



Here & Now

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

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

Christ Jesus died for our sins, was buried, and then arose from the grave. Those facts make forgiveness, salvation, hope and eternal life realities for all followers of Jesus Christ.

This information has to be transmitted to all people, cultures, races and families for the news to be appropriated. No better story is available for Florida Baptists than the transfer of this life changing information to the Seminole Indians of South Florida.

Some sources say that there were as many as 100,000 native Americans occupying Florida as early as the 1500's. However, due to harsh treatment by the Spanish, small pox and a cruel environment only about 50 native Americans had survived in Florida by 1700. The first recorded use of the word Seminole to designate a tribe was in 1771. The Choctaws, Chickasaws, Creeks, Cherokees and Seminoles were called the five "Civilized Tribes" because these groups adopted many of the white civilization ways. In 1934, the Seminoles were granted full United States citizenship and by this time the Seminole population in South Florida had reached about 500.



Seminole church meeting 1948

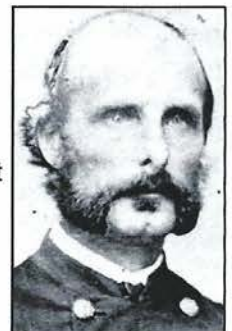
The May 28, 1830, Indian Removal Act gave the United States government the authority to remove all the Five Civilized Tribes east of the Mississippi to the Indian Territory in Arkansas and Oklahoma. The Choctaws left in 1831, the Creeks in 1835, the Chickasaws in 1837, the Cherokees then marched the "Trail of Tears," but the Seminoles refused to go. By this time there were about 500 in the Seminole nation and they hid in the Everglades. After three wars with the United States government, tribal turmoil and the harsh hand of political greed, the Seminole Tribe of Florida was created by a majority vote of the tribe on August 21, 1957. The Seminoles are the only Indian Tribe in America who never signed a peace treaty.



John Jumper

Today there are six Florida Seminole reservations. They are Big Cypress (591 residents), Brighton (566 residents), Fort Pierce (50 acres), Hollywood (Tribal official headquarters), Immokalee and Tampa. In the 2000 census 12,431 people self-reported themselves as Seminole, but only about 1,300 lived on one of the six reservations.

John Jumper (1820-1896) was a native of the Florida Everglades and served for nearly 28 years as a leader of the Seminole nation. He was converted to Christianity and lived most of his life in Oklahoma. Jumper became a Baptist preacher and assisted many Seminoles in their salvation experience.



W. F. Wood

The first official word from Florida Baptists relating to the Seminoles was an 1882 resolution from the South Florida Association appointing W. F. Wood to visit the Seminoles of South Florida and to report their condition to the Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. This visitation and inquiry

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First Seminole Indian Baptist Church

would prove to be very difficult because very few Seminoles lived on the reservations before 1940. In 1893, the Florida Baptist State Convention passed a resolution to evangelize the Seminole Indians within the borders of Florida.

In 1907, Creek Baptist missionaries from Oklahoma came to Indiantown near Lake Okeechobee and witnessed faithfully. In 1934, Willie King, an Oklahoma Seminole, began his efforts to reach the 600-700 Seminoles then living in South Florida. The First Seminole Indian Baptist Church was organized in 1936 on the Dania Reservation. Numerous converts came forward on the Dania and Big Cypress Reservations. The Big Cypress First Baptist Church was

organized July 20, 1952, and Willie King brought the message and missionary to the Indians Genus Crenshaw served as convener.

In 1947, five Seminole Indians from the Tamiami Trail enrolled at the Florida Baptist Institute in Lakeland. The five were Junior Buster, Josie Billie, Barfield Johns, Billie Osceola and Sam Tommie. Each student gave his testimony for the February 1947, *Southern Baptist Home Mission* magazine, and each spoke of his personal conversion and desire to see more Seminole family come to know Jesus. Sam Tommie was chief of his tribe and had been converted under the preaching of home missionary Stanley Smith. Smith was a Creek Indian from Oklahoma and baptized 95 Seminoles in one year. Junior Buster, Billie Osceola and Sam Tommie were greatly influenced by the wonderful ministry of Smith and his wife.



Mr. and Mrs. Genus Crenshaw



Seminole students L to R Front: Lucy Billie Josie, Billie; Back: Sam Tommie, Billie Osceola, Barfield Johns, Junior Buster

E. M. C. Dunklin (1863-1952) served as the area missionary for the Indian River Association. From 1921-1938, Dunklin served around Lake Okeechobee and the Everglades. He assisted in the start up of the Indian Town church and it was named Dunklin Memorial Baptist Church in honor of the "Jesus Man."

By 1981, there were three Seminole Baptist churches and five missions. It was my great privilege to get to know Wonder Johns (1934-2012) when he was a student at the Baptist College of Florida. Wonder served as pastor of First Indian Baptist Church on the Brighton Seminole Reservation. I knew Wonder as a serious student, Christian gentleman and loving pastor. He continued in that line of preachers that included John Jumper, Willie King, Stanley Smith and Genus Crenshaw.

The Seminole Indians of Florida have known heartache, trouble, war and depression. They have also heard about Jesus from fellow Christians who cared.

Honoring those who honor Christ,

Jerry M. Windsor
Secretary-Treasurer
Matthew 6:33



Mr. and Mrs. Stanley Smith