for his pastoral abilities. It was during this period that he began to serve as an associate editor for the *Florida Baptist Witness*. He also served as Assistant Recording Secretary of the Florida Baptist Convention and later served as the Recording Secretary of the Convention. Geiger achieved two important milestones in his life in 1902: he was elected Corresponding Secretary and Treasurer of the State Board of Missions and the Doctor of Divinity degree was conferred upon him by Stetson University.<sup>9</sup>

Geiger was vice-president of the Florida Baptist Convention in 1896 and 1897 and he served as W. N. Chaudoin's assistant. When Chaudoin retired as the First Executive Secretary of the Convention, he was selected to be Chaudoin's replacement. By the time of his promotion, he was already recognized for his leadership and influence among Florida Baptists.<sup>10</sup>

Geiger's graciousness and great character was displayed after the death of Chaudoin in January of 1904. He made the following remarks at his predecessor's funeral:

There is no man living or dead to whom the Baptists of Florida owe so much as to Dr. Chaudoin. . . Where is there a man who can write as he wrote? So clear, so forceful, so impressive. . . . He was great as a leader. . . How often in our Convention meetings, when heated discussion seemed imminent, his quiet loving admonitions have silenced and kept back the ready burning words. <sup>11</sup>

James H. Semple makes the following observation: it seems ironic that a man who was a great lover of peace and harmony and. . . a great

peacemaker should lead Florida Baptists during their most tempestuous years.<sup>12</sup>

Two of the major problems faced by Geiger and the Convention were the lack of funds and the shortage of ministers. Both of these problems impinged on each other and great lamentation over wide spiritual destitution resulted. The State Board found it impossible to employ and pay much needed missionaries. Some churches found it impossible to hold services. The State Board report to the convention in 1901, for example, noted that several county seat towns, some with good houses of worship, had been unable to hold regular preaching services during the past year. . . . Not only were ministers in short supply in Florida, but the prospects of producing Baptist leadership for the future looked slim. In 1904, for instance, only two ministerial students enrolled at Stetson.<sup>13</sup>

When L.D. Geiger became Executive Secretary in 1901, Florida Baptists consisted of 484 churches which reported 23,139 church members and 277 ministers.<sup>14</sup> He inherited a \$10,000 debt owed to Stetson University. Geiger made plans to pay off this debt. He noted in 1902 that people generally gave with greater reluctance for the paying off of this note than for almost anything else.<sup>15</sup> Many people were not as concerned as Geiger to pay off this note.

His record as Executive Secretary demonstrates his giftedness and great skill in administration and managing the resources of Florida Baptists. The Convention would grow spiritually, numerically, and financially under the capable hands of L.D. Geiger. He also demonstrated great leadership abilities as Executive Secretary of the Convention.

For the year of 1902, there were 23,689 Baptists in 483 churches which reported 1,451 baptisms.<sup>16</sup> The following year, there were 24, 515 Baptists in 496 churches which baptized 1,709 individuals.<sup>17</sup> The year 1904 reported 491 churches with 26, 141 members and 1,674 baptisms.<sup>18</sup> Financially, the Convention prospered also. Geiger's annual report in 1905 showed that the Convention had received \$30,562.31 and ended the year with a balance of \$538.08. Reflecting on the three years previous, Geiger said, In 1903, we reported work amounting in round numbers to \$25,000; in 1902, to \$17,000; and 1901, to \$13,000.<sup>19</sup>



In 1905, Geiger reported that the Convention had received \$41,427.12, which was \$10,914.81 more than the amount received in 1904. In 1905, there were 519 churches with 27,969 members and reported the largest number of baptisms so far, 2,065.<sup>20</sup>

In 1908, it was reported that the year 1907 consisted of 525 churches reporting 2,927 baptisms with 32,326 members.<sup>21</sup> This report also showed a great increase in the number of ministers. It had increased from 333 in 1907 to 430 in 1908. There were 599 churches with 37,027 members which reported 3,424 baptisms.<sup>22</sup>

The Convention was kept strong financially under the effective leadership of L.D. Geiger. The year 1908 opened with seeming cause for the gravest apprehensions. Already the evils of the Wall Street serpent had begun to close around the business interests of the country in anticipation of the November elections. . . . Besides this, Florida was in the turmoil of the most disastrous drought it had experienced for years. . . .<sup>23</sup>

John Rosser notes that Geiger's personality was different from his predecessor, W. N. Chaudoin. He describes Geiger in this way: His pictures indicate that he was physically of large mold and of robust physique, tall and corpulent. . . . He was endowed with sonorous voice and oratorical gifts, and that he was dramatic and illustrative in his preaching. His countenance reflects a kind and benevolent spirit. . . . He was devotedly loved by everyone in the community, regardless of creed. . . . He was a competent executive, one who adorned the office.<sup>24</sup>

When L.D. Geiger entered office as Executive Secretary, the spiritual condition of the churches in Florida were in dismal shape. Rosser describes it in these terms: While our missionaries have covered a considerable portion of the state, much destitution has not been provided for. . . . It is mission territory almost from one end of the territory to the other. Many of our larger towns are able to have preaching only half time. There are many new towns springing up in different parts of the state, and many strategic communities are being formed in the rural districts. No one, who knows the state at all, can be blind to its needs. Destitution is on every hand, in city, town, and country.<sup>25</sup>

Another element that required consideration was what resources were available to meet the poor spiritual condition of the state. Florida Baptists had come a long way since their beginning. They were optimistic and looked with faith and hope at the future. Looking at the needs and the available resources, decisions had to be made on how to attack this situation. They wanted to connect the resources with the needs that they thought were greatest. They expressed it this way:

We believe our first duty, as Florida Baptists, is in Florida. . . that more attention should be given to state missions. . . that this convention should authorize the Board to lay out its work for state missions on a much broader basis than ever before undertaken. There is no denying the fact that for the present the greatest obligations resting upon Florida Baptists are to their own state, and fully one half of all contributions should be devoted to state missions. We would stress the thought that in Florida under present conditions there is a peculiar need for a special emphasis to be placed on state missions. . . . We must give the place of first importance to our state mission work.<sup>26</sup>

It seems that God provided the man that was needed at that crucial hour. L.D. Geiger emerged as the leader as Florida Baptists entered the year 1902.<sup>27</sup>

It is common for new leadership to change many of the rules, procedures, and officials of the preceding leadership. This was not true of L.D. Geiger. His first report noted that the work of the previous year had been done along the usual lines.<sup>28</sup>

One historian describes the characteristics of the new leadership in the following manner: The new secretary's policy was to lengthen the cords already strung, to enlarge the place and to stretch forth the curtains of the tent already set up.<sup>29</sup> This basically meant that the work emphasized three things: ministerial education, building houses of worship, and supporting missionaries.<sup>30</sup>

Dr. Geiger noted in his first report that they had been highly successful in these three priorities. He also led the way by example. Rosser puts it this way: And chief among the workers was the secretary himself. He had borne the laboring oar. He had preached almost every Sunday, traversed the state from side to side, almost from

end to end, and attended every association. . . . He sent forth others and himself led the way. <sup>31</sup>

Support was also provided for thirteen students in college and seminary. Geiger also took action to end abuses of ministerial scholarships. It was thought that some students had received aid that they did not need. The following changes were implemented: The student must be in good standing in a Florida Baptist church; must have proved his worth by exercising his gifts for six months previous; must be sufficiently advanced to enter the first year of the Academy at Stetson University; must furnish the Board a full statement of his finances, both actual and potential; must not receive more than ten dollars per month from the Board, which amount shall be reduced in case the student's total income should exceed sixteen dollars; must accept no outside employment that interfered with his studies; must be under the watch-care of the pastor and three members of the local church, who would report from time to time the department and religious activities of the student; his class standing must be reported monthly by the faculty to the Board; must give a written statement that in the event of his voluntarily relinquishing the Baptist ministry he will within ten years after leaving school, refund at lawful interest all money furnished him by the Board. <sup>32</sup>

The following year, 1903, state mission work continued to advance under the leadership of Dr. Geiger. He recognized the rising importance of growing urban life. Up to this time, a majority of mission work had been in rural areas. He noted a new emphasis for the Convention in January, 1904. During the coming year, since all the destitution cannot be supplied, special attention should be given to the centers of population and influence. <sup>33</sup>

From 1904 to 1909, the Convention continued to prosper under the hand of Dr. Geiger. The growing number of new members necessitated building new buildings. Twenty-six new churches were built in 1904. Contributions to the Convention continued to grow, allowing for expanding the building projects and the expansion of missionary activity. <sup>34</sup>

L.D. Geiger also actively supported women's mission work while serving as Executive Secretary. From 1904 to 1909, the WMU Executive Committee of Florida and the Corresponding Secretary worked closely with Geiger. He highly praised the WMU for its work in missions.<sup>35</sup>

One writer describes his last day on earth in this way: on April 20, 1909, after Dr. Geiger and his wife had returned from services at the Baptist church in the evening and had retired at the usual hour, he complained of feeling ill and going to the back porch sat down on the step. Mrs. Geiger persuaded him to return to his room where, as he sat down, he said, Mother, I am dying, and expired before help could arrive.<sup>36</sup>

John Rosser summarized the achievement of L.D. Geiger in the following manner:

Dr. Geiger sang his swan-song to the Convention of 1909. The sands of life ran out early. He died suddenly on April 20 falling at the age of fifty-five. The years of his administration had registered larger progress on all fronts than had any similar period. They had set the Baptist house in such order and so enlarged its forces that Geiger's successor, coming on the stage of action, could achieve yet larger results.<sup>37</sup>

END NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Proceedings of the fifty-fifth annual session of the Florida Baptist Convention held with the Gainesville Baptist Church, January 25th to 27th 1910, 64.

<sup>2</sup>H.C. Garwood, *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists*, vol. 1 Ab—Ken; (Nashville, Tenn: Broadman Press, 1958) 527-28; James H. Semple, *A History of the Florida Baptist Convention from 1865 to 1918*, a thesis. (Fort Worth, TX: Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1962), 186.

<sup>3</sup>Edward Earl Joiner, *A History of Florida Baptists*. (Jacksonville, FL: Florida Baptist Convention, 1972), 60-61.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup>Semple, 187.

<sup>7</sup>Garwood, 527-28.

<sup>8</sup>Semple, 187.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, 187-88.

<sup>10</sup>Joiner, 103.

<sup>11</sup>Semple, 156.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 188.

<sup>13</sup>Joiner, 103.

<sup>14</sup>*Florida Baptist Convention Annual Minutes* 1901, N.P.

<sup>15</sup>Gilbert L. Lycan, Stetson University: *The First 100 Years*, (Deland, FL: Stetson University Press, 1983), 33.

<sup>16</sup>*Florida Baptist Convention Annual Minutes*. 1903, 76.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, 1905, N.P.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 31.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 1906, 32-33.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 123-24.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 1908, 163.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 1909, 114.

<sup>24</sup>John L. Rosser, *A History of Florida Baptists*; (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1949). 79-80.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 81.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 82.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 83.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 84.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 87.

<sup>35</sup>Martha Pope Trotter, *Faithful Servants: The Story of Florida Woman s Missionary Union, 1894-1994*. (Jacksonville, FL; Florida Woman s Missionary Union, 1984), 56, 61.

<sup>36</sup>Semple, 79. Garwood states that Geiger died on April 21, 1909 (editor).

<sup>37</sup>Rosser, 88.



## STUART BEGGS ROGERS THE QUIET BEFORE THE STORM

***Jerry M. Windsor***

*Secretary-Treasurer  
Florida Baptist Historical Society*

In 1925 Stuart Beggs Rogers wrote a review of his convention work that included some very interesting introspection.

Twenty-three years ago this month, the Convention saw fit to call me from a quiet place and humble sphere as a young pastor, and make me an official of this convention.

Some of you perhaps yet remember that eventful day; that critical hour in our fellowship and service.

You may also remember how I begged to be excused, and how scared I was, when in this intense moment you led me to the chair of the president of this body.

For six successive years we did our best to impartially guide the body along paths of peace, in the bonds of love.

While president of Convention you again called me to the still harder task of executive secretary of your corporation and mission board. This year we are bringing you our seventeenth annual report in that department.

Many things occurred along the backward look which we would be glad to forget, some to remember forever and forever.<sup>1</sup>

### *The Quiet Years*

Stuart Beggs Rogers was born near Macon, Georgia, on September 18, 1866. He attended local schools and Mercer University. According to the 1889-1890 Mercer University catalog, Rogers was a student at some time at Hearn Institute and was somehow related to Reedy Springs, Georgia. The 1890-1891 Mercer catalog stated that Rogers was a freshman at Mercer University and from Laurens County, Georgia.<sup>2</sup>

Rogers married Daisy Walker on March 4, 1896, in the Baptist church at Vidalia.<sup>3</sup> His father was reportedly a prosperous merchant and Rogers attended school at Mercer University and the University of Chicago but did not graduate. In 1897 Rogers became the pastor of First Baptist Church in Marianna and First Baptist Church in Chipley, Florida. He served each church on a one-half time basis.

The date of the conversion and call of Rogers apparently came before his marriage for he moved to Greenwood, Florida for pastoral ministry work in 1896. One source states that Rogers was forced to forsake his schooling in order to manage his father's business and save it from ruin.<sup>4</sup>

The training, experience, and temperament of Rogers laid the exact framework needed for his future ministry. He seemed to have a giftedness for uniting people behind grand projects yet he had a practical bent that served him well.

The University of Chicago study and the daily exposure to his father's business gave Rogers a sense of ease and persistence about fiscal matters that brought him to a focus of accomplishment in his pastoral work and in his work with the Florida Baptist Convention.

### *Marianna and Chipley*

Rogers became pastor of First Baptist Church, Marianna and First Baptist Church, Chipley on a half-time basis each. The churches were only about fifteen miles apart. Although they are in different counties (Marianna in Jackson and Chipley in Washington) the churches were much alike and actually had family, business, and friendship

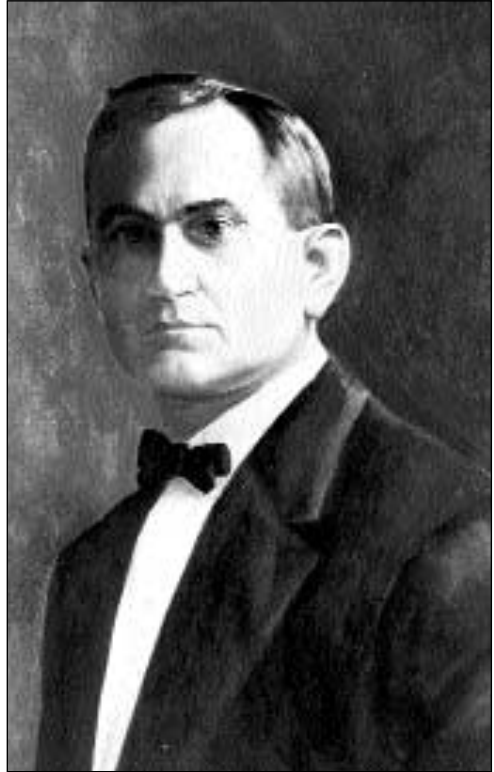


associations across church lines. Marianna was the county seat of Jackson County and Chipley was the county seat of Washington County. Jackson County joined Bay County and the Gulf Coast and Washington County joined Bay County Gulf Coast. Both churches were agrarian related and on the same highway and railroad lines. He served the churches for seven years. He also served two years as moderator of the West Florida Baptist Association.

In the centennial history of First Baptist Chipley it is stated that Rogers drew blueprints of the church auditorium at the kitchen table of Mrs. W. O. Butler. In 1901 the auditorium was built and in 1902 it was dedicated.<sup>5</sup>

Rogers was also heavily involved in the administrative organization of the church. He was the third pastor but the first to organize a Sunday School there.

Rogers left the business world and entered the ministry with a good deal of business experience but very little church administrative experience. Yet he was a quick learner. He found out quickly that there was a vast difference in getting a business to pay its debts and getting a Baptist to give his tithe. He also learned that salary and employment perks had to be negotiated to protect ones family. When Rogers was elected corresponding secretary of the Florida Baptist Convention on



Stuart Beggs Rogers

April 29, 1909, the following *Florida Baptist Witness* editorial made some very incisive observations about the man and his philosophy of ministry.

When he came to Florida he left a pastorate that was paying him \$1,400 and a home to take a field in Florida that paid only \$1,000 without a home. During his whole connection with the Florida work he has manifested a disposition to sacrifice himself for the cause. These things together with his broad knowledge of the State and his sound judgment and good business qualities and great energy make him well fitted for the work which has so unexpectedly fallen upon him.<sup>6</sup>

#### *First Baptist Church Gainesville*

Rogers was pastor in the Panhandle from 1896-1904. He then served as pastor of First Baptist Gainesville from 1904-1905. He was called to go to Gainesville in March 1904. However Rogers did not accept the call until certain things were worked out. He asked for \$1,000 a year and housing. After some debate the church met those needs and also agreed to some other innovative suggestions.<sup>7</sup>

The early months of the Gainesville ministry also caught Rogers up in a very critical matter of church discipline. J. B. Holley had preceded Rogers as pastor of First Baptist Gainesville. By his own admission, Holly had a terrible temper and was not always in good control. His temper was usually settled after a good night's sleep, but the problem was he reacted so quickly and so violently to certain triggers that he seemed to stay in hot water with someone all the time. People loved him and accepted his passion as just part of his personality. But at the January 1904 business meeting Holley handed the church clerk a letter and requested that the clerk read the letter to the church. The clerk read: Dear Brethren: I hereby hand you my resignation as pastor of your church with the request that you allow it to take effect after today's services. Fraternaly submitted, J. B. Holley. This document was read, accepted and Holly was out and 60 days later Rogers was in.

But Holley could not go quietly. He went over to First Baptist Church in Jacksonville and caused such a disturbance in a loss of temper that the church in Jacksonville withdrew fellowship from Holley. He then headed back to Gainesville to get the church to help him work it out.

Rogers had a land mine. A former pastor was on his doorstep pleading for mercy. The former pastor had a violent temper but he also had many friends in the Gainesville congregation. Rogers showed the wisdom of Solomon. He got a committee of 16 Baptist preachers from Northeast Florida to investigate the matter. When the dust settled, Holley apologized, Jacksonville restored him, Gainesville sent him on his way, and Rogers gained a great deal of respect from Baptists in Gainesville and Jacksonville.<sup>8</sup>

### *The Storm*

Stuart Beggs Rogers was ready for the work. The king was dead but long live the king. Rogers felt the pain and sorrow of the death of Dr. Lorenzo Dow Geiger (October 18, 1854-April 20, 1909) but he knew he was facing some embarrassing circumstances. In his 1910 report to the Florida Baptist Convention Rogers was openly concerned and honest about the situation.

It is with gratitude to God, and fraternal greetings to the Brethren, and yet with profound grief, that we bring to you this, our twenty-eighth annual report. . . there is a feeling of profound sorrow pervading our hearts. The shadows of grief have fallen like mantles of darkness about our board. . . Dr. Lorenzo Dow Geiger, your faithful and worthy secretary is dead.

Confronting us from the beginning, however, were some embarrassing circumstances. . . a large deficit. . .<sup>9</sup>

The *Florida Baptist Witness* in a May 6, 1909 editorial had already foreseen the problem. The writer noted that there were three matters

that needed to be dealt with. There was money stringency, a new man in the harness, and widely different ways of accomplishing the task. The writer also made a plea for patience, prayer, and wisdom for the convention and Rogers.<sup>10</sup>

### *The Debt*

The debt was hardly intentional. But it was large and could not have come at a worse time.<sup>11</sup> Stetson, Columbia College, and ongoing personnel and program expenses had state mission leaders in a crunch. Something had to be done.

Rogers had a plan. He served as President of the Florida Baptist Convention six times and he was well familiar with the convention finances.<sup>12</sup> He knew something needed to be done and he had built up a reservoir of trust among his peers. He had handled the death of Dr. Geiger with poise and statesmanship.

On April 24, 1909 (Dr. Geiger died April 20, 1909) Rogers wrote a letter to the editor of the *Florida Baptist Witness* and addressed it to the Baptist Host of Florida. He said, our great mission leader has fallen in the very midst of the struggle. . . but God reigns and the work must go on. Let us rally as never before. Don t get discouraged. Don t stop work. God will raise Him up a leader.<sup>13</sup>

Rogers used the death of Geiger to call for more faithful giving. Before he knew that he would be the new leader of the convention he pleaded: Don t let his successor start into the fight with a load he cannot carry. Let everyone make a GREAT MEMORIAL OFFERING, and rush it to his office, Apopka, at once.<sup>14</sup>

The financial plan was set. Rogers asked for three things. He asked for the election of a committee to apportion each association its prorata share of all obligations. Second, he recommended the adoption of a percent basis budget for the state convention. Then he asked for a twenty percent increase in giving by the churches of the convention for the year 1910.<sup>15</sup>

In 1915 the convention temporarily got out of debt. It nearly broke the health and strength of Rogers but he announced that your records

are clean, your office is clear, no obligations upon the office unpaid. . .

<sup>16</sup> As a matter of fact Rogers was worn out and he knew it. He tried to resign due to his worn out condition but the convention would have nothing to do with it.

### *Columbia College*

Stetson and the Florida Baptist Convention never could get any traction. There was a continuous love affair down through the years but no real affection. Questions about authority, trustees, and money were raised again and again. Baptists generally do not support what they can not control.

Finally on July 24-25, 1907, the Florida Baptist Convention approved a recommendation that a Baptist College be established in Lake City owned and controlled by the convention. The school opened on October 1, 1907, with an excellent administration and faculty and a student enrollment of 133. The school was to be administered by a board of 20 trustees, all of whom were to be members of Florida Baptist churches and elected by the convention.<sup>17</sup>

The school started out with 355 acres, eight buildings, and \$15,000 cash from the city council of Lake City. The beginning was promising but the financial support never materialized for the school. The terrible drought of 1908 was a great financial set back and expected pledges went unpaid. The convention could not come to the rescue of the school and eleven years later the school was forced to close with an indebtedness of \$50,000. All of this happened on the Rogers presidential/secretary watch. The pressure and stress were just too much for one man to handle.

The failure of Columbia College was simple yet complex. They simply did not have the money to operate. However other small colleges were surviving so there must have been some basic factors that caused the failure of the school. I believe those basic reasons were seven distinct events that hit Florida and the school at one time.

The 1908 drought cannot be over estimated. Good people made good pledges and for good reasons they could not keep their promise.

The 1895 freeze just seemed to set the whole state up for the tragic drought ten years later.

The failure of the Heard National Bank where the school did their banking was also a contributing factor. This one incident nearly caused total disaster for the school but loyal friends came to the school's rescue.

The World War I war cloud shed confusion and doubt across the economic landscape among banks, businesses, and other financial entities. The fields of France saw tragedy and failure but so did the national economy in the United States.

The Home Mission Board and Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention were deeply in debt and set up fund raising activities for every association and church in Florida. This added to the economic pressure in fund raising.

The resignation of C. A. Carson as president of the Board of Trustees put a pall on the college quest for survival. He served as president of the board for ten years and gave generously to the causes of the school but his resignation as board president sent shock waves that were easily and sadly misinterpreted.

The military draft actually dried up the student pool. When the school closed, the trustees felt that possibly the school could open the following year if the draft and World War I were not intervening. The war to end all wars continued and the draft stayed in effect.

After all these prevailing circumstances came a whirlwind fund raising effort by the Y.M.C.A. to raise \$100,000 in Florida. As secretary, Rogers says this fund raising effort swept from the border to the Keys and garnered nearly all discretionary funds that were available.<sup>18</sup>

### *The Efficiency Movement*

There was a general movement across the Southern Baptist Convention to somehow come to a better understanding as to the use of resources and personnel in the local church and on the convention level. Florida was also caught up in this attempt at efficiency. Saving money and man power was needful. Every department and employee was

stretched and the attempt to be frugal and more direct in ministry must have greatly appealed to Rogers.

A department of Efficiency was set up and a secretary was employed. The motivation was pure and the logic sound. The conclusion was drawn that if we do a better job at home we can do a better job abroad. If we do a better job in our churches we can do a better job in our convention.

The unit plan aspect of this movement was doomed to failure from the beginning. This was an attempt to bring all state agencies under one board. There would be no trustees at the colleges or Children's Home. There would be no directors to work through. There would be just one board elected by the convention to efficiently oversee all Baptist work in Florida. This idea sounds good but it flew in the face of turfism, traditional, and theological tenets that speak of giftedness and shared cooperation. The unit plan was dead in the water before it began.

But Rogers and his colleagues made two good points. One point was that a national budget with local fund raising needed to be established. This whole effort was crying out for a cooperation that would eventually come in 1925 with the Southern Baptist Convention Cooperative Program.

The second point was the importance of local church contacts in regards to Sunday School, missions, and giving. This concept of every member canvass was the genius of the efficiency movement.

The Efficiency approach might have been born in a business context but it grew theological wings when it put emphasis upon visiting every church member in the state convention and asking them to get involved in kingdom work.

Stuart Beggs Rogers felt he came from a quiet place and humble sphere to serve the Florida Baptist Convention. Yet he was a man with the exact spiritual temperament and leadership skills that the Florida Baptist Convention needed at such a crucial time.

Dr. Rogers suffered poor health off and on his whole ministry. He died on August 16, 1926 at a hospital in Atlanta, Georgia. He was survived by his wife and three children.<sup>19</sup>

END NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Stuart Beggs Rogers, 1908-1925 A Brief Review. p.1. Florida Baptist Historical Society. Stuart Beggs Rogers vertical file.

I admit the dates just do not seem to match.

<sup>2</sup>Actually the 1890-1891 Mercer University catalog, p. 10., mentions F. B. Rogers but Susan Broome in an email to Jan Cunningham dated July 29, 2004, states that the F. B. is probably a typographical error. He is also listed as a minister in the New Ebenezer Baptist Association, 1890, 92, 96.

<sup>3</sup>*Christian Index* marriage notice, March 12, 1896, p. 5. *Florida Baptist Witness*, May 6, 1909; August 19, 26, 1926; September 2, 9, 23, 30, 1926; November 13, 1941.

There is an unsigned research sheet in the Florida Baptist Historical Society Stuart Beggs Rogers file that states S. B. Rogers and Daisy had three children.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.* Rogers also served as pastor at Greenwood from 1896-1903.

<sup>5</sup>Joan P. Chance. *History First Baptist Church Chipley, Florida 1887-1987*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>6</sup>*Florida Baptist Witness*, May 6, 1909, p. 4.

<sup>7</sup>*The First Baptist Church Gainesville, Florida, 1870-1970*, pp. 20-24.

The salary and housing was agreed upon but one is led to believe that it was the other conditions suggested by Rogers that caused the church debate. Within three weeks of going there as pastor, Rogers had the number of deacons increased to seven, moved Sunday School from the afternoon to the morning, and reorganized the Sunday School and B.Y.P.U.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup>*Florida Baptist Convention Minutes*, 1910, pp. 10-35.

<sup>10</sup>*op.cit. Witness*, May 6, 1909, p. 4.

The writer also notes in this editorial that Rogers was a graduate of



Mercer University. I believe he was mistaken about that. Rogers did study at Mercer and the University of Chicago but I am not aware of his graduating from either school.

<sup>11</sup>Florida experienced a terrific drought in 1908. For an agrarian culture this was devastating. The Southern Baptist Convention was in debt at the Foreign Mission Board and at the Home Mission Board. Pastors of some of the strongest mission giving churches in Florida had given up their own pulpits for the first four months of 1909 to canvass the state for Southern Baptist Convention mission giving. This was necessary but it was devastating for state mission giving (1910, *Florida Baptist Convention Minutes*, p. 11).

<sup>12</sup>Rogers served as convention President at the conventions in Kissimmee (1904), Jacksonville (1905), Bartow (1906), Live Oak (1907), Plant City (1908), and DeFuniak Springs (1909).

<sup>13</sup>At no time does it ever appear Rogers sought the job as President of the Convention or Executive Director. The honors found him.

<sup>14</sup>*Florida Baptist Witness*, April 29, 1909, p. 4.

This is a rather interesting editorial page. On the left side Rogers pleads for support of the new director in the left hand column in his April 24, 1909 letter. On the right hand column of the same page the April 29, 1909, announcement of the new secretary is made. Rogers could not have foreseen that five day swing of events but it does show his humility and cooperative spirit.

<sup>15</sup>*Florida Baptist Convention Minutes*, 1910, pp. 17-18.

<sup>16</sup>*Florida Baptist Convention Minutes*, 1915, p. 28.

<sup>17</sup>Earl Joiner, Columbia College, *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists*, I, p. 300.

<sup>18</sup>State Convention Minute annuals are the best sources for a study of the failure of Columbia College. The annuals of 1917 and 1918 are especially enlightening. I have no idea where the Columbia College records are stored but Florida Baptist Convention minutes give a good annual overview from 1907-1918.

<sup>19</sup>The health of Rogers was a constant issue for him. It is my belief that his weakened condition might have caused the onset of undiagnosed tuberculosis.

The 1922 convention minutes tells of the purchase of property in Jacksonville for the construction of a new Baptist building. Later the completed building was named the Rogers building as a memorial to Rogers and his convention leadership.

According to the July 26, 1923 issue of *The Florida Baptist Witness* Rogers went to Europe for rest, relaxation, and enjoyment. He spent time in Rome, Paris, and Brussels. He was probably the first Florida Baptist executive director to travel abroad.

Rogers wrote a 23-page document entitled *A Brief History of Florida Baptists 1825-1925*. There is no documentation, no pictures, and no bibliography. Its importance lies in the fact that it was the first published history of Florida Baptist work.

# CHARLES M. BRITTAIN: STEADFAST IN ADVERSITY

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## I. Introduction

In the midst of adversity, some find it easy to deviate from their course. During the early 1900s Florida Baptists experienced times of great adversity but also were blessed with servants such as Charles Mercer Brittain who exemplified steadfast leadership through natural, financial and personal adversity.

Charles Mercer Brittain was born December 16, 1873. His story begins in Conyers, Georgia, in a land composed of granite strata. It was also an area afflicted with adversity during the 1800s. The county was named Rockdale, denoting the composition of the land and the resilience of the people. Conyers was nearly destroyed three times by fire. In 1864 General Sherman's March through the area left one mill standing. The townspeople rebuilt Conyers and it soon boasted forty stores, good schools, a college, twelve lawyers, twelve doctors and a large carriage manufacturer.<sup>1</sup>

Brittain lived under the faithful care of Christian parents Ida Callaway and Jabez Marshall Brittain. His father was a pastor who ministered to several churches in the state of Georgia. Young Charles was a hard-working teenager. At the age of sixteen, he moved to Atlanta and for four years worked in a large dry goods store, until he received

God's calling to the ministry. He accepted the call to preach while under the ministry of Dr. J. B. Hawthorne of the First Baptist Church of Atlanta.<sup>2</sup>

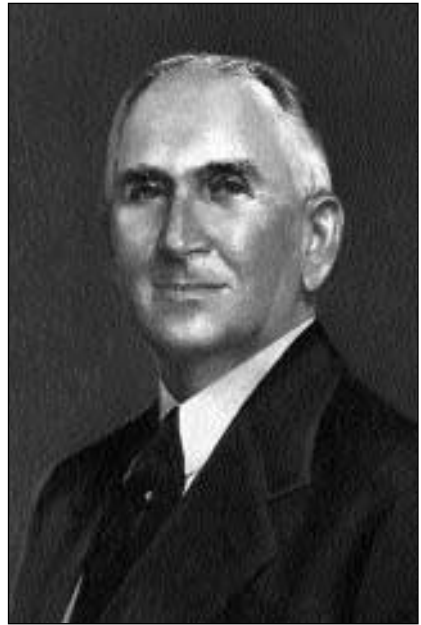
## II. Developing Perspective

### *The Spanish American War*

Young Brittain displayed a loving, humble and selfless spirit early in life. In 1894 at the age of twenty-one, he attended Mercer University and the organizations that drew him were those that advocated unity among Christians and missionary work. He took a strong interest in the campus Young Men Christian Association

(Y.M.C.A.). He was drawn to them because of their impact in the moral and spiritual lives of his fellow students. The YMCA had adopted a fourfold purpose: the improvement of the spiritual, mental, social and physical condition of young men and his exposure to the YMCA and other students studying for the ministry influenced him to have a greater heart for missionary work<sup>3</sup>.

One of the fondest memories of his college days was of Emmet Stephens, a ministry student from the mountains of North Georgia. Emmet impressed Brittain and others in the college in many respects. He had never been far from his home, therefore, he refused to travel great distances. He even refused to travel to a northern city to represent the student body at a meeting for the Student Volunteer Movement. After Brittain convinced him to go, he returned with a great passion for foreign missions. Emmet Stephens went on to travel and serve in the mission fields of China.<sup>4</sup>



Charles M. Brittain

Early in June 1898, Brittain had an unforgettable experience. On the morning of his graduation from Mercer, he received a telegram inviting him to go to Tampa to accept a position with the Army Christian Commission during the Spanish American War. Dwight L. Moody and others had set up the Commission during the Civil War. During the time of Moody's influence, the American YMCAs sent thousands overseas as war workers. Prior to the Civil War the YMCA had nearly 5,000 volunteers. After the war, they were reduced to less than sixty. Inspired by their message of service and sacrifice, Brittain accepted the offer to work with them, happy for the opportunity to serve on a mission field.<sup>5</sup>

Brittain traveled to Florida by train. The slow trip in Tampa took place during a hot dusty summer. When he arrived to Tampa, he fell very ill from train sickness. As he wearily walked from the station, his feet sank in the deep sand on the streets and sidewalks, which were in sharp contrast to the grassy plains of Georgia. There were very few paved streets at that time. After a quick recovery, he found those who would serve with him and they settled down in a delightful private home. At that time, Tampa had about fifteen thousand residents, with some thirty or forty thousand soldiers encamped around the city. On Brittain's first Sunday in Florida, he attended the First Baptist Church of Tampa. He made many lifelong friends in that church.<sup>6</sup>

In his work with the Army Christian Commission, Brittain had many interesting experiences. He and his fellow workers held religious services wherever they could get a group of soldiers together. Even Colonel Teddy Roosevelt of the Rough Rider regiment could not deter them. Sometimes Roosevelt would not call his men together for services, but they held them anyway. They would stand close to the regimental line to preach and lead in song. During their services, a roving sentry often passed between them and the men. After the he was gone, they would cross the line to distribute songbooks and return to their side before the sentry returned. After spending some time in Tampa holding many such services, he and another from his group traveled to Cuba with the army. They camped on the hills of Santiago to minister to the sick and dying.<sup>7</sup>

### III. Steady Leadership

#### *The Beginning of Ministry*

After obtaining his diploma from college and before becoming a leader among Florida Baptists, Brittain worked in various fields of ministry. He worked as a missionary worker for the YMCA; pastor for several churches in Georgia, Florida and Alabama; co-editor and later editor for the *Florida Baptist Witness*; and teacher, business manager, financial secretary, bookkeeper and purchasing agent for Columbia College. For more than a decade, Charles M. Brittain ministered moving from position to position. It would be a mistake to view him as carelessly fluttering from place to place. Instead one should understand that in those early years of his ministry, he was zealously mining the strata of ministry until he hit his mark. His mark or purpose in life would be to provide stable leadership for Florida Baptists during some of their most challenging times.

In 1899 Reverend Charles M. Brittain was ordained to the ministry. On June 27, 1900, he married Susie Marie Moore of Macon, Georgia, with whom he had five children. One of his sons, Carson Brittain, would serve as pastor of Ancient City Baptist Church in Saint Augustine, Florida, from 1970 to 1978. He started out as a pastor in Georgia, where he served for four years. He later attended The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville for one session. Then, in 1905 he accepted the call to pastor a church in Kissimmee. He stayed with the church for two years and went on to pastor a church in Lake City. While in Lake City in 1908, he became co-editor with Frank Edwards of the *Florida Baptist Witness*. He served in that capacity for two years.<sup>8</sup>

From Lake City, he accepted the call to pastor a church in Alabama. After two years in Alabama, he returned to Florida to teach in Columbia College, where he served in many other capacities. He also served two years as editor of the *Florida Baptist Witness*. In 1917, the school conferred upon him the Doctor of Divinity degree. Later that year, the college was closed and he became the pastor of the First Baptist Church

of Ocala. During this time, he was elected in February 1, 1920 as the Assistant Secretary of the State Board of Missions. Dr. Brittain served as the Assistant Secretary for six years.<sup>9</sup>

### *Steady Ministry in Adversity*

In 1926 Dr. S. B. Rogers resigned his position as the Executive Secretary of the Florida Baptist Convention and he died August 16th, that year. In September of the same year, the Great Hurricane of 1926, a category IV hurricane, swept through South Florida. The storm broke the dike on Lake Okeechobee and killed as many as 800 people. No Florida storm in previous history had done as much property damage. It hit Fort Lauderdale, Dania, Hollywood, Hallandale and Miami. The storm worsened the already poor economic situation in South Florida. It inflicted property damages estimated at \$95,000,000. The real-estate boom then collapsed rendering those who had millions of dollars at the end of 1925 to become poor by the middle of 1926.<sup>10</sup>

Dr. Brittain was elected Executive Secretary and Treasurer of the State Board on December 8, 1926. His mother died on the Sunday prior to his election. He left Jacksonville on Monday to attend her funeral in Georgia. He received the sympathy of the attendees of the Convention. He also received the full support and confidence of Florida Baptists.<sup>11</sup> A *Witness* editor wrote, "What of the future? There is a feeling that there are many and perplexing problems ahead us. Be this as it may there is nothing surer than that the work will go right on."<sup>12</sup> As noted elsewhere Dr. Brittain was elected to succeed Dr. S. B. Rogers as Secretary and Treasurer of the State Board of Missions. Brittain was respected by Florida Baptists and his election was no surprise.

Indeed, the Secretary-Treasurer and Florida Baptists faced many perplexing problems. Dr. Brittain kept the Convention afloat in a steady course as natural and financial storms crashed upon Florida in successive waves. The following year, the convention sought to render aid to the churches that had been destroyed by the storm and the collapse of the real estate boom. However, in September 16, 1928 a second storm tore through the Palm Beach area. The storm pushed

water across Lake Okeechobee onto the north side of the lake. The killer winds changed direction pushing the water back to the southern shore in a powerful surge. The death toll of the storm was 2,500 or more. Many more people were buried in haste and never identified. Property loss was estimated at \$75,000,000.<sup>13</sup>

That same year, the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board discovered that Treasurer Carnes had defaulted in the finances of the Board for nearly one million dollars. This affected Florida churches significantly. Promises of financial relief made to churches ravaged by the hurricanes were nearly impossible to fulfill.<sup>14</sup>

In 1929 a financial, social and spiritual storm (the Great Depression) hit the entire country. Once launched the momentum of the depression created a hurricane-like spiral. The State Board of Missions had already needed to borrow money to meet its obligations but after the market crashed, they had to cut back on the work. In 1930, the budget was the smallest in years. Still, even in the midst of such adversity, the Florida Baptist Convention was the only state convention to report a gain in gifts to missions.<sup>15</sup>

By 1932 twelve million U.S. workers lost their jobs. People roamed the streets unemployed and homeless. Thousands traveled in railroad boxcars, while many walked around the country looking for work that did not exist. The homeless put together shacks made of cardboard, scrap metal, packing boxes and tarpaper. People bitterly called these communities Hoovervilles, after President Herbert Hoover. Americans experienced widespread hunger. This storm, in addition to the two previous ones, beat the life out of the state of Florida and held it to ruinous levels for nearly six years.<sup>16</sup>

During this time, churches suffered from spiritual inertia as their building debts were threatened with foreclosure. Dr. Brittain recognized the need of Florida Baptists to engage in missions, rather than to be swallowed up by the depression. He saw the missionary spirit as an antidote to the depressed state of the church. The Good News (the Gospel) held the answer for those made poor, hungry and homeless by hurricanes and financial collapse. Dr. Brittain and his administration refused to quit. They sought to win the state for Christ. As we face the



future, Secretary Brittain said, we must not forget that most of our churches have grown out of evangelistic meetings and movements.<sup>17</sup> The gospel was still the answer to prevailing circumstances.

The Convention cooperated with the Home Mission Board to plan a statewide evangelistic campaign in 1927. The campaign brought 1,137 new believers to Florida Churches. In 1934 Dr. Brittain and his administration elected a State evangelist, Reverend T. O. Reese. Reese remained with the Convention until 1943. In 1936 after a survey of the state, Reverend R. D. Carrin was elected to serve in the field of rural evangelism. By 1940 the year of Secretary Brittain's last report, 551 men had been employed as missionaries at one time or another during his term of office.<sup>18</sup>

In 1932 the American people elected a new president, Franklin Delano Roosevelt who spoke by radio to the needs of sixty million Americans. He encouraged and comforted the nation with fireside chats. In 1938 Congress passed a number of New Deal measures. Before the Great Depression, Americans seldom looked to the government for help. Because of Roosevelt and his New Deal, however, Americans began to view government in a different way. Even before the depression, Florida churches, which seldom looked to others for help, had begun to view the convention's Building and Loan Fund in a different way. They borrowed freely, ignoring their obligation to repay their debt. As late as 1940, Secretary Brittain stated, Some of the borrowing churches benefiting from the loan fund never had any serious intention of paying the same. . . . Some notes given by churches have grown old with age.<sup>19</sup>

The Depression ended as the nation witnessed the coming of World War II. Just as America entered into a new chapter, the Florida Baptist Convention entered a new one with the illness and death of Charles M. Brittain at Fort Myers on January 12, 1943. During his administration, the number of churches aided by the Board was 553. The Board helped some of these churches more than once. The Convention also created funds for students in ministerial education.<sup>20</sup> Secretary Brittain saw the Convention through to recovery and to the beginning of the glorious climb upward and advance forward which has characterized its progress in recent years.<sup>21</sup>

### *Conclusion*

In a paper published in the 1941 annual, the authors characterized Dr. Brittain as a Baptist on principle, faithful in service, compassionate in soul, conciliatory in temperament and progressive in outlook.<sup>22</sup> He saw life after the Civil War, the Spanish American War, World War I, the Hurrricanes of 1926 and 1928, The Great Depression and the beginning of World War II. Just like the place in which he was born, a land composed of granite strata, Brittain was afflicted with adversity but his steady ministry denoted the composition of a positive, resilient and stable leader always expecting better days for the convention.

END NOTES

<sup>1</sup><https://www.govhost.com/conyers-ga/hist/index.htm>

<sup>2</sup>John L. Rosser, *A History of Florida Baptists* p. 100.

<sup>3</sup>Charles M. Brittain, Early Experiences in Florida No. 1, *Florida Baptist Witness*, 1941.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Rosser, p. 101.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Stuart McIver, The Blow that Broke the Boom, *Sun Sentinel*, September 19, 1993.

<sup>11</sup>*Florida Baptist Witness*, December 9, 1926 p. 5.

<sup>12</sup>*Florida Baptist Witness*, December 16, 1926 p. 3.

<sup>13</sup>Edward Earl Joiner, *A History of Florida Baptists* p. 147.

<sup>14</sup>Rosser, p. 103.

<sup>15</sup>Joiner, p. 147.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid, p. 105.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid, p. 106.

<sup>19</sup>Rosser, P. 107.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid, p. 108.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid, p. 102.

## SOURCES

This document's key findings come as syntheses of other research works, as is evident from the repeated usage of certain sources such as *A History of Florida Baptists*, by John L. Rosser and *A History of Florida Baptists*, by Edward Earl Joiner. The author relied most heavily on these secondary sources. The key primary sources used are the early recollections of *Experiences in Florida* by Charles M. Brittain and articles from the *Baptist Witness*, such as *Florida Baptist Witness*, December 16, 1926, p. 3; *Florida Baptist Witness*, December 09, 1926, p. 9; *Florida Baptist Witness*, January 06, 1927, March 07, 1929, September 11, 18, 25, 1941; the *Handbook 2003* (fbhspt1 vv1).qxd 1/28/2004, p. 44; and Florida Baptist Historical Society files.



## LIFETIME SERVICE AS A TRANSITIONAL LEADER: CHARLES H. BOLTON

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The Hurricane of 1928 struck Palm Beach County in the middle of the afternoon on Sunday, September 16. It was probably the most devastating hurricane to have ever crossed into Florida before that time, causing over 7,000 deaths during its deadly journey between the Caribbean and Canada.

On that very day at the First Baptist Church of West Palm Beach, Reverend Charles H. Bolton's 11 A.M. and 8 P.M. sermon topics were nearly prophetic in their titles: God's Will for America and, Summer is Ended and We are Not Saved. Earlier in the day Pastor Bolton had sent the church members home upon hearing news of the impending tropical storm. However, given the limitations of metrological forecasting in those days hardly anyone anticipated how destructive this tropical disturbance would prove to be. By 8:00 P.M. Sunday, every person in West Palm Beach, of every religion, would be praying for salvation, observed Eliot Kleinberg who subsequently chronicled the death and ruination of the great Hurricane of 1928.<sup>1</sup>

As the hurricane made a direct hit on the Roaring Twenties resort town of West Palm Beach, in its path was the wooden frame structure of the 3,000-seat First Baptist Church. By 3 P.M. the tornado like winds had leveled the church building to a pile of rubble. The only object left standing in its original location above the devastation of broken beams

and shattered glass was the wooden pulpit that had been constructed in 1903. The pulpit became a symbol for the members of First Baptist and a confirmation of the Scriptural imperative that, The Word of our God shall stand forever. <sup>2</sup>

For C. H. Bolton, leading his congregation to pull together and rebuild their house of worship was probably the most challenging and character-shaping experience the middle-aged pastor had ever known. But the experience also would define the transitional leadership role Charles Bolton assumed in nearly every ministry position he held from pastor to denominational leader.



Charles H. Bolton

Among those transitional roles was his selection as the fifth executive secretary-treasurer of the Florida Baptist Convention from 1941 to 1944. Bolton holds the distinction of having served the shortest length of time—three years and 15 days—of any Florida executive secretary-treasurer.

A native of Belgreen, Alabama, Charles Bolton was born September 13, 1886, to dirt-farmer parents. At age 18, Bolton married his childhood sweetheart Lena Mae Painter (age 19) on September 20, 1904. The couple had three children named Charles, Jr. (est. birth 1912), Elinor (est. birth 1919), and Edith A. (est. birth 1923).

Although the historical record is lost, at some point Bolton felt the call of God to enter the ministry. Pursuing that call at age 26, he attended Atlanta Theological Seminary (1912-14) and then The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (1915-17).

During his years at the Louisville seminary and continuing through 1939, Charles Bolton served as a pastor in Kentucky, Alabama, and Florida. These included service at two Alabama churches: Southside

Baptist Church in Montgomery, 1917-1924 and the Norwood Baptist Church in Birmingham, 1924-1927.

The most notable milestone during Pastor Bolton's transitional ministry at Norwood was to lead the Birmingham church to change its name for the fifth time in its history. Since its organization in 1885, the church had been known as: Third Baptist Church (1885); Second Baptist Church (1886); North Birmingham Baptist Church (1904); Twenty-First Avenue Baptist Church (1907); and finally the Norwood Baptist Church in 1924. Today, the church is no longer in existence.<sup>3</sup>

With the absence of a historical record, it can be assumed that Norwood, like so many churches, was experiencing an identity crisis. Changing its name was a likely attempt to not only define itself, but better market itself to the neighborhood that was its mission field. And the young pastor provided the leadership to help the congregation evolve through the identity change.

In 1927, Bolton was called as pastor of First Baptist Church, West Palm Beach, Florida. He was called to a church that was experiencing serious financial difficulties. The church had recently constructed a church tabernacle that could accommodate 3,000 persons, although the church's official membership was less than 900. Bolton was expected to lead the church to reduce its sizeable financial debt of \$167,000.<sup>4</sup>

No sooner had C. H. Bolton begun to lead the church membership to making a significant reduction in its debt, than the great Hurricane of 1928 struck and the debt-laden tabernacle was destroyed. To recover from a devastating natural disaster was significant in and of itself. But the effort to raise financial resources to pay off debt and rebuild was hindered initially by the failure of the return by many of the church's winter visitors, who had provided much of the church's financial support. And before too long, with the crash of the New York Stock Exchange in October, 1929, additional financial woes and economic turmoil came with the onset of America's Great Depression.

Although the church continued to meet in rented facilities, Bolton kept the vision of rebuilding before the congregation. Unfortunately it was not until February 1933 that the congregation was able to start

construction of a new sanctuary at a new location in downtown West Palm Beach. Assured of God's help, combined with the ingenuity of using salvageable material from the hurricane-destroyed building and volunteer labor, the rebuilding began. As soon as the walls and roof were in place the church members began meeting in the shell of the building. The rebuilding took nearly five years to complete. The church's written history proudly recounts the effort as being a church built on faith when the new building was finally completed and dedicated in 1939.<sup>5</sup>

The economic depression and slow-paced building program certainly did not distract from the church's mission of reaching people for Jesus Christ. The church membership grew by 39 percent in a dozen years to 1,438 from 876. And mission giving increased by 22 percent with the church contributing over \$2,400 through the Cooperative Program by the year 1938. And the church was debt free.

Bolton's service to the West Palm Beach church lasted 12 years, the longest tenure of any ministry position he held in his lifetime. And although most transitional roles are short-term, the economic realities of the time combined with Bolton's commitment to help the congregation transition into a new church facility, contributed to his extended tenure.

In May 1939 Bolton resigned from this Florida pastorate and made his first foray into denominational service. The Southern Baptist Convention's Relief and Annuity Board (now the Annuity Board) extended an invitation to Bolton to serve as what was then called associate secretary of the Board (which today would probably be comparable to the position of vice president).

Service with the Relief and Annuity Board was short-lived. By 1941, Bolton was ready to resign. Apparently, Bolton originally viewed the opportunity as a transition into a more significant leadership role at the Board than was realized. Nearly 30 years later, in a handwritten letter to a friend, Bolton explained his rationale for resigning from service with the Relief and Annuity Board. As you probably know, I went to the Annuity Board in '39 with the promise the Executive Secretaryship [sic] would be open to me in three and one-half years. After I got there the Executive Secretary changed his mind about



retiring.<sup>6</sup> At the time, the Executive Secretary of the Relief and Annuity Board was Thomas J. Watts, who served between 1927-1947.

Meanwhile back in Florida, on May 7, 1941, the Executive Committee of the State Board of Missions convened to learn that Dr. C. M. Brittain, after 15 years of service was resigning as executive secretary-treasurer of the Board. Brittain cited a heart condition that was providing only half of my original heart power left after the years of strenuous service that I have given to my and your work. . .<sup>7</sup>

Upon learning of Brittain's decision, the Board members wasted little time at the same meeting to have a time of prayer and accept nominations for a replacement executive secretary-treasurer. David M. Gardner of St. Petersburg made a nominating speech on behalf of his friend Charles H. Bolton. Other members nominated Roland Q. Leavell. Two written ballots and a reported decided trend in Dr. Bolton's favor, resulted in a final unanimous vote for Bolton. Telephone contact was made with Bolton at the Relief and Annuity Board. Bolton indicated he would meet with the executive committee members on May 14th during the Southern Baptist Convention meeting and provide an answer.<sup>8</sup>

With little fanfare, Charles Houston Bolton became the fifth executive secretary-treasurer of the State Board of Missions. And by the Board's next quarterly meeting—July 25, 1941—Bolton had assumed his new role. This would be another significant transitional role for Bolton who led the State Convention during America's years at war.

By the time Bolton had made his first report to the State Convention on the work of the State Board of Missions, the United States had entered World War II as a result of the December 7 attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. The following January Bolton reported to the State Convention that, Trying times demand strong men. Today offers scant room for weaklings. We must quit ourselves like men and witness in our daily living to the presence and power of the Spirit of our Blessed Lord.<sup>9</sup>

Despite the implications of the war, Bolton praised Florida Baptists for their increased missions giving and chided them for the decrease in baptisms during the prior year. He reminded everyone of the great

missions challenge that existed within the state. There are literally scores of places where new churches ought to be organized. Many places should have missions set-up and manned by the churches near by. An enlarged enlistment program should be inaugurated, Bolton stressed. And he called upon churches to provide religious services to assist chaplains serving in the growing number of Florida military posts.<sup>10</sup>

Turning to another subject, Bolton expressed concern over entirely too little being given as relief to our aged infirmed ministers and their families. He called upon churches to take quarterly offerings to provide financial assistance to those pastors who did not benefit from funds from the SBC Relief and Annuity Board.<sup>11</sup>

Following up on his concern over the financial security of retired ministers, Bolton rallied behind the cause of former pastors who were then serving as war-time military chaplains. He explained to the State Board of Missions during a 1942 meeting that these chaplains were not technically employed by a church, and as a result no financial contribution was being made toward the minister s retirement annuity. The Board approved a resolution requesting the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee to contribute the three percent dues for such chaplains as are members of the Ministers Retirement Plan.<sup>12</sup> It is not known whether or not the Executive Committee responded affirmatively.

Two years later—April 25, 1944—the Board approved a recommendation by Bolton to include church secretaries, educational directors and song leaders in the Ministers Retirement Plan administered by the SBC Relief and Annuity Board.<sup>13</sup>

These several actions obviously reflected a sensitivity Charles Bolton had acquired while serving with the Relief and Annuity Board.

In contrast to the concern for the retirement benefits of church staffs, the Board, during its March 3, 1942 meeting directed Dr. Bolton to write Congress protesting the placing of church employees under the Social Security program.<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately, the Board minutes do not reflect any rationale or discussion of the action. It could be assumed that the heart of the issue were the anticipated costs of the Social Security contributions and its affect upon local church budgets.

The perceived intrusion by the Federal government into church personnel issues again came before the Board a year later—March 12, 1943—when the Board approved a petition to Florida's congressional delegation requesting them to use their influence with the National War Labor Board to exempt churches and religious organizations from the operation of the salary and hours law.<sup>15</sup> Again the Board minutes are silent on the discussion which fostered such action.

During Bolton's brief tenure, much of the Board's attention and actions revolved around providing financial assistance in the starting of new mission work, providing loans to churches, and granting pastoral salary assistance to mission church pastors. Inasmuch as the Board paid close attention to the management of the Cooperative Program income budget, Bolton reported to the Board during its quarterly meetings that despite a war economy, Cooperative Program gifts were exceeding budget requirements. This infusion of extra cash helped pay off some of the debt carried forward from the Depression years, including a mortgage on the state offices facility known as the Rogers Building.

In addition to those accomplishments, there was at least one significant action that had long-term implications for the State Convention. This was the initiation of a partnership between the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board and the State Convention to jointly participate in the metropolitan mission work within Florida. Up until the mid-1940s the State Board of Missions earmarked funds to employ field missionaries to direct and develop the starting of new mission work across the state. These missionaries generally were assigned to the metropolitan areas with the greatest population growth. But the employment and assignment of these field missionaries were limited by available Cooperative Program receipts. To the chagrin of some State Board of Missions members, the Home Mission Board wanted to unilaterally assign its own missionary personnel within the state. By 1943 Home Mission Board leadership began serious negotiations with C. H. Bolton to develop a jointly funded city missions program. The State Board of Missions finally approved in 1944 a working agreement between the two entities to jointly foster the city missions program within Florida. The agreement provided that funding

of the program would be on a fifty-fifty shared basis, while supervision of the mission personnel would be under the complete jurisdiction of the State Secretary. The Board learned that these city missionaries were to be selected by the local association, but employed by the State Board of Missions.<sup>16</sup> This was a significant development in how the State Convention would do the task of missions within Florida for years to come.

C. H. Bolton resigned from his post as executive secretary-treasurer during the April 25, 1944 meeting of the State Board of Missions. In a letter read to the Board, Bolton noted that he had an active love for the pastorate. He went on to explain that he had served in denominational work for five years and now under what I trust is the leadership of the Holy Spirit was resigning. He announced plans to accept the call of the Riverside Baptist Church in Miami as pastor. The Board responded by approving a motion filled with the deepest sort of regrets and yet with great joy in his following what he believes to be God's leadership.<sup>17</sup>

Several months later, the *Florida Baptist Witness* devoted two pages of tributes offered by various persons. Some of those comments offered insights into how these individuals viewed the character and leadership style of Charles Bolton. He possesses the unusual gift of understanding and sympathy enabling him to get at the heart of a matter with clarity and decision, wrote J. Harrison Griffin. He noted that Bolton's bold frankness is one of his great assets. A member of the State Board of Missions, B. C. Land, observed, Dr. Bolton's business ability and knowledge impressed me greatly. He is as much at home in the world of business as he is in the world of religion.<sup>18</sup>

Service with the Miami church lasted for five years until 1949. Bolton's most notable achievement at Riverside was to lead the church to purchase its first bus and to preside over the development of plans to construct a new Sunday School facility.<sup>19</sup> Bolton's leadership during those five years had a positive effect upon the growth of the congregation. Riverside Baptist Church experienced a seven percent increase in membership to a high of 2,357 while averaging 95 baptisms per year. Reflecting the church's commitment to world missions, the total dollars given through the Cooperative Program increased 18

percent amounting to over \$7,000 being contributed by 1949.<sup>20</sup>

The call and opportunity to return to denominational service was presented to Bolton in February, 1949, when the directors of the Southern Baptist Foundation in Nashville offered him the opportunity to become the agency's first executive secretary. Bolton began his work the following May, and served until January 1, 1953. Certainly this was a transitional period for the agency as Bolton sought to bring the agency from infancy into a self-sufficient, independent and proactive role in Southern Baptist life.

Although the Foundation had existed as a corporate entity since 1947, it was administered by the SBC Executive Committee treasurer and a board of directors comprised of Executive Committee members. The employment of a full-time executive was finally authorized in 1947, but it took the board some time to secure the necessary operating funds and recruit the agency's first fulltime executive. The agency continues to be responsible for the custody, investment and management of funds received as gifts and bequests that are to benefit Southern Baptist agencies and institutions.<sup>21</sup>

Charles Bolton made one final career change that served as a transitional phase in his own life. At age 67 Bolton retired from the denominational post to return to the pastorate to conclude his ministry. He returned to Florida to serve as pastor of the First Baptist Church, Avon Park. His few years at the church (1953-1956) could be characterized as caretaker years. Although the 770 plus membership did not increase appreciably, Pastor Bolton managed to baptize an average 22 persons each year and led the congregation to earmark ten percent of its total gifts to the Cooperative Program.

Throughout his ever-changing professional career, Charles H. Bolton remained popular among Florida Baptists. Perhaps because of his reputation, or his statesman qualities, Bolton in 1928 was first elected by the Florida Baptist State Convention to serve on the State Board of Missions. His service continued for ten years. In 1939 Bolton was elected as president of the State Convention and was re-elected in 1946. And between 1937 and 1963 he served continuously on the Stetson University board of trustees.

At age 70, Charles Bolton was determined not to sit still in retirement. Before his death on November 11, 1973, at age 87, Bolton served as interim pastor in 40 churches. At the time of his death Bolton was living in Thomasville, Georgia, but was buried in Oaklawn Cemetery in Jacksonville, Florida.

END NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Kleinberg, Eliot, *Black Cloud: The Great Florida Hurricane of 1928* (Carroll and Graf Publishers: New York, NY, 2003), p. 63.

<sup>2</sup>Anon., *The History of First Baptist Church of West Palm Beach*. (First Baptist Church: West Palm Beach, Fla., 2001), p. 6.

<sup>3</sup>Allen, Lee N.; *Born for Missions: Birmingham Baptist Association, 1833-1983* (The Association: Birmingham, Ala., 1984), p. 50.

<sup>4</sup>Op. cit., *The History of First Baptist Church of West Palm Beach*, p. 5.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid. pgs 6-7.

<sup>6</sup>Charles H. Bolton, personal correspondence, March 17, 1973.

<sup>7</sup>Minutes, May 7, 1941, State Board of Missions, p. 797.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid, p. 800.

<sup>9</sup>1941 Florida Baptist Annual, p. 17.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid, p. 23

<sup>11</sup>Ibid, pgs. 18-19.

<sup>12</sup>Minutes, March 3, 1942, State Board of Missions, pgs. 821-822.

<sup>13</sup>Minutes, April 25, 1944, State Board of Missions, p. 861

<sup>14</sup>Op. cit., March 3, 1942, p. 825.

<sup>15</sup>Minutes, March 12, 1943, State Board of Missions, p. 839

<sup>16</sup>Minutes, January 25, 1944, State Board of Missions, pgs. 851-854.

<sup>17</sup>Op. cit., April 25, 1944, p. 863.

<sup>18</sup> Appreciations of Reverend C. H. Bolton, D.D., L.H.D., *Florida Baptist Witness*, July 13, 1944, Vol. LVII, No. 28., p. 7.

<sup>19</sup>Anon., *Seventieth Anniversary History* (Riverside Baptist Church, Miami, Fla., 1991) p. 17.

<sup>20</sup>1949 Miami Baptist Association Annual, no numbered page for Statistical Table.

<sup>21</sup>Cox, Norman W., editor. *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists*, Vol. I, (Broadman Press: Nashville, Tennessee, 1958), p. 1263.

## HOMER G. LINDSAY, SR.

### ***Don S. Hepburn***

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In the seven-month transition between the executive secretary-treasurer administrations of Charles H. Bolton and the legendary John Maguire, two significant events occurred that may be never more than mere footnotes in the history of the Florida Baptist State Convention. However, those events not only dramatically changed how executive secretary-treasurers of the State Board of Missions were employed in the future, they also elevated Jacksonville pastor Homer G. Lindsay, Sr., to the status as the only acting executive secretary in the 120-year history of the Board.

Before Homer Lindsay became a footnote in Florida Baptist history, the State Board of Missions unanimously selected two other men to serve as executive secretary-treasurer. But these men's subsequent responses promoted Lindsay into an acting secretary leadership role that lasted nearly seven months. After utilizing a longtime and swift replacement process for selecting and employing an executive secretary-treasurer—which suffered a major set-back—the Board set into motion a more thoughtful process that became the standard for years to come.

The series of unique events were set into motion beginning with the Board's 1944 annual meeting held at First Baptist Church, Jacksonville. Although this was to have been just another meeting, the Board was surprised to learn from C. H. Bolton that he was resigning as executive



secretary-treasurer. Bolton cited God's leadership to return to the pastorate, Bolton's first love.<sup>1</sup> By his action, Bolton became the one Floridian with the shortest service as executive secretary-treasurer - three years and 15 days. The Board expressed its deepest sort of regret at Bolton's decision and moved on.

As had been the prior 60-year practice for replacing five other former executive secretaries, the Board immediately opened the floor for nominations. The nominations were taken by secret ballot. The resulting nominees were: Thomas Hansen, H. M.

Liechty, Wallace R. Rogers, J. H. Griffin, Roland Q. Leavell, Homer G. Lindsay and T. M. Johns. With the list of nominees before them, the Board members proceeded to prepare secret ballots to select the person to be the next executive secretary. State Convention President Thomas Hansen received 29 out of a possible 33 votes cast, leading the Board to vote unanimously to elect Thomas Hansen, pastor, Main Street Baptist Church, Jacksonville, as the new executive secretary-treasurer of the Florida Baptist Convention.<sup>2</sup>

The following month in late May, the full Board was convened at a called meeting to hear Thomas Hansen's response to the Board's action. Hansen read a statement of appreciation concerning his election but declined the appointment. He said he felt it would be wise to nominate a committee of seven to serve as a search committee and make a recommendation to the Board for a vote.<sup>3</sup>

The first response came from R. C. Floyd who moved that Dr. Bolton be asked to reconsider and stay with the Board. Bolton asked that such a motion not be considered.<sup>4</sup>

Almost immediately, three Board members made motions to nominate persons for the executive secretary position. Finally Lee



Homer G. Lindsay, Sr.

Nichols moved that a committee of seven be elected by secret ballot, and then they would recommend a man for Secretary, in case none of those nominated today will accept.<sup>5</sup> The Board agreed to create the seven-member committee, but determined that the State Convention president and the State Board of Missions president should constitute two of the seven members. The Board took a ten-minute break to caucus.

When the Board reconvened they took a secret ballot with the understanding that the high five—those five persons who received the most votes—would be made a member of the search committee. The result was a search committee comprised of Roland Q. Leavell, A. W. Reaves, Hoke H. Shirley, T. S. Boehm, W. G. Stracener, in addition to State Convention President Thomas Hansen and State Board of Missions President Homer G. Lindsay, Sr.<sup>6</sup>

Apparently, in an effort to help the committee in their search, Board members again began making nominating speeches for various men. Among those nominated were Board members Wallace R. Rogers and J. Harrison Griffin, and Home Mission Board employee Solomon Dowis. The Board agreed to ballot on these three persons and elect the man with two-thirds of the vote as executive secretary. The ballot produced 23 votes for Wallace R. Rogers, who was serving as pastor, First Baptist Church, Pensacola. The Board then voted unanimously to elect Rogers.<sup>7</sup>

But between May and September, a curious thing happened. Wallace Rogers like his predecessor Thomas Hansen, apparently had second thoughts about accepting the post. The Board's Executive Committee must have informally agreed that Board President Homer Lindsay should be appointed acting secretary-treasurer. These two actions are based on secondary sources because there is no record in the Board minutes regarding either Rogers' resignation or any recorded action appointing Lindsay as the acting secretary. In fact, minutes from the Board's Executive Committee's very next meeting—September 12, 1944—contain no information that the Board was officially notified about the transition of leadership. In the course of its agenda, the Committee approved a variety of recommendations, including several that authorized the acting secretary to approve pastoral aid requests,

student scholarships and church grants. Yet no mention is made as to who was the acting executive secretary. The only official action was the Committee's approval that Brother H. G. Lindsay be authorized to borrow a Dictaphone machine that is here in the State Board office.<sup>8</sup> Most likely Lindsay was provided a Dictaphone to respond to official correspondence coming into the executive secretary's office and to carry out actions approved by the Board.

Some of the events on the transition of leadership were reported by the *Florida Baptist Witness*. The *Witness* announced the resignation of C. H. Bolton by means of a front page photograph and a short cutline on April 27 and an editorial tribute on May 11, 1944. The *Witness* did note the election and subsequent decline to serve response by Thomas Hanson in its May 18 edition. However, neither the election of Wallace Rogers, nor the appointment of Homer Lindsay was officially reported in the *Witness*.

Corroboration from other sources confirmed Lindsay's appointment as acting executive secretary. The first of these was an October 1944 article, in which the *Witness* noted Lindsay's fifth anniversary of service as pastor of First Baptist Church, Jacksonville. The article stated, "In addition to his pastoral duties, Dr. Lindsay is President of the Florida Baptist State Mission Board, and since the resignation of Dr. Bolton has been serving as Acting Executive Secretary-Treasurer."<sup>9</sup> A second verification appeared sometime later, after the Board's election of John Maguire as the new executive secretary. A "Welcome Dr. Maguire" article, penned by Homer Lindsay, was published in January the following year. Lindsay stated, "It was almost seven months ago this position became vacant by the resignation of Dr. Bolton. At the request of the State Board of Missions, I assumed the added duties of Acting Executive Secretary-Treasurer until a successor could be elected."<sup>10</sup>

Another documented source is the 1944 issue of the *Florida Baptist Annual*. In the State Board of Missions' report to the State Convention, the printed report under the byline of Homer G. Lindsay, acting executive secretary-treasurer. He reported the resignation of C. H. Bolton. Finding themselves without a Secretary and in need of time to find a suitable successor, your Board asked the writer as President of

the State Mission Board to assume the duties of the Acting Executive Secretary-Treasurer until a successor should be chosen. For the past seven months your humble servant has been acting in this capacity while a Nominating Committee of the Board has been in search of God's man for the place. While the responsibility of pastoring a large downtown church and acting as your Executive Secretary-Treasurer has been almost more than one man could bear, yet the membership of the First Baptist Church of Jacksonville have been most sympathetic, and we have accounted it as a labor of love for our beloved denomination.<sup>11</sup>

During another called meeting of the Board just a month prior to the 1945 Florida Baptist State Convention annual meeting, the report of the search committee of seven was presented. Their recommendation was that the Board elect as the new executive secretary-treasurer, John Maguire, then pastor of the Calvary Baptist Church, Birmingham, Alabama.<sup>12</sup> Although the official records do not provide any background on the search process, John Maguire asserted in an interview years later that he was the first person to have received a unanimous support of the search committee. They had not been unanimous on the others. . . five men had failed, Maguire recalled.<sup>13</sup>

Apparently, Maguire was not present at the December 1944, Board meeting. So Committee Chairman Wallace Rogers left the meeting to make a long distance telephone call to John Maguire. Rogers subsequently returned and interrupted the transaction of business to report on his call to Dr. Maguire, relaying that the newly elected leader happily accepted the position to become Florida State Executive Secretary-Treasurer.<sup>14</sup>

By appointing a search committee and responding to its recommendation, the Board made a dramatic departure from its former procedure for employing an executive secretary-treasurer. No longer would impromptu nominations be the order of the day. Subsequently, the three men who followed Maguire as executive secretary-treasurer were all identified and screened by a search committee and recommended to the full Board for approval.

Subsequent to Maguire's election as the sixth executive secretary, *Florida Baptist Witness* Editor E. D. Solomon wrote a tribute to Lindsay

in the state Baptist newspaper. We owe a debt of gratitude to Dr. Homer Lindsay, pastor, First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, who has served as secretary for the past six months. Solomon noted that Lindsay had given himself diligently to this work while keeping up the work of a great pastorate. The editor went on to conclude, Dr. Bolton left the work well organized and in tip top shape. It has suffered none under Dr. Lindsay's wise leadership.<sup>15</sup>

Lindsay only took credit for one significant action while serving in the interim position. He reported to the State Convention in January, 1945, your acting secretary has increased the amount in this [Florida Baptist Convention] reserve fund from \$50,005.50 reported last year, to \$99,990.00 as of January 1, 1945.<sup>16</sup> This action was significant because income between the Depression years and the end of World War II had been sluggish. But it more likely reflected a personal agenda Lindsay set for the Convention to be out of debt and proceed on a cash basis. It was the same agenda used by the then 37-year old pastor when he was called to lead First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, out of serious financial difficulties, just four years earlier.

When the church called Lindsay as pastor in 1940, morale of the congregation was very low. The church faced a serious financial crisis that included a \$125,000 mortgage, the default on several loans that had resulted in the foreclosure on buildings used for Christian educational purposes, and members and their offerings leaving by the droves. Using a slogan of Debt Free in '43 Lindsay managed to eliminate the indebtedness and set the standard pay as you go for all of the church's future building programs.<sup>17</sup> And to rebuild the membership, Lindsay began a vigorous evangelistic pulpit work that not only attracted large numbers of people, it became the hallmark of Homer Lindsay's 33-year ministry at the Jacksonville church.<sup>18</sup>

Between 1940 and 1973, the church's membership grew to 5,652 from 1,939, making it the largest congregation in the state. The church's annual baptisms record grew from 35 to over 635, which in 1973 was a statewide record and 14 more than the baptisms reported by Miami's Allapattah Baptist Church. And although First Baptist's Cooperative Program gifts increased from \$1,917 to over \$34,000 by 1973, the

giving was not a pace setter. The fact is many churches with one half First Baptist s membership were giving as much or more through the Cooperative Program.<sup>19</sup>

Lindsay had been elected to the State Board of Missions while serving his first Florida church in 1942. The Board quickly elected the Tennessee native as the Board president and chairman of the Executive Committee, a leadership position he held through 1945. This concluded Lindsay s service and relationship with the Board for 25 years. It was not until 1970 that he was re-elected to the Board for another three-year term.

Despite his denominational historical footnote status, Lindsay holds the distinction of being one of Florida Baptists —if not Southern Baptists —most influential and successful pastors of his day. The hallmark of his life and ministry was to lead the First Baptist Church of Jacksonville, to become one of Florida s largest and most successful downtown churches.

END NOTES

<sup>1</sup>State Board of Missions Minutes, April 25, 1944, p. 863.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 863.

<sup>3</sup>State Board of Missions Minutes, May 23, 1944, p. 866.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 866.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 866.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 866.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., pgs. 866-67.

<sup>8</sup>State Board of Missions Minutes, September 12, 1944, p. 872.

<sup>9</sup>*Florida Baptist Witness*, October 5, 1944, p. 9.

<sup>10</sup>*Florida Baptist Witness*, January 18, 1945, p. 8.

<sup>11</sup>*Florida Baptist Annual*, 1944, pgs. 56-57.

<sup>12</sup>State Board of Missions Minutes, December 5, 1944, p. 874.

<sup>13</sup>Interview with John Maguire, Florida Baptist Convention oral history project (Tape transcript 85-058, p. 2), December 12, 1985.

<sup>14</sup>State Board of Missions Minutes, December 5, 1944, p. 874.

<sup>15</sup>*Florida Baptist Witness*, January 11, 1945, p. 4.

<sup>16</sup>*Florida Baptist Annual*, 1944, p. 61.

<sup>17</sup>Wall, Belton S., *A Tale to be Told* (First Baptist Church: Jacksonville, Fla., 1999), p. 120.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>19</sup>*Florida Baptist Annual*

# JOHN MAGUIRE AND FAVORED FLORIDA

***Jerry M. Windsor***

*Secretary-Treasurer*

*Florida Baptist Historical Society*



John Henry Maguire was the son of a Primitive Baptist and a shouting Methodist.<sup>1</sup> He was born in the Indian Territory on February 25, 1900.<sup>2</sup> His father was a blacksmith and he was the eighth of twelve children born to Thomas Oscar Maguire and Sarilda Munday Maguire.<sup>3</sup>

John quit school in the fourth or fifth grade and got a job handling ice in a store in town.<sup>4</sup> This work continued while Maguire remained at home under a rather austere but pious family rule. There were no nearby churches for him to attend as a child but his family read the Bible together and had times of devotion and prayer. His father had a theology that espoused everything happened was supposed to happen and salvation was divinely predetermined by one being either saved or lost. Family religion had a frontier recklessness and an independent bent. Sarilda Maguire felt that a person could be saved but could also fall from grace. This amalgamation of theology produced a family that had no local church home but just went where there was a religious group.<sup>5</sup>

The family later moved to St. Joe.<sup>6</sup> Upon moving there Sarilda Maguire began taking the children to the Methodist church and John and his younger sisters and a younger brother were sprinkled and became members of the Methodist church.

## Feeling

In these early years Maguire had three very special influences upon his life. One was his mother who always seemed to be strong and



helpful for him. Another was Mother Walker who was an invalid in the community and the area matriarch. She was bed ridden but had powerful social and religious influence even though she was not able to attend church. The third influence was Uncle Billy Jones a deacon at the local Baptist church. These three people made spiritual and psychological impressions on Maguire that caused him to choose to be converted at age twelve and join the Baptist church.<sup>7</sup>

Maguire later recalled in an interview that a call to Christian service came to him as a teenager. He shared with J. H. Hunt, his pastor and then there came a feeling that I . . . that the Lord was calling me for some special work.<sup>8</sup>

As most preachers do, Hunt concluded a personal call to service meant a call to preach and arranged immediately for Maguire to preach at a later Sunday evening union service at the church. The Baptists, Methodists, and probably some Presbyterians from the area were present.

The pastor did a rather unusual thing. He would not permit Maguire to tell he was going to preach and neither did he announce it until the very time of the preaching hour. That is when the pastor announced his surprise. He told the waiting congregation that one of our very own boys is going to preach for us today, Brother Johnny Maguire. Chaos ensued.

Mrs. Bullner, a lady in the church heard this surprise announcement and publicly stood and said, If this church has come to a place like this, they can get along without me. Come on children. Then she and a Mrs. Meador and her two children left the church building with the sound of great laughter from people in the house.<sup>9</sup> These six leaving and the ridicule of the laughter left a scar that could have been avoided.

Interestingly enough it would be twenty years before Maguire would become a pastor. There were years of preparation, education, and Sunday School service before Maguire became pastor of First Baptist Church in Florala, Alabama.<sup>10</sup>

### You Can't Preach With an Empty Head

The feeling call that Maguire received was first interpreted as a call to missionary service in Africa. This meant that formal education had to be

sought. This feeling call stayed with Maguire all through his education and preparation years. When asked about the direction and response to this call, Mrs. Maguire later replied that when they had the experience and education to go the Foreign Mission Board in the World War II years did not have the money to send them.

The intensity of the call increased. When the Southern Baptist Convention launched the 75 Million Campaign they promoted a calling out the called Sunday for the local churches. This particular emphasis put direct possibilities before those who had expressed an interest in church vocations. There was a challenge to make the decision public and to follow through with proper experience factors and academic training.

John Maguire told Brother Hunt, his pastor, about the persistent call and Brother Jones, a deacon in the church, told Maguire that if the Lord's calling you to preach. . . then He is calling you to get an education. As a matter of fact, Brother Jones went so far as to say,

You can't preach with an empty head.<sup>11</sup> This challenge helped to encourage Maguire to find a way to get training for Christian vocational work.

they were callused

Quitting school in the third or fourth grade has never been a good entree for college work. Maguire realized he had to find a school that would take an eighteen-year-old and give him another chance. That school was San Marcus Baptist Academy in San Marcus, Texas.<sup>12</sup> Maguire said he went to San Marcus with two pairs of trousers, a grey



John H. Maguire

sweater, and 33 cents.<sup>13</sup> His intention was to work his way through school. The president asked to see his hands. When Maguire produced callused hands, the president felt confident he would work and told him, You'll start to work in the morning digging ditches.

Maguire worked his way through high school at San Marcus and then entered Rusk College in Texas (1921-1922). The school closed and he transferred to Howard Payne College in Brownwood, Texas (1924-1926) and received his A. B. degree. He did graduate work at George Washington University in Washington, D.C. (1926-1927) and in 1934-1935 attended The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky.

Dr. Maguire had some significant people to come into his life at San Marcus and at Howard Payne. At San Marcus it was Mrs. Kirby and Jessie Guy Smith, a history teacher. At Howard Payne it was Dr. Thomas Taylor, President of Howard Payne, Dr. Shelton, a history teacher, and Dr. Jewel Daughtery, a medical doctor. Dr. Maguire in later years referred to each of these people as heroes in his life.<sup>14</sup>

I didn't go huntin him, he came huntin me!

Clyde Merrill was born in Heflin, Alabama on March 19, 1910. Her father was a lawyer there and the family was very active in the Baptist church. Her father taught the men's Sunday School class and her mother taught the ladies Sunday School class. The family had a great reputation in Alabama for public service. The maternal grandfather of Clyde had nine children and four of the boys played football at the University of Alabama, and all four were Phi Beta Kappa. An Uncle of Clyde was a Lieutenant Governor of Alabama. When Clyde was 18 years of age her father became a circuit judge and the family moved to Anniston, Alabama.

Clyde was one of six children and graduated from high school at age 15. She attended college at Alabama College (now the University of Montevallo) majoring in English and minoring in history. She served as president of the Alabama College B.S.U. for three years.

After graduating from high school Clyde served one summer as a waitress at the Mentone, Alabama religious encampment. It was there

that she met John Maguire who was attending a Sunday School conference.<sup>15</sup> Although John was ten years older they immediately began dating (she was 17 and he was 27).

Clyde Maguire had gone through her own religious crisis and call. When she was fourteen years of age a student from Howard College had challenged her and others as to a personal call to serve. Clyde later stated, I know the Lord had a special place for me from that week on.<sup>16</sup> Her commitment and zeal were genuine and when she met the highly motivated Sunday School worker from the southwest, her life's direction was somewhat sealed. Clyde finished college at age 19 and went to Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and graduated at age 21. She and John married on September 3, 1931, exactly four years from the day they met.

Mrs. Maguire was once asked about the time she and Dr. Maguire got acquainted. She replied that they met in Alabama and, I didn't go huntin him, he came huntin me.<sup>17</sup>

### Very happy years

John Maguire felt a call to ministry before a call to be pastor.<sup>18</sup> The call to serve as pastor came at Mentone Baptist Assembly where he and Mrs. Maguire were attending a conference. This pastoral call came when Maguire was 36 years of age and that call was immediately verified. Upon this special call from God, he told Mrs. Maguire that he would accept the first church that calls me. Within seven days, three churches had contacted him. They were the first churches that had talked to Maguire in Alabama about pastoral work, so he and Mrs. Maguire saw the immediate hand of God at work.

Their obedience to accept their calling was rewarded as they went to First Baptist Church, Florala, Alabama, as pastor and wife. The Maguires spent three happy years there (1936-1939) and Mrs. Maguire recalled, The day we left, it was raining, and it was raining inside the car.<sup>19</sup> Dr. Maguire felt much was learned in that first pastorate because the church needed to be organized better and he felt that organization was one of his skills.

Calvary Baptist Church of Birmingham, Alabama, extended a pastoral call to Dr. Maguire and he and his family went and served there six good years (1939-1945). Out of this experience Dr. Maguire learned to have a clear cut understanding about every aspect of the call. He learned that a written call was best and a detailed call was needed.<sup>20</sup> The Birmingham church was broke. They didn't even have a bank account. Dr. Maguire seemed to feel that God had again placed him in a situation where he could use his gifts. This time the gifts of fund raising and budget promotion were needed.<sup>21</sup> God gave him the grace and gumption to do the work.

I thought we had an understanding

The Maguire family was not needing to leave Alabama and had no particular ambition to go anywhere else. Dr. and Mrs. Maguire were well known, well received, and happy serving in their chosen state.<sup>22</sup> Dr. Maguire had served 18 years there and Mrs. Maguire had lived there all her life except for seminary days at Southwestern.

Mrs. Maguire later recalled that she knew that, Wherever the Lord called John, he called me. However she admitted that being a native Alabamian and near her family was so nice that she was not happy at the prospect of moving to Florida. She said, I never had even prayed to stay in Alabama. I just thought the Lord and I had an understanding. . .<sup>23</sup>

How have we displeased you?  
That you are going to send us to Florida. . .

The Maguires coming to Florida was a miracle in itself. The State Board of Missions did not reach out to them.<sup>24</sup> The search committee was split. There was no house, there was debt, an anti-mission spirit was in many of the churches, travel was very difficult in the War years, the office had been vacant for a year and it seemed nobody wanted the job.

In addition, Dr. Maguire had four basic requirements. He had decided that the seven member search committee had to be unanimous. He also determined that the complete State Board of Missions would

have to extend an unanimous call. Having learned his moving expenses lesson in Birmingham, he required moving expenses, and he and Mrs. Maguire were broke, so he needed a house.

All four of these requirements were met and Dr. Maguire came on board as Executive Secretary-Treasurer in January 1945. Only then did he find out he had to pay monthly rent to live in the new \$12,000 house.

Mrs. Maguire was not very happy with the decision. She was a faithful loving wife, but she recalled, I thought Lord! How have we displeased you? That you are going to send us to Florida. . . .<sup>25</sup>

### Every family brought their own light

Someone tried to help Mrs. Maguire with the move from Alabama to Florida and stated that Florida was a mission field and needed help. Mrs. Maguire replied, Alabama needed help too.<sup>26</sup>

Preachers are always looking for some verification that they made the right move when they uproot their families and go from one place to another.<sup>27</sup> Moving is stressful and moving a reluctant family can be heart-breaking and traumatic. Any bit of divine intervention and authentication is usually welcomed. Mrs. Maguire seemed to need that special assurance<sup>28</sup> and received some upon their move to Florida.

We hadn t been here more than a month or six weeks before John had to preach at the Maxville Church down in the Black Creek Association. Now Black Creek is in wonderful shape now, but back then, I expect it was the most backward association in our state. And he was to preach one Sunday night and the children and I went with him. And we walked in and the church didn t have electric lights, every family that came brought their lantern and put it in there. And I thought, ooh, if my friends in Birmingham can see me now. But there was really a beauty about the service, that every family brought their own light and the more folks that were there, the more lighted the church was. So while right at first I had some misgivings, they vanished

real quickly. And I saw that the Lord. . . while he didn't send John to a foreign mission field, he put him into a field and sent all the foreigners to him.<sup>29</sup>

### 10 dozen roses

Dr. Maguire hit the ground running. When he came to Florida there were a total of ten staff members on the convention staff. He began to reach out to pastors, staff, churches, and other state conventions to bring in highly qualified and motivated leaders.

There were six things that bothered Dr. Maguire deeply when he moved to Florida. (1) there was debt; (2) twenty-five percent of the churches were giving nothing to missions; (3) the convention needed to be better organized; (4) twenty-five percent of the churches did not have a pastor; (5) many of the churches were substandard in their total giving; and (6) there was a problem of unity in the convention. Dr. Maguire did not choose to handle these one at a time. He took his organizational skills and fund raising skills and combined them to go after the tasks at hand.

During his twenty-two year tenure the number of Southern Baptist churches cooperating with the state convention grew from 826 to 1,462. The number of Florida Southern Baptist members increased from 184,140 to over 600,000. During the administration of Dr. Maguire, he supported Stetson;<sup>30</sup> saw the ownership of Baptist Bible Institute transfer to the convention; established the Florida Baptist Retirement Center in Vero Beach; oversaw the expansion of The Florida Baptist Children's Home ministry; helped establish the *Florida Baptist Witness*; commissioned the Florida Baptist Foundation; led in the development of Lake Yale Baptist Assembly and the assembly in West Florida; and guided the WMU from an auxiliary status to a regular convention department.<sup>31</sup> Church incomes increased from three million to thirty-seven million. World mission giving increased from \$346,000 to \$3,537,000. Convention employees increased from 10 to 76.

Dr. Maguire was especially pleased that Florida Baptist Churches gave faithfully through the Cooperative Program and that the percent of

church receipts to convention-wide causes increased from 25 percent to 42 percent.<sup>32</sup>

Dr. Maguire died December 18, 1987 in Jacksonville. Seven years later, Mrs. Maguire died on February 5, 1995. He was 87 years of age at his death and she was 84 years of age at her death. The Maguires had three children; a son, John David lives in Claremont, California, a daughter, Merrill Skaggs lives in Madison, New Jersey, and a daughter, Martha Worsley lives in Jacksonville.

After his December 31, 1967 retirement, Dr. Maguire served as interim in 15 separate churches and between 1977-1987, he served as volunteer chaplain in Jacksonville's Baptist Medical Center. Maguire had a hobby of growing roses and had 93 Grenada bushes at his home. Some days he would give away 10 dozen roses to patients at the Jacksonville Baptist Medical Center.<sup>33</sup>

Dr. Maguire was an organizer and fund raiser. He was also a minister and servant of the gospel.



END NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Audio taped interview. Don Hepburn interviewed John and Clyde Maguire, December 12, 1985, at the Baptist Building in Jacksonville. Hereafter referred to as Hepburn interview. Tape 85-054.

<sup>2</sup>This territory became the forty-sixth state in 1907. Oklahoma gets its name from two Choctaw Indian words. *Okla* means people and *homa* means red.

<sup>3</sup>John H. Maguire, article by Don Hepburn and Barbara Denman. *Florida Baptist Witness*, December 31, 1987. Hereafter referred to as Hepburn-Denman.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.* The only town mentioned by Maguire was the town of Brock.

<sup>5</sup>Hepburn interview, Tape 85-054.

<sup>6</sup>It has been written that Maguire was born in Brock and later moved to St. Joe. This writer has not been able to locate a Brock in Texas or Oklahoma. However, there is a St. Joe, Texas, in north Texas about three miles from the Oklahoma line and about forty miles north of Fort Worth.

<sup>7</sup>Hepburn interview, Tape 85-054. Dr. and Mrs. Maguire were elderly and not in the very best of recall health when this interview was conducted. He was 85 years of age and Mrs. Maguire was 75. They would revisit the past without always giving proper chronological and geographical data. This writer believes that Maguire was living in Texas at the time of his conversion and call.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.* Hepburn interview, Tape 85-054.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.* Hepburn interview, Tape 85-054. This nearly destroyed Maguire. He later said, I wanted to die. He went and preached for five

to seven minutes but even at age 85 it still had to hurt. Mrs. Clyde Maguire in hearing her husband tell this story again after all those years spoke out in the Hepburn interview and said, . . . but those two. . . and I tried not to dislike anybody. . . but those two women who walked out on his first sermon. I have a mighty hard time not disliking them. Of course, they are long since dead, but I think that was one of the meanest things I ve ever heard of anybody doing.

<sup>10</sup>Hepburn interview, Tape 85-056. The call to pastor came in 1936. This was five years after Maguire had married. He and Clyde were at the Mentone, Alabama Conference Center with friends, Mr. and Mrs. Chester Quarrels. The beautiful mountain retreat offers great sites and wonderful sleeping weather. Babbling brooks and cool breezes had caused Mrs. Maguire to sleep like a log, and the Quarrels agreed. John Maguire spoke up differently. He said, I didn t sleep at all. . . I was by the bed all night last night, because the Lord was telling me that it was time for me to be a pastor.

<sup>11</sup>Hepburn interview, Tape 85-054.

<sup>12</sup>The San Marcos Academy received its charter on July 20, 1907. The coeducational school was begun as a boarding school for grades one through twelve. It was founded for the primary purpose of giving students good academic and Christian training. In 1910 the academy was taken over by the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

<sup>13</sup>Hepburn interview, Tape 85-054. I once heard Dr. Bill Hull say that, It will be interesting to see if God can call students who wear designer jeans to go to Africa.

<sup>14</sup>Hepburn interview, Tape 85-054.

<sup>15</sup>Hepburn interview, Tape 85-056.

<sup>16</sup>Hepburn interview, Tape 85-056.

<sup>17</sup>Hepburn interview, Tape 85-054.

<sup>18</sup>Hepburn Interview, Tape 85-054 and Tape 85-056. John and Clyde Maguire were very strong on the call experience. Clyde felt called and John felt called. The first call of John was to some special work. The call of Clyde was a call to serve. The second call of John came when he was married and working with the Alabama Baptist Convention as a Sunday School worker. He said the Lord called him to be a pastor.

Clyde clearly distinguished between the calls. She said she felt God calling her to marry a preacher boy and she felt she was getting the next best thing when I got a Sunday School worker.

<sup>19</sup>Hepburn Interview, Tape 85-056. The Maguires were happy every place they served. Both of them remarked that they never wanted to leave anywhere.

<sup>20</sup>Hepburn Interview, Tape 85-056. Actually Dr. Maguire got caught twice on this. The first experience was when the Calvary Church told him to get a truck down there to bring your stuff. He did that and ended up having to write an unexpected check for his moving expenses from Florida to Birmingham. He paid the mover but made the church pay him \$25 a month until he got his money back.

The second time, Dr. Maguire got stung in the call confusion is when he came to Florida. He made sure that they promised to pay his moving expenses. Then he asked about a house. They said, We have just built a new house within walking distance of the Baptist Building. Everything seemed clear until he got to Florida and the convention charged him rent. Both the Maguires felt they had plenty of scars from the call game.

<sup>21</sup>Hepburn Interview, Tape 85-056. Dr. Maguire told of these two call confusion experiences and concluded: Now that prepared me to come to Florida, because our work was largely unorganized, and monies were way low.

<sup>22</sup>Due to family connections and denominational service both Maguires were well known in the state. Dr. Maguire had worked for nine years as a Sunday School specialist (1927-1936) and Mrs. Maguire had served as B.S.U. president for three years at Alabama College, and then for 25 years had a monthly column in the B.Y.P.U. magazine.

<sup>23</sup>Hepburn Interview, Tape 85-058.

<sup>24</sup>Five men turned the job down before Dr. Maguire was officially contacted.

<sup>25</sup>Hepburn Interview, Tape 85-056. The Maguire quote favored Florida has intrigued me. A case could be made that Dr. Maguire meant that he favored Florida when he moved from Alabama. The idea of God favoring Florida came later.

<sup>26</sup>Hepburn Interview, Tape 85-058.

<sup>27</sup>A few years ago at Ridgecrest Baptist Assembly I heard Dr. Bill Pinson tell a heart rendering story about this. He moved a teenage daughter from Fort Worth to San Antonio when he left Southwestern Seminary and went as pastor of First Baptist Church, San Antonio. She had just settled when Pinson announced that he was leaving San Antonio and going as President of Golden Gate Seminary in California. He said his sixteen-year-old daughter wept and pleaded, Daddy please don t move. He said after one year at Golden Gate she came to him and told him that she was glad they had made the move.

<sup>28</sup>Mrs. Maguire was not the type to hold back what she felt. When asked how soon she and Dr. Maguire started having children, she replied, Well, just about as soon as legally. . . . Hepburn Interview, Tape 85-056.

<sup>29</sup>Hepburn Interview, Tape 85-058.

<sup>30</sup>Dr. Maguire felt committed to raising funds for Stetson and was jealous for the school and its ministry. He received the D.D. degree from Howard Payne in 1942, the D.D. degree from Stetson in 1951 and the Doctor of Laws degree from Florida Memorial in 1962.

<sup>31</sup>As the Queen of Sheba said, The half has not been told. For an exact list of accomplishments of the Maguire years (1945-1967) see Chapter eight of Don Hepburn s work in the revised *A History of Florida Baptists* by Earl Joiner.

The W.M.U. story according to Dr. Maguire was a wonderful story of mission enthusiasm and cooperation. When the W.M.U. went from auxiliary to convention status, Dr. Maguire recalled Carolyn Weatherford said, Whatever the convention desires, we ll do. Hepburn Interview, Tape 85-058.

<sup>32</sup>Dr. Maguire looked forward to the time when Cooperative Program receipts would be split fifty-fifty. This came about in 1985 when Cooperative Program funds were divided equally for the first time between state convention ministries and Southern Baptist Convention causes.

<sup>33</sup>Don Hepburn-Barbara Denman. *Florida Baptist Witness*, December 31, 1987.

# HAROLD C. BENNETT: GOD S GREAT OPTIMIST

## ***Bill Sumners***

*Director and Archivist  
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Harold C. Bennett began his tenure as the 7th Executive Secretary of the Florida Baptist Convention in 1967. He followed the long and distinguished leadership of John Maguire, but few individuals came more equipped for the task.

Bennett grew up on a farm in the mountains of North Carolina. At the age of twelve, he accepted Christ as his personal Savior in the First Baptist Church of Ashville, North Carolina. He was active in his church through his involvement in Sunday School and the Baptist Young People s Union. His mother was equally involved in church with work in the Woman s Missionary Union and Sunday School. However, his father rarely attended church. Dad was an avid golfer, Bennett said in a 1986 interview. He played every Thursday and Saturday and 90 percent of the Sundays. He heard me preach only one sermon—and that from a seat in the balcony. <sup>1</sup>

During his senior year in high school, he was greatly influenced by the Gary Cooper movie *Sergeant York*. The movie told the story of Alvin York, a young man from the hills of Tennessee, who struggled with the conflict between participating in war and his Christian beliefs. In the movie, York takes his dog and his Bible up a hill where he reads and prays before determining to serve in the army. He goes to Europe and returns a distinguished hero. For Bennett, the focus of the movie

was York's commitment to Bible reading.<sup>2</sup> He committed himself to be a better student of the Bible.

After serving as a clerk with the Federal Bureau of Investigation, he joined the Navy and became a Navy pilot. It was during these days of military service that Bennett felt God's call to ministry. He felt the need to discuss this inner call with the Navy chaplain. He did not get encouraging words from this counseling session. The chaplain told him plainly, "If you can be happy doing anything else—even digging a ditch—don't go into the ministry." Bennett also shared his feelings with his mother and one of his uncles, who was a minister, but received no overwhelming response from either.

After leaving the Navy, he returned home to the First Baptist Church of Ashville and received the encouragement he needed from his pastor, W. Perry Crouch. Crouch served as an encourager to Bennett and many other young people who felt God's call to service. Bennett, along with other young adults, planned a youth-led revival for the church with Crouch bringing the sermons. It was during that week that Bennett made a clear decision to enter the ministry.<sup>3</sup>

Harold Bennett attended Mars Hill College, graduated from Wake Forest University and completed his Master of Divinity degree in 1953 at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. In 1968, he received the Doctor of Divinity degree from Stetson University. During his days at Wake Forest, he served as pastor of the Glen Royal Baptist Church and while at seminary he served as chaplain for the Kentucky State Reformatory. He left seminary to be assistant pastor at the First Baptist Church in Shreveport, Louisiana. Bennett later served as pastor of the Beech Street Baptist Church in Texarkana, from 1955 to 1960.<sup>4</sup>

In 1960 A. V. Washburn, head of the Sunday School Department of the Sunday School Board, asked Bennett to join him on his staff. His work focused on the 30,000 Movement, which used the Sunday School



Harold C. Bennett

to start new churches and missions. He worked closely with C. C. Warren who coordinated the work of the Home Mission Board, the Foreign Mission Board, and the Sunday School Board for the 30,000 Movement. Because of his involvement with this project, the Home Mission Board pinpointed Bennett to come and serve as the director of the City Missions Department. He remained with the Home Mission Board only two years before leaving for Texas. The Baptist General Convention of Texas called and wanted Bennett to come as the Missions Division Director. He continued in that position for only three years before the Florida Baptist Convention called.<sup>5</sup>

In 1967 the Florida Baptist State Board of Missions appointed a nine member search committee to find a successor to the longtime state executive secretary, John McGuire. The committee struggled with the process after considering a number of men and making serious approaches to at least two before realizing they had not found the man God wanted for Florida Baptists. The committee made a list of six men, any one of which would have made an excellent secretary. The name of Harold Bennett was on the list.

James L. Monroe, chairman of the search committee, stated, Everyone we checked with had the highest opinion of him. Our investigation was very thorough and we found he measured up in every way in ability, imagination, and dedication. Monroe and the other committee members were impressed with his pastoral experience and his work with the Sunday School Board, the Home Mission Board, and the Baptist General Convention of Texas. The chair of the search committee concluded his remarks to Florida Baptists by stating, He has a great missionary heart and a burning desire to see us adopt a challenging program which can make a real impact on this strategic state in which we live. Bennett was elected unanimously by the Florida State Board of Missions on September 1, 1967. He began his duties as the 7th state executive secretary on October 15, 1967.<sup>5</sup>

For the next twelve years, Bennett led Florida Baptists through significant growth and remarkable expansion. He brought ideas learned from his previous work in churches and agencies to the state convention. This was most readily visible in his reorganization of the



Florida Baptist Convention staff on the division concept. During his leadership a church-pastor-staff ministry was established. He strengthened the planning process by initiating the concept of a staff planning week for state convention workers. He also implemented a merit performance salary program. This included developing position descriptions, worker qualifications, salary grades, anniversary dates, and annual performance reviews which determined salary adjustments.

Organizational changes were just a means to an end. The real goal for Bennett was starting churches and missions. During Bennett's first ten years as executive, Florida Baptist gifts to the Cooperative Program increased from \$3,937,645 in 1967-68 to an estimated \$8,000,000 in 1976-77. Florida Baptists contributed 47 percent of their Cooperative Program gifts to the Southern Baptist Convention and its causes.

During his tenure, the work of the state convention focused on two efforts—new church starts and establishing missions. The Florida Baptist Convention Church Site Committee was created with the goal of starting four hundred new churches within ten years. The Florida Baptist Convention Church Bond Plan was created to assist churches in building needed facilities. The Convention developed a new cooperative planning agreement with the Home Mission Board, which resulted in increased support and effectiveness of the total mission program in Florida. The Florida Convention assisted in meeting the special crisis needs of the struggling Kansas-Nebraska Baptist State Convention.

Physical facilities were expanded and improved during Bennett's service in Florida. The state convention office building was renovated and additional property was acquired. The convention purchased property for the construction of the Blue Springs Baptist Assembly and additional property for the Lake Yale Baptist Assembly.

Bennett's experience and background made him a top choice for leadership positions in the Southern Baptist Convention during his time in Florida. He served as a member of the Committee of Seven of the Southern Baptist Convention and looked at a name change for the Convention and the organizational structure of the national body. He also served as a member of the Mission Service Corps Committee of the SBC which had been appointed to recommend methods, plans, and a

strategy for implementing a proposal by President Jimmy Carter to enlist and send out 5000 mission volunteers for one or two years in reaching the objectives of Bold Mission Thrust. Additionally, Bennett served as president of the Association of Baptist State Executive Secretaries.<sup>7</sup>

Porter Routh, who had served as Executive Secretary-Treasurer of the Executive Committee since 1951, announced his plans to retire in 1979. The search committee contacted Harold Bennett about the position, and he was interested. Bennett recalled that the process seemed rather smooth until the actual meeting when he was to be recommended to the Executive Committee. The search committee wanted to keep their recommendation a secret from the Executive Committee members and the news media. Bennett had some reservations about this plan. He said, Okay, if that s the way you want to do it, that s fine; but I think you will have trouble with the press. He was right. The search committee distributed information about Dr. Bennett to the Committee and the press. He recalled that he was completely at ease with the process because I really wasn t excited about leaving Florida. God had blessed the work in Florida a great deal. I gave my personal testimony before I took any questions and made the comment that up to this point I felt God had led me very clearly and that if the Executive

Committee elected me as Executive Secretary-Treasurer, [it] would be an indication of God s continued leadership; but if not, I would go back home to Florida and be very happy there. In February, 1979, the Executive Committee elected him unanimously as the Executive Secretary-Treasurer.



Albert McClellan, Duke McCall, Porter Routh, and Harold Bennett

Later, the title would be changed to President to conform to Tennessee state law requirements. Dr. Bennett remarked that the name change in the title significantly decreased the number of letters I received addressed to Mrs. or Ms. Harold C. Bennett.<sup>8</sup> Bennett worked with the outgoing executive, Porter Routh, until the end of July and assumed the responsibilities of that position on August 1, 1979.

Bennett was to serve under some of the most trying times for a Southern Baptist Convention leader. The year 1979 marked the beginning of what became known as the controversy in Southern Baptist life with the election of Dr. Adrian Rogers, pastor of the Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis, as president of the Convention. Over the next twelve years the election of the president and control of the agencies of the Southern Baptist Convention became battleground issues between moderates and conservatives. This debate, along with traumatic personnel and agencies issues, would tear at the fiber of the Southern Baptist family. Harold Bennett found himself surrounded by this controversy.

Soon after Bennett was elected as the president of the Executive Committee he was invited by W. A. Criswell, longtime pastor of the First Baptist Church of Dallas and his former pastor, for a meeting at the 1979 Southern Baptist Convention session in Houston, Texas. Bennett recalled that after lunch he met with Criswell, Paige Patterson, Paul Pressler, and others. The purpose of the meeting was to invite Bennett to join their movement. He declined. Bennett reasoned that he was elected to serve all Southern Baptists and he thought, This is only a segment of Southern Baptists, and I serve both sides and all groups within the Southern Baptist Convention.<sup>9</sup>

Bennett was troubled by the conflict within the Southern Baptist family. In the heyday of the tensions in the Convention he wrote, I pray for peace in our Convention every day. The Convention is a part of my life, my very being. I believe God will give us peace when our lives, attitudes, spirits, actions, and faith are pleasing to Him. May it be so, and soon. Only God can give us peace.<sup>10</sup>

As president of the Executive Committee, Bennett headed a staff that coordinated Convention activities between the annual convention

sessions, distributed and accounted for Southern Baptists giving through the Cooperative Program for national and international missions and ministries, and directed Southern Baptist Convention public relations. During Bennett's leadership tenure from 1979 to 1992, the SBC grew from 13.2 million members to 15.2 million and from 35,404 churches to 38,221. Cooperative Program receipts soared from \$75 million to \$140 million, an 87 percent increase. Southern Baptists dedicated a new SBC Building in 1985, an \$8 million dollar, seven-story facility.<sup>11</sup>

The focus of Bennett's role as head of the Executive Committee in denominational events was to be fair. Reflecting on some right and wrong decisions he might have made, he said, "I trust that people will know that my commitment had been to serve the Lord first, and then to function in my administrative responsibilities second. I have tried to be thorough and complete. My attempt has been to be fair to every constituency within the Southern Baptist Convention. I have worked hard at being fair. There have been times when people assumed I was on the other side from them, that I was their opponent, but that was not true. I was trying to be fair to all Southern Baptists. I trust most people have recognized my efforts to be fair to the various groups within our Convention."<sup>12</sup>

Years later all areas of the Southern Baptist family remarked on Bennett's adherence to this pledge to serve all Southern Baptists. Reggie McDonough, who served with Bennett as executive vice president of the Executive Committee from 1981 to 1987, remembered Bennett's "all out dedication to the Southern Baptist Convention. He was willing to put his own personal needs and ideas aside because he felt very strongly that he was elected to serve all Southern Baptists," said McDonough. James N. Griffith, retired executive director of the Georgia Baptist Convention, noted that "His reputation for fairness and graciousness to all was honestly earned, adding that Bennett sought always to be fair to all, whatever the circumstances might be. Griffith said he had told Bennett during a visit with him at the 2003 SBC in Phoenix, that I did not know of anyone who could have done a better job than he did in the particular time he served as president and

treasurer of the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention. Griffith recognized that Bennett served during some of the most hectic, troubled and turbulent times in the history of our Convention, but that . . . at no time did I observe him losing his temper, speaking in a negative way about anyone, or failing to show Christian grace toward everyone. He somehow rose above the discord, rose above the littleness into bigness, and never let his Christian testimony fall below the high standard of our Lord for his faithful and dedicated servants.<sup>14</sup>

John Sullivan, executive director of the Florida Baptist Convention, was a member of the Executive Committee during Bennett's tenure. He was a man of faith and conviction, Sullivan said. His ability to treat a person fairly during a difficult situation was a centerpiece of his ministry during those days. Sullivan added that Bennett was one of the most capable administrators in the Southern Baptist Convention. He exhibited administrative awareness and strong convictions about doing things decently and in order. His work in Florida is still foundational to all we do.

Harold Bennett was one of God's great optimists, said Marv Knox, editor of the *Baptist Standard of Texas*, who worked under Bennett as an editor for Baptist Press. His spiritual calling mandated that he lead the SBC Executive Committee during the most divisive years in Baptist history. Through all the storms of controversy, he never relinquished his belief that God is great and God's people are good-hearted. He never stopped believing the Lord could utilize the people called Baptists for divine and eternal purposes. He also was a faithful Christian who modeled honest, ethical leadership. He was straight up and true, and his word never faltered or equivocated.<sup>15</sup>

James T. Draper, Jr., president of LifeWay Christian Resources, said he received good counsel from Bennett when he served as president of the SBC from 1983-1985. But he wouldn't force it on me. He always made suggestions for me to consider, Draper said. I felt he wanted me to succeed. I think he viewed that as part of his job. I think most people will tell you he's fair, he's a very strong, positive, consistent leader and he's good at what he does.

Morris Chapman, Bennett's successor in 1992, said, "As my predecessor, Harold Bennett was always ready to assist me when I had a question, and in the early days of my administration of the Executive Committee, he was an invaluable mentor. Chapman, who served as SBC president from 1990 to 1992, noted "He knew Southern Baptist Convention and Executive Committee work as well as anyone in the convention, and no one knew the constitution and bylaws better than he."<sup>16</sup>



Harold and Phyllis Bennett

In 1992 Harold Bennett retired as president of the Executive Committee after over thirteen years of service. After retiring from the position, Bennett did extensive work with the American Bible Society, serving on its Board. He was committed to the task of distributing the Word of God to people around the world. He found the work of the Society remarkable, noting that in 1991 the American Bible Society provided almost 237 million Scriptures to persons in the United States and many other countries in the world.

His other post-retirement interest was the work of the Baptist World Alliance. In his retirement article in the *Baptist Program*, he challenged Southern Baptists to be involved in the work of the Alliance. In the Baptist World Alliance there are 157 conventions/unions with 146,836 churches and 37,801,976 members. Bennett felt that the BWA played an instrumental role in the Baptist witness to the world. He encouraged Southern Baptists to become involved in the work of the Alliance. He felt that at the meetings of the BWA, one could feel the heartbeat of God's work through Baptists around the world.<sup>17</sup> Denton Lotz, general secretary of the Baptist World Alliance, acknowledged Bennett's contributions to the work of the organization by noting that Harold Bennett was a world Baptist. But he was more than that to Lotz. Harold Bennett had a great gift of encouragement. How many times

Harold Bennett would call me on the phone and say, Denton, don't worry, everything's going to be alright, the Lord is in control.<sup>18</sup>

Bennett remained active in the work of the American Bible Society, the Baptist World Alliance, and the Souper Bowl of Caring, a program for raising funds for soup kitchens and other ministries to the needy. He died at his home in Brentwood, Tennessee, at the age of 78 on July 27, 2003, after a brief bout with pancreatic cancer. He was survived by his wife, Phyllis, two sons, a daughter and five grandchildren.

At his time of retirement from the Executive Committee in 1992, Bennett was asked to speculate on the future of Southern Baptists in the 21st century. He answered that he believed Southern Baptists would be strong and active in the year 2001 and the years following. I do not believe God is finished with using Southern Baptists in accomplishing His will in this world, Bennett replied. He forecasted that by the year 2001, Southern Baptists would have streamlined the Convention's work and become more effective in missions and ministries. He also believed that the conflict in the Southern Baptist Convention will not be as evident as it has been within the last decade. I hope we will be able to live with one another in a more accepting fashion. Then we can join in doing the big task God has placed on our hearts. We will still be busy with the task of carrying out Christ's commission to preach the gospel to every person in the world.<sup>19</sup>

END NOTES

- <sup>1</sup>*Baptist Program*, September, 1986, p. 6.
- <sup>2</sup>Interview with Harold Bennett by Bill Sumners, August 5, 1994, p. 1.
- <sup>3</sup>*Baptist Program*, September, 1986, p. 7; Interview with Harold Bennett by Bill Sumners, August 5, 1994, p. 2.
- <sup>4</sup>*Baptist Message*, September 14, 1967, p. 14.
- <sup>5</sup>Interview with Harold Bennett by Bill Sumners, August 5, 1994, p. 2.
- <sup>6</sup>*Florida Baptist Witness*, September 7, 1967, p. 2.
- <sup>7</sup>*Florida Baptist Witness*, October 13, 1977, p. 9-11.
- <sup>8</sup>Interview with Harold Bennett by Bill Sumners, August 5, 1994, p. 3.
- <sup>9</sup>Interview with Harold Bennett by Bill Sumners, August 5, 1994, p. 13.
- <sup>10</sup>*Baptist Program*, November, 1987, p. 11.
- <sup>11</sup>Baptist Press release, July 28, 2003, p. 1.
- <sup>12</sup>*Baptist Program*, May, 1992, p. 11.
- <sup>13</sup>Associated Baptist Press release, August 1, 2003.
- <sup>14</sup>Baptist Press release, July 31, 2003.
- <sup>15</sup>Associated Baptist Press release, July 28, 2003.
- <sup>16</sup>Baptist Press release, July 28, 2003.
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## DAN STRINGER AND FLORIDA BAPTISTS: A COWBOY UNTAMED

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Dan Stringer, a native of Oklahoma, became Executive Director of the Florida Baptist Convention in September 1979 and served until 1989. Stringer's career was marked by solving a number of knotty administrative problems prior to his arrival in Florida, while in Florida, and certainly after leaving the state.

Dan comes from a rich background. He was born in Cordell, Oklahoma, on November 7, 1927, to Abby Lola McArthur Stringer and Daniel Carmichael Stringer, a Southern Baptist minister who grew up on a farm in Mississippi. When Dan's father was sixteen, his family loaded all their possessions on two railroad cars and moved to Oklahoma. Dan's father attended Oklahoma Baptist University, and then served churches in Oklahoma, Arizona, and New Mexico. He began his career at the age of nineteen as a bivocational minister, first serving as a farmer, then as a teacher while he attended school and served small Baptist churches.

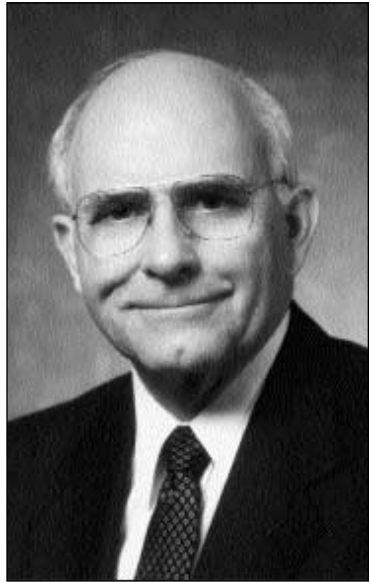
Dan's father suffered from a severe bronchitis that was erroneously diagnosed as tuberculosis. In a desperate move to better his health, the family moved to New Mexico. After some recovery, the Stringers returned to the pastorate, moving to the First Baptist Church of Erick, Oklahoma. Eighteen months later, the malady returned, forcing the Stringer family back into New Mexico. After serving three years at Ft. Sumner of Billy the Kid fame, Dan's father spent six years at

Clayton, and then went to the First Baptist Church of Gallup, New Mexico. The family then moved to Albuquerque where Dan's father became the city missionary—working with the Home Mission Board. In that role, he started eight churches in the city of Albuquerque.

His father's work exposed Dan not only to the rigors of the pastorate, but also to the ebb and flow of denominational organization, politics, and activities. His father was a Southern Baptist conservative who remained faithful to the denomination in spite of the antics and beliefs of Frank Norris and pressure from his fundamentalist friends. The elder Stringer served on the New Mexico Baptist State Board and as the President of the New Mexico Southern Baptist Convention. He also became a member of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board and the Foreign Mission Board. His father's career activities exposed him to both local and national Baptist leadership. For instance, one bureaucrat from the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board would visit Albuquerque, take Dan to lunch, and talk about his work. His father would take him to state board meetings when he was a boy—permitting him early on to see a state board at work. On one occasion two members of the board engaged in a heated argument. To remove Dan from the scene, his father offered him a quarter and told him to go get a milkshake. However, he put the quarter into his pocket and stayed to watch the show. After Dan and his father returned home, his father remarked to his mother, I took that boy over to see how a Christian board would work and then those two. . . said such bad things. . . , but I thought it was a pretty good introduction to the denomination (Tape #89-054, p. 8). As a result of such things, Dan learned that denominational leaders should never be put on a pedestal and that while the denomination was not perfect, it was God's means of accomplishing his mission purposes.

Stringer's mother also contributed to molding his character and helped prepare him for kingdom service. Actually, she was an immersed Methodist who met Dan Carmichael Stringer, Sr. while teaching school. Though he assumed she would become a Baptist after marriage, she balked at rebaptism. Stringer, Sr. gave up. After eight years of marriage, one morning she presented herself for church membership. So flustered

was her husband, he had to be reminded to present her to the church. It was then he found she had not been concerned about baptism, but the security of the believer. At the age of seven at Erick, Oklahoma, in 1934, Abby Stringer won her son to the Lord. She then instructed him to go and tell his father. This very conservative, almost humorless, very committed woman supported her husband and stretched every household dollar to feed the family of six—mother, father, Dan, and three sisters, Earline, Doris, and Jane. Mother taught Dan the value of a dollar and the importance of a good name.



Dan Stringer

Dan finished high school in Albuquerque in 1945 and joined the Marine Corps in May of that year, serving until August 1946. When the Japanese surrendered, Dan was transferred to the fire department at Camp Pendleton, California. He laughingly said at eighteen he was the third man in the line of command, and often, in the absence of his superiors, held the responsibility for 128 men and all the fire protection for Pendleton.

Upon discharge in 1946, Stringer returned to Albuquerque and enrolled in the University of New Mexico's school of engineering. It was at this time he met Harriet Rogers who later became his wife. Harriet, born in Lake County, Florida, on January 18, 1927, grew up near Leesburg, and in 1940 made her profession of faith in the First Baptist Church of Leesburg. Upon graduation from high school she attended Tift College for one year-1944-45. Since she wanted to major in Spanish to prepare for entry into the diplomatic service, her instructor encouraged her to attend the University of New Mexico. Grandmother, who was paying for her education, thought it was a great idea. She entered the University of New Mexico in 1945 majoring in Spanish.

After a year she changed her major to economics and business and spent a great deal of her time working with the Baptist Student Union (BSU). Dan and she met through the BSU, first dating friends, and then dating each other. By this time Dan had surrendered to ministry and was serving Boskey Farms as pastor. Harriet graduated and worked as a staff member at the First Baptist Church of Albuquerque. After a brief courtship, the couple was married on November 11, 1948.

Dan dropped out of the University of New Mexico that fall, but upon his father's recommendation entered Wayland College in January 1949. Unfortunately, he remained at Wayland only three semesters. He was elected president of the Wayland BSU—the only campus-wide student group. Acting in this capacity, he and the college president tangled over the school's smoking policy. He represented returning veterans who wished to smoke, but the president faced donors who opposed the habit. Dan said, [W]e continued to be friends, but we [Dan and Harriet] moved on to another school (Tape #89-054, p. 23).

Dan then transferred to Baylor University during his junior year, choosing to major in history and minor in English. Unfortunately for him Baylor required all ministers to major in Bible as well. Dan objected, declaring he wished a broader education at baccalaureate level—he intended to go to seminary anyway. To get the denominational scholarships he desired, he took thirty semester hours more than he needed to graduate. After graduation in 1952, Dan applied for admission to the Master's program to enable him to stay in university housing. He also served Milligan Baptist Church just south of College Station [Texas Aggie country] from 1949 to 1951. He moved to Saints Rest Baptist Church [Later called Stepala], Bryan, Texas, in May 1953, working there until August 1955. While at Saints Rest he enrolled in Southwestern Seminary, earning some thirty-two semester hours. In the summer of 1955 he transferred to The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, graduating in 1957.

After graduation from Southern, he returned to New Mexico to serve Lordsburg church from 1957 to January, 1959. His next pastorate was the First Southern Baptist Church Buckeye, Arizona, where he served from January 1959, to July 1965. He then moved to the First

Southern Baptist Church of Las Vegas, Nevada, working there until November 1966. These were followed by a brief pastorate in Scottsdale, Arizona, then Coronado Baptist Church from 1968 to 1969. In terms of growth, the Buckeye pastorate appears to have been most successful, logging over 400 baptisms in six and one-half years.

During his Scottsdale years, Dan also served as Associate Director of Missions for the Arizona Baptist Convention (1966-1968). He not only started numerous churches with little or no money, conducted extensive language missions, and managed several Christian social ministries programs, but acted as the Arizona convention business manager without title. Without adequate background and experience, he struggled with a convention that produced only \$32,000 per month. Of this money 24 percent went to Grand Canyon College and 20 percent went to the Southern Baptist Convention. To make matters worse, that convention struggled with bills payable equivalent to three months convention income. No wonder in 1968 he returned to the pastorate. However, in 1969 he moved back to the convention as Director of Missions and Associate Executive Director under the leadership of Dr. Roy Sutton, a man he counted as his mentor (Tape #89-055, p. 11).

Part of the financial struggle in the Arizona convention in the late sixties and early seventies related primarily to the heavy dollar drain of the college. In addition, the Children's Home required some funding. Also, this small convention with a budget of \$500,000 found itself trying to control three hospitals with huge budgets of \$12 to \$18 million dollars apiece. Very quickly this situation evolved into a struggle that eventually resulted in transferring title of each hospital to its local board and allowing each to operate unhindered. Stringer's experience in dealing with the school and hospitals led him to comment, "Your relations need to be established ahead of any problems . . . . But if you are already in a controversy, that is not the time to try to build bridges" (Tape # 89-055, p. 14). He added, "I think there are some indications that we may have seen our last successful Baptist college or university has already been established" (Tape #89-055, p. 14).

In spite of Dan's struggle with convention owned institutions, he believed strongly in the Southern Baptist Convention's mission purpose.

From his dad, he learned the necessity of starting churches. From Sutton, he acquired an orderly mission strategy. From evangelist W. G. Laws he developed a deep appreciation for evangelism. From Harold Bennett, a former Executive Director of Florida, he learned to use convention materials such as evangelistic plan books and the Sunday School Witnessing Campaign. All of these tools served him well as he assumed the responsibility of leadership first in the Northwest and later in Florida.

In 1971, Dan Stringer was elected the fifth Executive Director of the Northwest Southern Baptist Convention, which consisted of 248 churches and 30,000 members. He quickly moved to stabilize the staff, start new churches, and strengthen the financial base of the convention. Unhampered by a drain on convention resources by institutions, Dan invested heavily in mission endeavors. After eight and one-half years the convention moved from a baptismal ratio of 1 to 19 to 1 to 16. Churches increased in number from a beginning in 1971 of 248 to 360 in September, 1979. Annual Cooperative Programs gifts rose from a beginning \$292,000 to \$950,000 when he left (Tape # 89-055, p. 19). Another thing that stretched resources was the fact that the Southern Baptist Convention voted to assume responsibility for Southern Baptist churches in Canada. Another major controversy was laid aside when the SBC 1963 Statement of Faith was adopted by the Northwest Convention.

While reviewing his time in the Northwest, Stringer declared, I guess in the Northwest I learned how to be an executive director . . . (Tape # 89-056, p. 2). He began to appreciate the difference in the pressure of a high-level staff member making a recommendation and a chief executive holding final decision-making responsibility. Stringer also cited a personal professional growth seminar attended in Nashville as being pivotal in the development of his leadership skills. He said, I guess I learned to appreciate the role [Executive Director] . . . and to realize it was a base that God had given me . . . [I]f God has provided it for you and you are prepared for it, then you should use it (Tape # 89-056, p. 5).

Dan Stringer, Jr., was elected to the post of Executive Director by the Florida Baptist Convention's State Board of Missions in September,

1979. He brought to the position a lifetime of experience and preparation which served him and the Florida convention well until his retirement in 1989. His first contact with the convention's search committee came in the form of a phone call from Chairperson James Monroe in May, 1979. Monroe followed up with a request to interview him in Houston, Texas, at the 1979 Southern Baptist Convention. At this point, Stringer really thought they would pick someone from Florida or the Southeast. However, he did take the time to read *Florida Baptist History* by Earl Joiner, reviewed several convention annuals, and analyzed the baptismal and Cooperative Program giving records in an attempt to determine how missions oriented and evangelistic they were. A few of the search committee interviewed him in Chicago, and then requested he meet with the whole committee in Atlanta in August 1979. Not only did this interview come in the middle of a vacation, his wife fell and broke her foot, forcing him to leave her in a Los Angeles hotel while he flew to the interview. When he was offered the job, Dan asked for two weeks to make up his mind. After they had decided to go to Florida, Harriet confessed when she found out Harold Bennett was going to Nashville, she knew they would be forced to consider Florida. Stringer went to work November 1.

When asked why he went to Florida, Dan declared, [B]ecause it's not really a traditional southern state, it's more cosmopolitan, it's growing, it's front edge . . . (Tape #89-056, p. 10). Going in, Stringer knew the age of both the professional and administrative staff would force replacement, reorganization, and additions to the Baptist Building work force. It was also obvious to Stringer that the churches, convention leadership, and Baptist Building staff needed to come to grips with the cultural diversity of the growing state and learn how to minister to the various ethnic groups.

Beginning work on November 1, Stringer immediately faced the 1979 state convention meeting. The decision was made to permit Dr. Woody Fuller to handle this meeting, but, in passing, introduce Stringer to the convention assembled. Sitting in the orchestra pit, Dan watched Florida Baptists engage in debate over division of the Cooperative Program funds and the matter of salary confidentiality. When he was

introduced to the group, he committed himself to address the concerns of that convention.

The 1979 convention wished to send 50 percent of all Cooperative Program gifts to the Southern Baptist Convention. The budget adopted in 1979 provided for only 48 percent of the basic budget to be dedicated to national concerns. The advanced budget of \$1,800,000 was not shared with the SBC at all, but was divided among Florida Baptist institutions. By 1985, Stringer led the convention to fund all Cooperative Program gifts at a 50-50 division. However, between 1985 and 1989, inflation decreased and churches failed to increase their percentage of giving, making it difficult for the convention to maintain its generosity to the SBC. Stringer acknowledged that some churches failed to allow for a decline in inflation and giving, and overextended themselves in terms of staff and budget. To resolve their financial crises, often churches cut Cooperative Program giving and were slow to return to former giving levels. Dan added, [A] culmination of the 10 years of controversy . . . also hurt us (Tape 89-056, p. 12). It became obvious by 1988 that the convention could not continue its giving pattern, forcing a retiring Stringer to recommend to the Board of Missions a reduction in the percentage of Florida Cooperative Program funds sent to the Southern Baptist Convention.

A major contribution by Stringer to Florida Baptist work was his success in sensitizing the convention as a whole and the Baptist Building staff in particular to the need of evangelizing and ministering to the growing ethnic populations appearing in the state. He was of the opinion that the best way to change attitudes and approaches was to supply information. Therefore he secured the assistance of the Home Mission Board and Sunday School Board's specialists in cultural backgrounds. These experts taught the staff how to respond to the various cultural groups within the changing state and to use demographic studies to plan and execute ministries within all program areas. As retirements occurred, he brought in new people and created new departments. One was the Ethnic Education Department which featured a cultural specialist tasked with the responsibility of training people to function within a cultural setting to execute various programs.



A New Work Assistance Office became responsible for developing a comprehensive strategy for starting new churches—black groups, ethnic groups, suburban starts, inner city churches, etc.

Other offices and programs were added from time to time while many were reorganized. For instance, the office of Public Relations was expanded and assigned the responsibility of developing video production, writing news stories, developing advertising pamphlets and the like. Dan also restructured the Church Training Department, forming the Family Life Department and the Pastoral Ministries Department. The Assistant Executive Director assumed responsibility for Church Staff Relations while responsibility for properties was shifted to the office of Business Services. During this time the convention developed the Blue Springs Baptist Assembly which contained all the camping facilities for west Florida. Also growing out of Stringer's background was the addition of a new feature of convention work—the development of partnerships with Pennsylvania/South Jersey and Montana/North and South Dakota which gave the state experience in direct mission work that it had not had before.

Another major contribution made by Stringer was leading the state to reorganize the State Board of Missions. Upon his arrival in the state, the board had 107 members, all serving three-year terms. This meant that by the time they were trained, they rotated off the board and were rarely heard from again. Worse, over half the board held no committee assignment—necessitating the board proper becoming a committee of the whole (Tape # 89-056, p. 17). Over a period of three years, the board was limited to 99 members, every member was assigned to a committee, and each was eligible to serve two three-year terms (1996 *Florida Baptist Annual*, p. 29).

When Stringer was asked how he related to Florida Baptist institutions, he declared he entered the state with the reputation of holding an anti-institutional bias. Looking at his background—he grew up in a New Mexico that suffered failed institutions and served in an Arizona at a time when the convention developed institutions more rapidly than they could afford—one could conclude this was true. However, Dan denied possessing an anti-institutional bias. He

explained, I think an older, stronger state convention can have institutions . . . while a very new pioneer convention should not have institutions at all, because that is not what it s there for at that point (Tape #89-057, p. 3).

Upon his arrival in the state with or without bias, the Florida convention supported several institutions. One was Stetson University which historically experienced a somewhat stormy relationship with its supporting convention. Oddly enough, though a private institution, Stetson holds a charter issued by the Florida State Legislature, which makes it impossible for the convention to gain control. In spite of this, Florida Baptists have supported the university generously, receiving in return trained ministerial leadership. Stringer commented, I also see Stetson as being very responsible in what they are trying to do with their resources, and academically there is no question about the quality of what they are doing (Tape #89-057, p. 4). During Stringer s tenure, the convention s relationship with Stetson appears to have been quite amicable.

The only school the convention owned out right at the time Dan entered the state was The Baptist College of Florida, once known as Baptist Bible Institute. First organized to train students without high-school diplomas for ministry, the school began offering baccalaureate degrees in ministry in 1974. Stringer believed the school existed at his time as a preparatory institution for seminary training—not something he appeared to be excited about. He declared the school would prosper and continue to receive heavy convention support only if it diversified its offerings and created a distance education program (Tape #89-057, p.5). Since that time, Baptist College has begun a teacher education program, has opened four distance sites—Jacksonville, Orlando, Tampa, and Pensacola—and an on-line degree program.

Surprisingly, Stringer s attitude toward the convention s paper, the *Florida Baptist Witness*, differed from many executives of other states. In his opinion the state paper s purpose was primarily one of evaluation rather than promotion. Executives who believed state papers existed to promote Baptist work seem to prefer the editor be a staff member working under the state board. Stringer was quite comfortable

permitting the *Witness* to incorporate and operate under a separate board (Tape #89-057, p. 6).

When Dan's attention turned to the Florida Baptist Foundation, he discovered a board that did not make decisions, thereby forcing the Florida executive director's office to govern the agency. Shortly after Stringer came to Florida, the director of the foundation retired. That board asked him to assist in identifying a new director. Dr. George Borders was elected to run that institution. After Borders took charge as executive director of the foundation, the board took hold and the foundation director has been totally accountable to the foundation board rather than the Executive Director's office.

Also during Stringer's tenure, a group of brainstorming laymen charged with discovering ways to increase resources for starting new churches hit upon the idea of organizing a credit union. Money earned through interest charged by this institution was to be invested in a loan program for new church starts. Governed by Florida's banking laws, the new agency felt the pinch of limited resources, but gradually emerged as a successful operation.

Perhaps the most popular institution owned by Florida Baptists during Stringer's tenure was the Florida Baptist Children's Home. The organization was well led, but financially strapped. In 1979 the purchase of a new air conditioner created financial crisis. The 1980's saw an improvement in their financial base to the extent they were able to add programs, staff, and facilities with confidence. One of the reasons this occurred was the significant improvement in the Mother's Day offering that went directly to their support. Another move that helped all institutions was Dan's decision to lead the convention to budget and fund over a five year period. These commitments assured the institutions a stable percentage of the convention's funds for five years. Evidence indicates that whatever Stringer's feelings about institutions, he worked hard to preserve, protect, develop, and adequately fund the existing institutions supported by the Florida Baptist Convention.

Another set of issues revolved around the relationship of the state convention to its various local associations. Stringer said, Florida is a

little different from most state conventions . . . and it comes from the fact that we had the district program for so long. . . (Tape #89-057, p. 12). Associations still suspected that the state convention staff sought to control the work and personnel of the local association. Funding was an issue. As the associations picked up the responsibility of hiring and paying their Directors of Missions, the state cut back on salary support. To compensate, the state more heavily subsidized associational programs. Unfortunately, the tension existing between the associations and the state at the time of Dan's arrival still existed at the time of his leaving.

When Dan Stringer retired in 1989, he still felt Florida's main task was what he believed it to be when he arrived—establish churches and win the lost regardless of cultural background. The one achievement that brought him most satisfaction was the 50-50 division of Cooperative Program funds. He said, I think Florida deserved to be the first state to get there . . . (Tape #89-057, p. 13). He expressed a disappointment in baptismal ratios and the churches' decrease in giving through the Cooperative Program. In terms of hard administration, Dan deeply regretted not being able to entirely eliminate the convention's debt relative to financing Blue Springs Assembly. However, he should look back on his achievements in Florida with satisfaction. While he did not tame Florida, neither did they tame Dan Stringer.

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*1996 Florida Baptist Annual*

JOHN SULLIVAN:  
EXECUTIVE SECRETARY-  
TREASURER OF THE  
FLORIDA BAPTIST  
CONVENTION  
1989-PRESENT



***Thomas A. Kinchen***

*President, Baptist College of Florida*

Rarely does reading the life story of a denominational leader seem like a great plot for a television mini-series. Imagine a life with the breadth of the coal camps of West Virginia, the Federal Bureau of Investigation in Washington, small rural churches in Arizona and Texas, a large metropolitan church in Louisiana, and the office of Executive Director of one of the strongest state conventions in Southern Baptist life. Such is the life of Dr. John Sullivan.

Travis Gene John Sullivan was born in Ansted, West Virginia on October 20, 1936. Growing up in a coal camp in West Virginia was not an easy life for Sullivan. Reflecting on those days he says, Most people have never seen a coal camp. They have no idea what it's like for your father to go to work before it's daylight and get home after it's dark and everybody is on poverty row. Nobody has anything. As a result of that there was a comradery of ignorance, apathy and poverty. We just didn't know any better. That's who we were.<sup>1</sup> Sullivan's father could not read and write. His mother had a lifetime history of poor health and died as a result of complications from surgery when she was 36 years of age. John was 16 at the time. It would have been easy for Sullivan to find every excuse for doing little or nothing with his life, but he was made of better material than that. He attributes much of his tenacity for doing the right thing to his mother. A job begun was a job to be



John Sullivan

completed. Stopping short of carrying out one's commitment was not an option. That training has borne much fruit for kingdom service in Sullivan's life.

Unfortunately John Sullivan did not have the influence of a Christian home in his developmental years. He did not come to know Jesus Christ as his savior until he was eighteen years of age. While working for the Federal Bureau of Investigation in Washington, D.C., Sullivan had a most fortunate meeting on a city bus. It was there that he encountered Arkansas-born Nancy Hinson who had come to Washington to work for the Bureau. In recounting that meeting he tells of missing his

regular bus and having to take the next one. It was on that next bus that he first saw Nancy. Sullivan aptly describes that meeting as a divine appointment. Nancy began to share Christ with John. Later they were married, and within two months after the wedding John accepted Jesus Christ. The two most significant decisions in his life had come within a matter of weeks. With Christ as his guide and Nancy as his companion, Sullivan began a new life journey. After over 43 years of marriage John and Nancy are visibly more in love than ever. That love is especially evident when they share accounts of the blessings received through their three children and five grandchildren.

After two years of service Sullivan left the Federal Bureau of Investigation to respond to the Lord's call into Christian ministry. The call to ministry involved years of preparation. During that time Sullivan received a baccalaureate degree from Grand Canyon College in Phoenix, Arizona as well as the bachelor of divinity, master of divinity and doctor of ministry degrees from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. John Sullivan never saw the time of preparation as separated from

service. He ministered at various churches throughout his educational career. Theological education was not only a vital part of Sullivan's formative years in ministry, it has been a key point in his leadership within the Florida Baptist Convention. During his tenure eight theological education sites have been established in Florida. Sullivan emphasizes his commitment that any who are called to ministry in Florida ought to have theological education readily available.

John Sullivan knows Southern Baptists and Southern Baptist churches from all levels. During his first pastorate the church had an average Sunday School attendance of 11. Average attendance at his successive churches was 35, 100, 200, 800 and finally 2,150. During Sullivan's 14 year tenure at the Broadmoor Baptist Church in Shreveport, Louisiana, the church averaged 110 baptisms per year. During that same period Sunday School attendance increased from 1,414 to 2,150, and Cooperative Program gifts increased from \$137,500 to \$752,283.

In addition to service in the local church Sullivan has served on the governing boards of three state conventions, the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention and the Southern Baptist Convention Peace Committee. He has served as parliamentarian at the meetings of the Southern Baptist Convention since 1986. Wherever he has served John Sullivan has made decisions that are characterized by wisdom and integrity.

John Sullivan came to Florida in 1989 to begin service as the ninth Executive Director-Treasurer of the Florida Baptist Convention. Upon talking to the search committee Sullivan stressed that he is a preacher who can do administration and not an administrator who happens to preach. On every timely occasion he still rings that clear note. He has the heart of a pastor, the mind of a scholar, the passion of an evangelist, and the tenacity of a junkyard bulldog. Whenever all of the titles and accolades are put aside, John Sullivan is a preacher of the gospel of Jesus Christ. He doesn't desire to be anything more or less than that.

When he came to Florida in 1989 Sullivan took the reins of a convention that had a rich heritage and stood on the brink of what many might see as difficult challenges but he interpreted as glorious



prospects. The state was growing at an unparalleled rate. The ethnic diversity of the population was becoming more pronounced. The population growth was outstripping the growth of the churches. After taking an inventory of the scene before him and the convention, Sullivan began to promote a three-pronged emphasis that has characterized his ministry in Florida. When asked about the work of the convention, Sullivan is quick to answer that the priorities are: evangelism without apology, starting churches intentionally, and strengthening existing churches. Sullivan has devoted time, prayer, effort and the resources of the Florida Baptist Convention to these noble ends.

The emphasis on evangelism has been fleshed out across the state of Florida as well as in many mission partnerships begun by the Florida Baptist Convention. Since John Sullivan became Executive Director, the convention has established eight partnerships across the United States and abroad. Persons are being reached for Christ from Montana to Belgium to Haiti and Cuba. Further partnerships are being explored in Nevada and the Amazon region of Brazil. Sullivan simply cannot rest while Floridians hear the message over and over again while there are those in other areas of the country and the world who have never heard. During Sullivan's term of service over 475,000 Floridians have been baptized as born again Christians. Truly this man has kept the main thing the main thing.

John Sullivan's eyes sparkle, his voice softens and a tender heart shows clearly as he talks about the great privilege and responsibility that Florida Baptists individually and corporately have for reaching the world with the gospel of Christ. He particularly revels in sharing accounts of sharing the good news in the impoverished areas of Haiti and Cuba. Evangelism is the top priority of this Executive Director-Treasurer not only for the convention but for his own life.

Establishing new churches was seen early by Sullivan as the only way to begin to make a dent in the disparity between the overall population of Florida and the percentage of that population who knew Christ as Savior. On every occasion he emphasizes that the only possible way to reach this vast complex population is through seeding the state with Bible believing, gospel preaching churches. Since

Sullivan came to the Florida Baptist Convention in 1989, over 1,830 new congregations have been planted by Florida Baptists. These congregations range from the large metropolitan areas to the sleepy country communities, from the senior adult retirement areas to the youth oriented cultures of the beaches and all points along the spectrum. Seeds are being planted. Growth is occurring. Nurture is the most vital ongoing activity as the convention supports these new congregations.

Perhaps the most challenging of the priorities that John Sullivan has espoused is that of strengthening existing churches in the state. According to current statistics, the vast majority of Southern Baptist churches are on a plateau or are dying. Certainly Florida Baptist churches are not exempt from this trend. Just as inactive church members are difficult to reactivate inactive churches present some of the same challenges.

Since he came to Florida, John Sullivan has brought together an exemplary staff and focused them on ministry to and through the local church. He well knows that as the local church goes so goes the denomination and the efforts to reach the world for Christ. Convention staff regularly travel over 2,000,000 miles per year as they minister throughout the state. With a heart for evangelism and starting new congregations to assimilate these new converts it is sometimes difficult to have the focus and energy needed to strengthen the existing churches that need that new vitality. In one interview Sullivan noted, I d be less than honest if I did not say in the state of Florida we still have a lot of things that we need to do in terms of strengthening the churches and if I had one thing to replay, it might be that I would play off a little more of the other two in the interest of the third, strengthening the churches. <sup>2</sup>

The organization of the work of the convention has changed greatly under Sullivan s leadership. As he viewed the ethnic diversity of the state he became convinced that there needed to be focused leadership and effort in the areas of language missions and African-American missions. The current organization of convention staff provides divisions of work in general missions, language missions and African-American missions. This reorganization and emphasis did not come



John and Nancy Sullivan at a reception

without its detractors. There have been those who have charged that the Florida Baptist Convention is starting racially defined churches rather than general churches for the entire population. In response to a question about this Sullivan stated, We are starting African-American churches in

primarily African-American communities. We would wish that every church would be bicultural, multicultural but that s not going to happen overnight . . . criticism as long as you feel like you re doing the right thing has never been a great issue with me. <sup>3</sup> Following this organizational strategy the number of churches started in both language and African-American communities in Florida has increased greatly.

Early in John Sullivan s leadership in Florida disaster relief became a central theme. Florida has a history of dealing with hurricanes, but nobody was prepared for the visit of Hurricane Andrew. As the winds subsided across the southern end of the state and the devastation became evident, Florida and the nation were stunned by the trail of destruction. Under the direction of the Executive Director and with the hands-on work of literally the entire convention staff, Florida Baptists took the leadership in ministering to the hurt and heartache of South Florida residents. Work ranged from providing cold water to hot meals to a dry and safe place to sleep to rebuilding homes, churches and lives. While the storm had hit indiscriminately with its destruction, the Florida Baptist Convention ministered indiscriminately in the name of Christ to all who were in need. Once again, John Sullivan gave close, tireless and involved leadership and direction to the disaster relief. Once again his commitment to doing the right thing just because it is the right thing

came through in an uncompromising fashion.

The involvement of the Florida Baptist Convention in disaster relief has not been limited to the devastation that has visited only within the borders of the state. Since the experience of dealing with Hurricane Andrew over 4,000 Florida Baptist volunteers have responded to natural and man-made disasters in Florida, across the United States and overseas. During the last decade Florida Baptists have provided \$300,000 of direct aid to disaster victims. During the 2003 food drive Florida Baptists collected over 100,000 tons of food for the refugees in Iraq. The leadership of John Sullivan has been clear and consistent in providing for those who are in need.

Throughout all phases of his responsibility John Sullivan has demonstrated the highest integrity and commitment to stewardship. He is quick to tell anyone that he has a responsibility to God and to Florida Baptists for the resources provided by our Lord and returned through the generosity of Florida Baptists. In turn, Florida Baptists have responded to this integrity-based leadership as they have supported Baptist causes throughout Florida and around the world in record offerings. Since 1989, \$420,000,000 has been given by Florida Baptists through the Cooperative Program for missions in Florida and around the world. Under John Sullivan's leadership Florida Baptists have given an additional \$12,680,423 through the Maguire State Mission Offering for work in Florida.

John Sullivan has led Florida Baptists for 15 years. During that time the convention has experienced record performance in virtually every area of work. While any man could be tempted to flirt with some degree of pride in the midst of such accomplishment, Sullivan has remained focused and practical.

When asked to comment on John Sullivan's leadership among Florida Baptists leaders from around the state and nation are quick to respond. Bobby Welch, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Daytona Beach who served on the search committee that brought Sullivan to Florida summed up his feelings about the Executive Director's contributions, "One of the greatest things John Sullivan has done for this state is to bring us to the awareness that we are right in the middle

of the world. The world is at our doorstep. John Sullivan, like no other man has prepared Florida for this very quest and for the days ahead. <sup>4</sup>

Ted Traylor, pastor of the Olive Baptist Church in Pensacola, characterized Sullivan as, . . .fiercely cooperative. He loves Baptists even when Baptists don t love him. And he unifies all behind the Cooperative Program, taking every CP dollar he can and squeezing every little cent out of it. <sup>5</sup>

When asked about the things that delight him most after serving for 15 years at the helm of the Florida Baptist Convention, Sullivan quietly shares that the most amazing thing to him is the fact that the churches still invite him to come and preach for them. This is an absolute joy for him. Perhaps John Sullivan s own summary statement sums up his ministry best:

When I stand in the judgment before God and have to give an account of what I ve done, I hope the Father will say to me, Sullivan you didn t do everything right, but any mistake you made was a mistake of the head and not of the heart. You maintained your integrity, you told the gospel story and that s all I ever called you to do. The greatest joy of my life is getting to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. There is no labor in it for me. It is the joy of my life and so I hope the Father can say, You didn t always do it right, but it was always a mistake of the head. Never a breach of integrity. <sup>6</sup>

When assessing the ministry and service of any current executive officer the inevitable question is, Where do we go from here? The quick and accurate answer for Florida Baptists under the leadership of John Sullivan is that the destination is wherever the Lord has folks who still need the witness of the gospel and the ministry of the body of Christ. To quote that great cartoon theologian of a few years ago, Buzz Lightyear, To infinity and beyond! That may well be where John Sullivan is prepared to lead Florida Baptists.

**END NOTES**

<sup>1</sup>Transcript of Video Presentation Faithful to His Call, VV0405, January 7, 2004, Florida Baptist Convention, page 6.

<sup>2</sup>Transcript of Audio Recorded Revival Promo and Interview w/ Dr. John Sullivan, Southside Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Tape # 02-021, page 10.

<sup>3</sup>Transcript of Audio Recorded Revival Promo and Interview w/ Dr. John Sullivan, Southside Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Tape # 02-020, page 11.

<sup>4</sup>Unpublished First Draft, Barbara Denman, Division of Public Relations, Florida Baptist Convention.

<sup>5</sup>Unpublished First Draft, Barbara Denman, Division of Public Relations, Florida Baptist Convention.

<sup>6</sup>Transcript of Video Presentation Faithful to His Call, VV0405, January 7, 2004, Florida Baptist Convention, page 11.

# Executive Secretaries (Directors)-Treasurers Florida Baptist Convention

(Information submitted by Don Hepburn)

- |                               |   |
|-------------------------------|---|
| 1880-1900<br>(20 yrs)         | William N. Chaudoin<br>(born August 20, 1829; died LaGrange, Florida,<br>January 22, 1904)                                    |
| 1901-1909<br>(8 yrs)          | Lorenzo Dow Geiger<br>(born October 18, 1854; died April 21, 1909)  |
| 1909-1926<br>(17 yrs)         | Stuart Beggs Rogers<br>(born September 18, 1866; died Atlanta, Georgia,<br>August 16, 1926)                                   |
| 1926-1941<br>(15 yrs)         | Charles Mercer Brittain<br>(born December 16, 1873; died Fort Myers, Florida,<br>January 12, 1943)                            |
| 1941-1944<br>(3 yrs)          | Charles Houston Bolton<br>(born September 13, 1886; died Thomasville,<br>Georgia, November 11, 1973)                          |
| 1944-1945<br>(7 months)       | Homer G. Lindsey, Sr.—Acting Executive Secretary<br>(born February 2, 1903; died Jacksonville, Florida,<br>September 5, 1981) |
| 1945-1967<br>(22 yrs)         | John Henry Maguire<br>(born February 25, 1900; died Jacksonville, Florida,<br>December 18, 1987)                              |
| 1967-1978<br>(10 yrs)         | Harold C. Bennett<br>born July 30, 1924; died Nashville, Tennessee, July<br>27, 2003)   |
| 1979-1989<br>(10 yrs)         | Dan C. Stringer<br>(born November 7, 1927; resides in Scottsdale, Arizona)  |
| 1989-Present<br>(15 yrs-plus) | T.G. John Sullivan<br>(born October 20, 1936)   |

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# Florida Baptist Historical Society



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