



Here & Now

Vol. 6

An update for Florida Baptist Historical Society Board of Directors and Friends

No. 5

May, 2014



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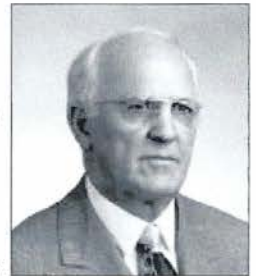


Penny Baumgardner
Secretary

Dear Board Members and Friends of the Florida Baptist Historical Society,

Denominational service can be a joyous experience. It has been my privilege to serve as associational moderator, state convention committee member, and Southern Baptist Convention researcher and writer. Currently I serve at First Baptist Church, Graceville as Sunday School teacher, Royal Ambassador leader and church history committee person.

One such service experience stands out in my mind that was Christian, Baptist, ethical and ecumenical. That was my years of service on the United Christian Action Board here in the state of Florida. D. J. Abernathy (1925-2011) was the Executive-Secretary Treasurer of the UCA organization when I served. I had served as graduate fellow to ethicist Dr. Clayton Waddell when I was a student at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary so UCA board service was a tenure of concern, learning and committed service for me. The main thrust of the organization was exposing and fighting the evils of alcohol and that was a battle that came easy for me. As R. G. Lee used to say "I am so dry I have to prime to spit."



R. G. Lee

The United Christian Action, Inc., is one of those service organizations that appears for a while and then for a number of reasons just disappears from our denominational horizon. But that story of the alcohol fight is a rich part of our history and heritage.

Florida Baptists can trace their stand against the manufacturing and selling of "intoxicating drinks" to their early years. At one time Baptists had a "moderation view" of alcohol consumption. However by 1790, Baptists in America saw distilled spirits alcohol production and availability had to be resisted. *The Florida Baptist Witness* on May 21, 1885, editorialized that the manufacture, sale and use of liquor was anti-government and anti-God.



John Maguire

The Florida Temperance Society was active in the 1940's and was led by Fred Barnett. E. D. Solomon was the last president of the Anti-Saloon League until they disbanded in Florida. In 1945, John Maguire, then Executive Secretary of the Florida Baptist Convention and Bishop Arthur Moore of the United Methodist Church in Florida, set up plans for an organization called "Florida Drys." A Methodist served as its first executive director.

Jack Eppes served as the director of "United Florida Drys" in the 1950's, 1960's and 1970's. The goal of the Florida Drys was education, legislation and rehabilitation as it related to alcohol. They published a paper named "United Christian Action" and fought the evils of alcohol on every hand.

Robert A. Parker served as Executive Secretary Treasurer of the organization in the late 1970's and D. J. Abernathy was elected Executive Secretary Treasurer in 1979. Dean Judson Abernathy was made for that job. D. J. was born in Illmo, Missouri, on January 19, 1925. He was the son of kind and loving parents and his father was a Baptist preacher. D. J. entered military service in July, 1944, and served with the Second Armored Division in the



D. J. Abernathy

5400 College Drive ~ Graceville, Florida 32440

Telephone: 850-263-3261, Ext. 480 ~ E-mail: fbhspt1@baptistcollege.edu ~ web: floridabaptisthistory.org



D. J. Abernathy

European Theater of Combat. He was wounded and nearly killed in the Battle of the Bulge in 1944, and was awarded the Purple Heart and Bronze Star medals.

It was in 1946, that D. J. married Jimmie Morris of Tampa, Florida. He graduated from Furman University in 1949 and Southwestern Seminary in 1952 (B. D.) and 1953 (M. R. E.). D. J. served as pastor in Texas, North Carolina and Florida. D. J. served as pastor of North Park Baptist Church in Tampa (1968-1978) until he became executive director of the United Christian Action group. He served through the UCA from 1979 until 1990 when the organization was disbanded. He was a faithful denominational leader that caught a vision. He traveled the state of Florida, teaching, preaching and interacting with legislators regarding Biblical issues of morality in general and alcohol abuse specifically.

The disbanding of United Christian Action, Inc., was a rather sad time. Everyone involved saw the need for the organization but there was not much state wide support for its mission and efforts. D. J. saw to it that United Christian Action worked with New Testament purpose and New Testament principles. The 45 year ministry of "Florida Drys" and "United Christian Action" had a positive influence in the state of Florida. May we never forget it.

D. J. and Jimmie retired to Ridgecrest in the North Carolina mountains but he continued to preach and serve until his death at age 86 in 2011. He and Jimmie had three children (Jeanne, Dean, Morris) and all three graduated from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Some people see the Baptist anti-alcohol fight as negative and mean spirited. There is another side to this. D. J. Abernathy showed that commitment to Christ and compassion for people meet in denominational service. The United Christian Action organization was more than a passing historical event. It was also an organization of committed people concerned about salt, light and yeast in society.



D. J. Abernathy

Honoring those who honor Christ,

A black and white image of a handwritten signature in cursive script, enclosed in a rectangular border.

Jerry M. Windsor
Secretary-Treasurer
Matthew 6:33