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## EDITORIAL PERSPECTIVE

Mark A. Rathel  
Secretary Treasurer  
Florida Baptist Historical Society

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

Florida Baptists believe in education; however, the Florida Baptist Convention has pursued a non-traditional path in educational institutions in comparison with sister Southern Baptist state conventions. Joshua Mercer founded an academy prior to the Civil War. Henry Deland founded Deland Academy, now Stetson University in 1884-1885. Florida Baptists for many years, however, enjoyed a positive relationship with Stetson and committed millions of dollars to the institution, although the Convention never owned and operated the school. In the early twentieth century, Florida Baptists began Columbia College in Lake City, but the school closed due to economic reasons during the Florida bust of the early 1920s. The Florida Baptist Convention assumed control of The Baptist College of Florida in 1957. The Baptist College of Florida is the only educational institution sponsored by the Florida Baptist Convention.

During the fifty-eight years of the existence of The Baptist College of Florida, the school has used several names: Florida Baptist Institute, Baptist Bible Institute of Florida, Baptist Bible Institute, Florida Baptist Theological College, and The Baptist College of Florida. The various

names reflect different phases of the school's history and purpose.

In November 2000 the annual meeting of the Florida Baptist Historical Society focused on the history of The Baptist College of Florida. Dr. Fred Donehoo, Florida Baptist Historical Society board member, receives credit for the innovative program—an interspersing of narrative and testimony vignettes. This issue of the *Journal of Florida Baptist Heritage* attempts to capture the vignettes in printed form.

Dr. Thomas Kinchen, president of The Baptist College of Florida, highlighted the meeting by presenting his vision for the future of the college. Alumni from differing decades provided testimonies of their student days. Dr. Wiley Richards isolated key factors in the school's history. Dr. James Southerland, former president, graciously agreed to an oral interview and we have included the transcription.

Two articles in this issue were not part of the society meeting; the editor, however, felt that they contributed to the journal's theme. Previously, I wrote a brief article on the important role of R. G. Lee in the early years of the college. At the faculty prayer retreat in the fall 2001, our two senior professors reflected on their thirty plus years of service. Their reflections contained numerous anecdotal materials the editor thought would make a worthwhile contribution to this volume.



THE BAPTIST COLLEGE  
OF FLORIDA:  
PROSPECTS AND  
FUTURE

Thomas A. Kinchen  
President  
The Baptist College of

Please let me thank you for the time and attention that you have focused on The Baptist College of Florida during this meetings. This is a unique institution that has fulfilled a defined purpose through almost six decades of service to Florida Baptists. Today, we have the opportunity to have an expanded influence through an increasingly diversified student body, extension sites, international partnerships and technology based education through interactive television and the internet.

As you have already noted, the college has sought to address the needs of its public in a variety of ways as the society around us has changed. The great challenge has been to remain focused upon our purpose while developing improved and relevant programs and delivery systems.

Educational institutions are notoriously slow in adapting to changing needs, and theological institutions are notoriously slower than other educational institutions. The perception of change is usually more powerful and more susceptible to error than the reality. Whenever you introduce the spiritual beliefs and the concept of the call of God felt by individuals or groups into an educational institution you have created an extremely sensitive situation in view of any change.

The question becomes whether an institution changes as a result of the needs of its public or whether the institution leads with change in seeking to reshape its public. The posture of our college has been responsive to the needs of the churches in Florida and the surrounding areas.

We remain a narrowly focused institution in purpose with a strongly driven desire to expand the delivery systems and vocations in ministry for training those who will serve the Lord throughout their lives. We will continue to be challenged to explain the new delivery systems and vocational opportunities, but I would rather explain a multiplicity of delivery systems rather than trying to explain not delivering the message in whatever format possible, whenever possible, wherever possible.

When I visualize the programs of the college I see two arrows. Each has a shaft and a head. In the older arrow there is a narrow shaft delivering the head. This represents the narrow definition of vocations open to be considered as ministry in the past. The current arrow has a much broader shaft representative of the multiplicity of vocations that are now seen as legitimate forms of ministry. While the shafts may be greatly different in appearance and potential, the head is the same. The very tip of the point represents the place at which the gospel is brought to bear on the target of the world. The point never changes, but the remainder of the arrow is in perpetual redesign. The propulsion for the arrow continues to be the call and commission of our Lord.

The vision for the future lies in the fashioning of the arrow. In recent years we have added programs that have addressed the needs of bivocational ministry, educational ministry, counseling ministry, leadership development, and various other needs of our students and graduates. There are still pressing program needs in the expanding education arena as well as technology, business administration, and related areas as they impact church leadership.

With a student population on the campus that is getting younger we have addressed the physical needs of housing and activities areas. Currently all housing for individuals as well as that for families is full. We are much like that dynamic church family that is having to learn to get along with the changing population moving into the neighborhood.

We are convinced that God is calling a multifaceted army together. Our mission is not to call the recruits but to provide the training for those whom He has called.

Our future will be more of the same and some things that have not yet been dreamed. All of our programs will continue to have the central core and focus of theological education. Institutions that have marginalized their theological stance have done so at the peril of their purpose. We will not do that. There are many other institutions doing good things. We will do this best thing. All degrees currently have at least a minor in biblical studies. This is in addition to the other theological studies required in each degree program.

Our degrees in theology continue to be the flagship of our programming. They permeate all else that we do. This will not change. We will teach more persons to do more things in more vocational settings to serve the Savior. But we will not abandon the theological core, because it is there that the message resides.

The campus community will continue to develop. Indicators point to an increasingly younger student body on campus. I have already alluded to the learning experience that we are facing in integrating out traditionally older student population with these new arrivals. It is certainly my desire that we will never become a campus that is entirely traditional or non-traditional in age bracketing. The intergenerational mix is invigorating. If we cannot get along here, we probably will have problems in the churches.

The future will bring greater development of our distance learning models. Currently we have work on the campus in Graceville as well as in sites in Jacksonville, Orlando, and Miami. In addition we have partnerships with the Barbados Baptist College and the Canadian Southern Baptist Seminary. Dialogue is underway for further relationships. Our work through interactive television is offered at our Florida based sites. There is the possibility for further expansion in that medium. The most exciting current development in this area is the internet based program delivery. Currently we are offering the Bachelor of Science in Biblical Studies through this avenue. This is a degree completion program. Within the very near future we will offer a full

baccalaureate degree through the internet. There are also other opportunities for continuing education through our technology based distance learning facilities.

We are experiencing a proliferation of training and service opportunities that will give students the best in quality education coupled with up-to-date experience in the fields. Discussions are currently underway for the development of a senior adult residential facility on the campus in Graceville. This will provide independent living facilities as well as assisted living opportunities. In addition we are in dialogue concerning the development of a group home for children on the campus. Both of these facilities will be developed through agreements with other Florida Baptist Convention agencies. These ventures will provide excellent services for the intended target groups as well as give an enhanced ministry setting for the campus. We will be learning while and by doing.

The new motto of the college is *Changing the World through the Unchanging Word*. Our future is wrapped up in that phrase. The world cannot be changed in only one place and then left to the winds of capricious fate. We dare not train individuals in only a portion of the ways in which they can be change agents. Certainly some will think that we are diluting the purpose. But rather we are enlarging avenues through which we can deliver the message that accomplishes the purpose.

As we look to the future we have a multifaceted stewardship obligation. First, to our Lord we owe the stewardship of the time, talent, treasure, and dreams that He has given to us. We will be true to that stewardship. To Florida Baptists we owe the stewardship of their trust, prayers, and funding. We will be true to that stewardship. To our alumni we owe the stewardship of the time that they spent at the school, the faithful representation that they have given for the school, the funding that they have helped to secure, and the students that they have sent to us. We will be true to that stewardship. To our students we owe the stewardship of their trust, their funds, their promise for the future and the enlarging of their vision and grasp. We will be true to that stewardship.



Finally, we have a stewardship to ourselves. Shakespeare wrote, This above all, to thine own self be true. And it must follow as the night the day that thou canst not then be false to any man. The Baptist College of Florida has a faculty and staff that is exemplary in commitment, conduct, training, and sensitivity to the call and commission of our Lord on their lives. If we would dare to try and deceive any, we cannot deceive our own hearts. We will be true to our Lord, to Florida Baptists, to our alumni, to our students, and thus to ourselves as we carry forward the sacred trust that has been placed into our hands.



## HISTORY OF THE BAPTIST COLLEGE OF FLORIDA

*Dr. Fred Donehoo has a masters degree in History and Ministry, a Doctor of Ministry in Christian Education from Luther Rice Seminary and a Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Administration and Research from Oxford Graduate School.*

**T**he educational ministry now known as The Baptist College of Florida was born in the 1940s in answer to a great need. The need was well illustrated by a survey made in 1941 revealing that in the South Florida Baptist Association, which included Lakeland and Polk County, there were sixty Southern Baptist pastors of whom only eight had any college or seminary training. This need was exacerbated following World War II when the Lord blessed Southern Baptists richly by calling many of the returning veterans to the pastoral ministry. Most of these men did not have any college training and many did not have even a high school diploma.

To find the proximate reason for calling into existence the institution we are now considering, we may look in two different places. First, we may look at the general recognition of the problem and the beginning attempts to solve it on the part of several Southern Baptist associations in south central Florida. The other place where we must look is in the heart of one man who accepted from the Lord a burden to initiate and facilitate a pioneer work to meet this great need.

In early 1942, a meeting was held in Tampa to consider how to help solve the problems of pastors having no educational training for the ministry. Representatives were present at this meeting from the South Florida, Tampa Bay, Pinellas, Orange Blossom, and Southwest Florida

Associations. As a result of that meeting, two schools came into existence: one in Tampa and one in Lakeland. The school in Tampa lasted only two years.

Frank Faris, as Associational Missionary for the South Florida Baptist Association was keenly aware of the need. Faris had a mixed educational background himself, and had succeeded in the pastorate on the basis of disciplined self-study. He undertook to enlist the help of other Southern Baptists to found an institution designed to begin meeting the educational needs of pastors.

In July of 1943, the South Florida Baptist Association appointed a committee to investigate starting a school for pastors in response to a formal appeal from Rev. Faris and Rev. T. S. Boehm, pastor of First Baptist Church in Lakeland. In the following month, the investigative committee reported and the South Florida Baptist Executive Board voted into existence a pastors school without name or formal charter. The school was authorized to charge students one dollar per quarter plus fifty cents per course.

Classes began on September 7, 1943, with fourteen students, and met in the educational building of First Baptist Church in Lakeland. The school owned no property. It used borrowed lecterns and wooden chairs. There was no faculty pay, no budget, no library, no taxes, and no deficit.

The spark plug in organizing and directing the school was Frank Faris. He was joined from the very beginning by Rev. T. S. Boehm. All of the teachers were volunteers and in January 1944, a faculty committee was appointed to help Rev. Faris and Rev. Boehm to organize the curriculum. Later, after becoming convinced it was of the Lord and would be a successful venture, Rev. James S. Day also gave strong and effective support.

For several years, the school had no official name. It was called at various times the Pastors School, the Associational Pastors School, the South Florida Associational School, and probably other names lost in the mists of history. Finally on April 2, 1945, the school was officially incorporated as Florida Baptist Institute. This gave the school the unfortunate acronym FBI. Consequently, in 1947, the Board of Trustees renamed the school Baptist Bible Institute of Florida. Finally

on February 28, 1949, the school was given the name which it kept until 1988: Baptist Bible Institute.

In its earlier years, the school was supported almost exclusively by the South Florida Baptist Association. To supplement the munificent income realized from student tuition and course fees, the South Florida Baptist Association donated \$600 in January of 1944, and \$4,100 in early 1945. In 1944 a student body organization was initiated with a president, vice president, secretary, and reporter. In 1945 the first school bulletin or catalog was published.

In December 1946, Rev. Leon Gambrell accepted the official presidency of the school. Rev. Gambrell was pastor of the First Baptist Church in Lake Wales. One of Rev. Boehm's original dreams for the school was that it would not only give men called to the pastorate some Bible training, but also help many of them to complete their high school work. This idea did not last beyond 1947 because of the introduction of the government's GED Program and official state accreditation standards.

In 1945 eleven building lots were donated, and the school began establishing its own campus. Most of the buildings on the campus were surplus buildings purchased from the government following World War II and moved from a nearby Army Air Force Base. By 1948 there was a campus of seven acres with twelve fully functioning buildings.

In 1948 both the *School Notes*, a newsletter controlled by the students, and the *Florida Baptist Institute News* were established. About a year later the name of the *Florida Baptist Institute News* was changed to *Institute Echos*.

From the very beginning of the school, students were active in spreading the gospel. Some of the activities of the Practical Christian Work Department were listed in the *School Notes* and they were very impressive. A mission formed and served by students became, in 1948, Central Avenue Baptist Church in Lakeland. Also in 1948, the school was fortunate to have both B. B. McKinney and R. G. Lee to lead conferences in the school chapel. That same year, the school's doctrinal statement was published; it followed closely the doctrinal statement of New Orleans Baptist Seminary.

The Baptist Bible Institute, which had little or no academic admissions requirements, nevertheless had high standards in other areas. Under the heading general requirements were listed such things as high moral standing. Also listed were conversion, consecration and a desire to render Christian service. In addition, students were required to provide proof of clean habits, sound physical and mental health, and intellectual maturity. Among the items prohibited were the use of tobacco, liquor, other narcotics, and divorce.

In 1950 Rev. R. W. Waterman, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Graceville, Florida, transmitted to the Board of Trustees of the Baptist Bible Institute an invitation on the part of the West Florida Baptist Preachers Association to relocate the school to the tri-state area around Graceville. This area was experiencing problems very similar to those which had called the school into existence in Polk County. At that time, the Board of Trustees graciously declined the invitation.

In 1952 Dr. Gambrell resigned his position as president of the school to take the pastorate of the First Baptist Church in Brooksville. About this same time, Dr. Boehm and Dr. Day both accepted pastorates outside of the state of Florida. This leadership vacuum was filled with the calling of Arthur House Stainback to the position of president of Baptist Bible Institute. Dr. Stainback was known in Southern Baptist circles as an advocate of education for rural pastors and had previously expressed his concern for an educational institution in the tri-state area. At an evangelistic conference in January of 1953, Rev. Waterman from Graceville and Rev. James H. Cristy from Bonifay, Florida, approached Dr. Stainback about the possibility of locating Baptist Bible Institute in Graceville. Dr. Stainback expressed some interest in the idea and Revs. Waterman and Cristy returned to cultivate interest on the part of local churches and businessmen in helping to make their dream possible.

Among others, they were able to enlist the help of two Methodist laymen, Mr. Claude Tindel and Mr. George W. Morrow. These men immediately began to cultivate financial help and to make available an attractive location for the school. In early 1953, several trustees visited Graceville and looked at the land being made available. Standing about where the R. G. Lee Chapel now stands they agreed to recommend the

move to Graceville to the Board of Trustees of Baptist Bible Institute. On March 9, 1953, the Board of Trustees unanimously voted to move the Baptist Bible Institute to Graceville, Florida. In October 1953, as classes were beginning in Lakeland, several classes were also started in the First Baptist Church of Graceville, Florida. On October 5, the South Florida Baptist Association concurred in the wisdom of the move.

Among the compelling reasons for the move was the radical change in the needs of pastors and churches in the two areas involved. The Baptist Bible Institute in Lakeland had graduated in 1953 a number of students who had never had opportunity to serve as a pastor or even to gain preaching experience. On the other hand, a survey revealed that there were 450 Baptist churches within 50 miles of Graceville which had part-time or bivocational preachers and that within a 100 mile radius there were 1,100 such churches. In order to facilitate the transition and meet the needs of the tri-state area and of the students, Dr. Stainback sent faculty members Rev. C. N. Walker and his wife to Graceville in the summer of 1954. Their assignment was to travel from church to church in the area sharing the good news that a preachers school would be moving to Graceville. Shortly after the school moved in the Fall of 1954, Dr. Stainback was able to report that almost every student was preaching almost every Sunday and over half of the students had already been called as pastors by small churches in the area.

On July 15, 1954, the books were closed on Baptist Bible Institute in Lakeland and on September 7, 1954, classes began in Graceville, Florida, on the new campus. During the first year of the school in Graceville, Rev. R. G. Lee conducted a revival at the school and became very much interested in the school's welfare.

Ray Hall was dedicated on March 28, 1954. Houses began to be built for student quarters and a house formerly owned by the Greenwood Products Company was moved to the campus. In addition, the snake-infested swamp just north of 12th Avenue was excavated and became Lake Albert.

The emphasis on meeting the needs of rural churches was continued and enlarged. Dr. Stainback was joined by Dr. John Freeman, Director of Rural Life Development, in sharing with others the need for this kind

of ministry. Mr. George Morrow helped Dr. Stainback convince the Ralston-Purina Company to begin a research farm in connection with the school.

About the time of the move to Graceville, an attempt was made to gain the sponsorship and support of the Southern Baptist Convention. The effort to turn ownership and responsibility over to the Southern Baptist Convention was supported by Dr. R. G. Lee and others prominent in the convention. This issue was settled in December 1954, when the Convention Executive Committee declined to make any recommendation regarding the school to the convention.

A brochure published in 1956 revealed that there were 30 churches served by pastors who were students at Baptist Bible Institute. In nine months, these 30 churches had baptized 587 people, increased membership from a total of 4,139 to 5,038, and increased the total of their church budgets from less than \$50,000 to \$103,740. In addition, six of the churches had moved from part-time to full-time pastoral status.

Several years after being turned down by the Southern Baptist Convention, the school made overtures to the Florida Baptist Convention, and a period of negotiation and discussion ensued. Dr. Stainback, for various reasons, decided it would be in the school's best interest for him to resign from the presidency if the school should, in fact, become the property of the Florida Baptist Convention. Final arrangements were begun in December 1956 to transfer ownership of the institute to the convention. Dr. Stainback's resignation was accepted on June 25, 1957, when ownership of the school was officially transferred to the Florida Baptist Convention. Dr. Stainback agreed to remain until August 15. When the Board of Trustees appointed Rev.



*Dr. Arthur House Steinback  
1952-1957*

George Gay as interim president, they requested Dr. Stainback to remain and help Rev. Gay adjust to the school and extended Dr. Stainback's salary through December 15.

Shortly after assuming ownership of the school, the Florida Baptist Convention filed a charter of incorporation, appointed a Board of Trustees, and elected a presidential selection committee. The man recommended by this committee for the presidency of the school was Dr. James E. Southerland. He was formally elected on November 12, 1957, and assumed office on December 1, 1957.

One of the urgent matters to which the new board of trustees addressed itself was the construction of a chapel building. Trustee authorization to begin the R. G. Lee Chapel came at their meeting on February 6, 1958. A large portion of the money used in the construction of the chapel had been raised by Dr. Stainback and Rev. R. G. Lee. The chapel was completed and dedicated on February 13, 1959. On that occasion, R. G. Lee preached the dedicatory sermon and Dr. Southerland was officially inaugurated as president the same day.



*Dr. James E. Southerland  
1957-1977*

Dr. Southerland's early attentions were turned to academic matters. He projected a vision of bringing pastoral training to men called later in life to the ministry. He enlisted the faculty in creating a curriculum that was seminary in content but junior college in level in order to accomplish this purpose. In 1960 he employed Dr. Walter D. Draughon as academic dean. Dr. Draughon served the school for 31 years. In 1962 admissions and academic standards were

revised and standardized. In the fall of 1963, annual faculty retreats were inaugurated.

Beginning about 1963, the attention of Dr. Southerland and the board of trustees was turned to the increasing need for newer and better



buildings on the campus. According to Dr. Wiley Richards authoritative history of the school, several years of respite were followed by what could be called a building frenzy. During this time, the Graceville Administration Building and the Solomon Classroom Building were



*Ray Hall, dedicated March 28, 1954 was the first permanent building built on the Graceville campus.*

built along with several new student duplexes and other student housing units. In 1967 the Ida J. McMillan Library Building came into existence along with additional student housing. In 1968 and 1969, the Frank Faris Student Center and the President's home were completed. In 1972 tennis courts were built. By 1976 there were two mobile home parks and twenty-seven brick residences.

By 1973 the Board of Trustees recognized that there were fewer and fewer people being called to the ministry who did not have at least a high school education. On December 15, 1973, the board voted to require all students admitted to the school to be high school graduates or to have passed the GED test. In March of 1974, it was decided to begin exploring the possibility of gaining accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. In September 1975, the State Board of Missions approved the move from a three- to a four-year degree program for the Baptist Bible Institute. In November of that year (1975), the Bachelor of Ministry Degree title was initiated. In January of 1977, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools representatives visited the campus for a preliminary survey.

In the late summer of 1976, Dr. Southerland notified the Board of Trustees of his intention to resign from the presidency of the school. Dr. Southerland and Dean Draughon had just begun the detailed work necessary for accreditation, so Dr. Southerland agreed to make the effective date of his resignation the following fall of 1977. He would at that time have completed 20 years as president of Baptist Bible Institute. Dr. Southerland had served the school as president for a longer period of time than any other person. Dr. Southerland still lives in Graceville and, though in failing health, consented to a video interview. That interview has been transcribed and is included under a different heading in this journal.

The early notification which Dr. Southerland gave concerning his resignation gave the Board of Trustees ample time to find his replacement. The man called to be president of Baptist Bible Institute on the resignation of Dr. Southerland was Rev. Joseph P. Dubose. Dr. Dubose came to this office with first hand knowledge of the school as he had served on the board of trustees. He was ministering as pastor of East Hill Baptist Church in Pensacola at the time of his election to the presidency. Dr. Dubose was officially elected president as of June 1, 1977, and served an internship under Dr.



*Dr. Joseph P. Dubose  
1977-1990*

Southerland, whose retirement became effective in December of 1977. The school continued its efforts toward meeting all of the requirements of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools for accreditation and finally gained that accreditation in 1981.

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, the school made many changes, adjustments, and improvements in academic and organizational matters. In 1981 the Bachelor of Ministries degree was dropped and was replaced with the Bachelor of Theology, the Bachelor of Religious Education, and the Bachelor of Sacred Music degrees. Faculty committees had much work to do from 1981 through 1987 to prepare for reaffirmation of Southern Association Accreditation. They had to deal with all of the deficiencies pointed out by the original

visitation team and, in addition, found it necessary to deal with many changing standards of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. In 1982 the school worked out a contract with Chipola College to provide contract teachers in the area of General Education. In 1986 the minimum age requirement for admission to the school was removed. In 1981 through the generosity of some local business men, the McRae-Morrow Building was completed. With the return of a healthier national economy in the middle 1980s, the Brackin-Chandler Building was built and in 1990 the Smith Building was completed.

Following the reaffirmation of Southern Association Accreditation in 1987, the need was felt to change the name of the school. Dr. Dubose pointed out to the trustees that Baptist Bible Institute was gaining status among other educational institutions as a full-fledged college granting accredited bachelor s degrees. He pointed out that, while retaining the ministry and theological emphasis of the school, the word college should be included in its name. The trustees voted to rename the school Florida Baptist Theological College on September 6, 1988.

### ***Seminole Indians Join School***

One of the most interesting aspects in the early years of the school was the introduction into the student body of a number of Christian Seminole Indians seeking Bible training for pastoral and other work among their own people.

In 1946 six Seminole Indians made application to attend Florida Baptist Institute. Josie Billie, a former medicine man was the first to enroll. Sammie Tommie, a former tribal chief and the only one of the six who could read and write; Billie Osceola, reputedly a great-grandson of Chief Osceola of Seminole War fame ; Barfield John, Junior Buster, and E. J. Tiger. Two Indians, Clay Gibson and Elizabeth



*Josie Billie flying to preach to  
Seminoles, 1947*

Carney, came from Oklahoma. Lee Tafaya came from New Mexico. Rev. Stanley Smith had led three of the students to Christ, Junior Buster, Billie Osceola, and Sam Tommie.

Help for the Indians came in unpredictable forms. The U.S. government assigned Miss Alice Smith as a teacher. Faculty helped where possible, but one person played a key role. Mrs. S. L.

Collins, a retired school teacher, assumed supervisory control of the work. Her interests extended beyond the

classroom. When a student informed her that his son needed shoes, she gave him the needed money. As news spread about her gift, others came to her. Eventually, she was sending oranges as far north as Cherokee, North Carolina, as Indians there learned about her generous spirit.

(Information taken from *Telling the Story of Jesus*, written by Dr. W. Wiley Richards, p. 30.)



Left to Right, Front: *Lucy Billy, Josie Billie*  
Back: *Sam Tommie, Billy Osceola,*  
*Barfield John, Junior Buster*

### ***Testimony of Harold Dann Graduated from the Baptist Bible Institute in 1951.***

Harold and Margaret Dann, graduates of Baptist Bible Institute, Spring 1951, written by their daughter, Monique Desrochers.

After serving overseas in World War II, Harold Dann felt called to the ministry. It was a hard decision for him and the last thing he wanted to do, but he followed God's leading. He married his sweetheart, Margaret Roberts, and attended Stetson University briefly.

In the fall of 1948, both Harold and Margaret enrolled in Baptist Bible Institute at the Lakeland campus. Harold felt it was a solid theological school. He, like so many of the other students, was on the GI Bill and received \$100 a month. He worked at many odd jobs and it was often that Margaret would find him asleep in the tub late at night, exhausted from studying and working long hours. There was very little money, so part of their education was learning to lean on God and to exercise their faith in Him because that was all they had.



*Graduating class of 1950*

Baptist Bible Institute was a new school when Harold and Margaret started there. There was a lot of work to be done on the physical facilities. Harold worked at painting and maintenance on the buildings and Margaret, who had previously finished business school, worked in the school office.

Baptist Bible Institute had a wealth of great teachers. Many were older men and women who had retired from other professorships and were living in Lakeland. Local pastors also sometimes taught. It was like God dropped in the best of the best into Lakeland. Their life experiences and teaching abilities were

priceless. Harold is especially thankful for the way Baptist Bible Institute taught him how to pastor a church. There were many practical things that helped over the years such as how to direct a church in decorum, how to up build a church, etc. The theological training was good, but pastoring as a foundation was one of the treasured things he learned at Baptist Bible Institute.

Margaret remembers the time that the great pastor R. G. Lee was coming to the school for a lecture and Harold drove to the airport to pick him up. While Harold and Margaret were at Baptist Bible Institute, many bright energetic young men came to Baptist Bible Institute ready to preach, and were not there very long before they realized God had not called them to preach. The school became a sifting out time to find out what God wanted to do in their lives, and the school had a profound impact on all of its students.

Harold and Margaret were graduated together in the spring of 1951. They were the first married couple to be graduated together, and Margaret was one of the first three female graduates of the school.

Harold pastored churches in Lake Wales, Winter Haven, Lakeland, Miami, Apopka, and several other places. For several years he was a church planter doing the difficult work of pioneer missions. He and Margaret have two children, Art and Monique, and five grandchildren. Harold recently retired from full time pastoring at the age of 78 and is currently Pastor Emeritus of Triune Missionary Baptist Church in Winter Haven, Florida.

My favorite story from my parents experience with Baptist Bible Institute involves my father s smoking. In the era when they started to Baptist Bible Institute, cigarette smoking was as common as chewing gum. During the war, GIs received rations of food that included cigarettes. So, as was common, Harold Dann smoked cigarettes. Baptist Bible Institute had a rule against students smoking. When he and Margaret were on their way to Baptist Bible Institute to begin their life studying for God s ministry, he took his pack of cigarettes out of his pocket

and threw it out the window of the car. Thanks to God's help he never smoked another cigarette.

Rev. and Mrs. Dann currently live in Winter Haven. In 2001, he will be 80 and she will be 76.

***Testimony of John Sibole who was graduated from Baptist Bible Institute in 1952.***

The first time I ever heard of Baptist Bible Institute was at the Florida Baptist Convention in 1949. At that time the president of Baptist Bible Institute, Dr. Gambrell, made his report about a school that would accept a God-called man and prepare him for the ministry. My wife, Vera, and I talked to him at the close of the service and prepared to attend Baptist Bible Institute in January.

I suspect many students in these days would not choose a school like Baptist Bible Institute. There are many reasons for this. Our apartment was furnished with a small foot tub in which we kept a 25 pound block of ice—this was our refrigerator. We had no air conditioner in our new home nor in any of the classrooms. One tar-paper covered building was both study hall and library.

The great advantage of Baptist Bible Institute in those days was its God-called and dedicated professors such as Dr. Denham, Rev. Bill Smith, Rev. and Mrs. Walker, Rev. Pat Wimberly, and others.

Baptist Bible Institute gave me a foundation in the Bible and prepared us to share the Word with others. I have served three churches in my ministry: Wildwood Baptist Church at Bartow, Forest Park Baptist Church in Orlando, and Melrose Heights Baptist Church in Miami Lakes, Miami, the latter for thirty years.

I remember with great fondness the wonderful fellowship and love that permeated the campus. It was a wonderful time of learning and of growing in the Lord Jesus. After I graduated, I

was elected to serve on the Board of Trustees and voted to move Baptist Bible Institute to Graceville. My prayers shall always be for this school as it prepares students for greater service for our Lord.

***Testimony of William H. Anderson who was graduated from Baptist Bible Institute in 1955.***

Having come to conversion and salvation in the spring of 1949, and not having any connection with any church up until that time, and having never read over a dozen chapters in the Bible, it was all a new and happy experience for me at twenty-two years of age.

When I was converted, it was in cold blood; I mean it was genuine. After my baptism, I became a member of a cooperating Baptist church of the Southern Baptist Convention. Since that point in time, I have been in regular church worship services Sunday and Wednesday at least ninety-eight percent of the time.

I was called to preach in the early fall of 1951. My call to preach was as vivid as my experience of salvation. There is no question about either one, and never has been.

I had heard for some time about the Baptist Bible Institute and enrolled there in the first part of January 1952. I had been a Christian slightly less than three years. My exposure to the Bible and to church life had been short but I had gained some knowledge from studying the Bible in a Sunday School and on my own and listening to preaching by my pastors and other preachers. I had a high school education when I enrolled at Baptist Bible Institute. I believe at that time Baptist Bible Institute would accept you if you had been called to preach even if you didn't have but a second or third grade education. That was basically why the school was started and what had been in Brother Frank Faris' heart in starting it.

I don't think the Christian atmosphere could have been better anywhere than it was at Baptist Bible Institute. It was like



being in a big family where love prevailed. The leaders and teachers at that time were the most conscientious and dedicated Christian people I have ever known or been around. They were there because their heart was there. They were there to help us poor boys (and several older men) to prepare for ministry. Many of us had just come out of the service or off the farm. I was farming when I surrendered to preach, and I sold out and went to Baptist Bible Institute. I had just been married, so both of us went together and lived in an apartment on the school campus.

Attending Baptist Bible Institute for the curriculum that was offered at that time was a God-sent blessing to me. The learning and training I got there has been one of the most valuable things that ever happened to me and has been a blessing during my thirty years of pastoral work. I was full time on the field for eighteen years, and have more recently served about twelve years as a bivocational preacher. What that really means is a full time minister on part-time pay. From 1981 until now I have done supply preaching all over our local area. For the past year and a half I have been interim pastor of a church just north of where I live. I have pastored seven churches. I have preached eighteen revivals in my years of ministry back when revivals ran for a week to two weeks. I think I have held every place of leadership in the association during these years. I conducted one school of missions in the Sewanee Association back in the 60s.

At Baptist Bible Institute, we were taught not only precepts and doctrines but the principles behind things. It was a very good school in its early years and is even better today. I guess I will always think it as Baptist Bible Institute regardless of how many times the name is changed.

The school has always had high standards for behavior. You couldn't smoke if you went to school there or use tobacco of any kind. There was no cursing or even minor slang language of any sort. There was no sex abuse; women were looked upon and treated with all respect (the sexual revolution in this country had not begun at that time). The single men had very strict orders

concerning the women's dormitory. There was a high standard of dress code on campus also. You did not see shorts of any kind on men or women.

Students learned a great deal by example from the faculty as well as from one another as fellow students. If I remember correctly we had a time for chapel every day. This was always inspirational, because nearly every day we would have a visiting pastor from some church in the area. Everything in and around the school was spiritually oriented. I spent three years at Baptist Bible Institute and was graduated with one hundred and eight hours of credit. I finished my work at Christmas in 1954 and went through graduation exercises in 1955. I was salutatorian of my class. I remember that the salutatorian and valedictorians had to write a speech and I still have mine. I was told my speech was so long I could only give the outline while the valedictorian's speech was so short that he had to go back and write it over.

Many of the students in those days were on the GI Bill while others supported themselves in other ways. The cost of attending



*Staff, 1954*

*L. to R., Joyce Pelham, Nadine BBarclay, Virgil Davis, A. H. Stainback, Mary Phillips, Nell Walker. Back: Catherine Smith, P. W. Lett, J. D. Freeman, Leslie Sanders, Jack Nightingale, C. N. Walker, Clara Nell Jones*

Baptist Bible Institute was very reasonable. The Godly men and women who were there on the faculty and administration were trying to help us get a grip on theology, preaching the gospel, and church administration. I understand they were not paid very much and a lot of them did a lot of sacrificing. I believe some of them even gave their time to the school free. The teachers that I remember were Bros. Boehm, Johnson, Denham, Davis, Freeman, Williams, Hickman, and Bro. and Mrs. Walker. Dr. Denham was the dean and acting president until Dr. Stainback came in late 1952.

I believe I could say that Baptist Bible Institute gave me a tremendous shove and I have been rolling ever since.

***Testimony of John E. Ingram who was graduated from Baptist Bible Institute in 1958.***

I felt called to preach in 1953, and was convinced I needed training to prepare for the task. I learned about the Baptist Bible Institute through friends and from their reports I decided it was probably the one for me. I considered Baptist Bible Institute along with several other options but definitely felt Baptist Bible Institute was the school I should attend. I made a trip from Jacksonville to Graceville on a Saturday and when I arrived I found the president, Dr. Stainback, along with several students planting trees in the field behind Ray Hall. While they worked I asked questions and finally Dr. Stainback walked over and sat on the porch of a small building and told me everything I needed to know about the school. When I returned to Jacksonville I had some mixed emotions about attending Baptist Bible Institute but they did not last for long after I got there.

I started attending Baptist Bible Institute in the fall of 1954 and found what I was looking for. I found a fine group of dedicated Christian men and women, both faculty and students. I found the courses I needed most were the very ones that I got. Had it not been for Baptist Bible Institute I could not have done

what I needed to do as a pastor. I was graduated in 1958 along with twelve others, I believe. I feel sure that their testimony would be similar to mine.

During my first semester at Baptist Bible Institute, I traveled by car with several other students every week from Jacksonville to Graceville. During the second semester, I was called to serve Southport Baptist Church located about fifty miles from Graceville. I was able to attend school while serving the church. I was their pastor for five years and the Lord surely blessed my early ten minute sermons. I eventually learned to preach longer sermons and God added many souls to His kingdom including several whole families.

After graduation I moved back to Jacksonville and served Caleb Baptist Church for two years, then Bostwick Baptist Church (where Billy Graham had preached some of his first sermons) for fourteen years and then served St. John s Baptist Church for five years. All of these pastorates were good and successful experiences and I feel sure that Baptist Bible Institute has played a major role in all my ministry.

To the best of my memory there were very few buildings on the campus when I attended Baptist Bible Institute. The R. G. Lee Chapel was in the planning stage and was built while I was there.

***Testimony of Raymond L. Estes who was graduated from Baptist Bible Institute in 1960.***

God called two ordinary people to minister to His people. Clara and I were married July 31, 1949. She had led me to accept Jesus as my Savior about a year before we were married. Shortly after, I knew that God was calling me into some type of Christian service. At that time, I was working with Royal Ambassadors and Brotherhood, and was teaching a Sunday School class, but I knew that was not all God had in mind. I was praying and trying to tell God that I was too shy and too bashful about standing in front of

people to be a preacher. This went on for some time. In addition, I had not finished high school, and I knew that if God wanted me to preach, I would have to go to school somewhere to prepare.

A friend of mine came by to see us who had just graduated from Baptist Bible Institute. He encouraged us to visit the school. In September of 1957, after much prayer, we sold our home and eighteen acres of land and moved to Graceville, Florida, with our two boys, ages five and three.

The school was very small at that time. There was only one building for classrooms. There was a cafeteria and one small office building. The R. G. Lee chapel was built while we were there.

Dr. James Southerland came to the school as president shortly after we started our first year. He was a very good president for the school.

My wife and I were fortunate to have employment during the time we were in school. I was a brick mason by trade, and was able to work part-time. My wife had worked for a rural electric co-op in our home town of Lafayette, Alabama, and was able to get a job in the electric co-op in Graceville. We enjoyed Graceville very much and made many good friends.

I graduated in May 1960. We have served God through four churches since graduation. I retired in 1992 and moved back to the community where I had served for seventeen years. At the



*Greenwood Building, 1955  
Given by the Greenwood Products Company and  
used by the school as an office building.*

request of the pastor, deacons, and church family I am now serving as part-time assistant pastor.

We thank God for Baptist Bible Institute and for the progress that has been made in the past forty-three years. We praise God for The Baptist College of Florida.

***Testimony of James W. McCall who was graduated from Baptist Bible Institute in 1962.***

My first knowledge of the school, then Baptist Bible Institute, came as a result of my pastor, G. Robert Towe, placing a catalogue in my path. We owned a small automotive service center in Deerfield Beach, Florida, and God was calling us as a family into full-time Christian service. I needed preparation to serve better and the catalogue captured my attention. My wife also felt the call and we both wanted to find a school that would meet our need. We read the catalogue with excitement at learning that there was a school that met our needs and expectations. We visited the school in the spring of 1959 and were convinced that Baptist Bible Institute was the school for us.

We made application and were accepted as full-time students. It was quite a change! We had been out of school for eleven years. We sold our business and our home and packed our belongings in a U-Haul trailer and headed toward the opposite end of Florida.

Our family moved into a two-room apartment at 5400 College Drive, Graceville, Florida, and had the best year of our lives, to that point, because we were in God's will and living on the campus of His school. I thought I was old at twenty-nine, but we found a lot of couples our age with children attending our school.

Baptist Bible Institute was a small school with small classes in which students received a lot of personal attention. For the most part, the faculty held doctor's degrees from our Southern Baptist Seminaries and were well prepared to give the best of

training to the students. Not only were we in a great academic community but to be a part of a school where every one there was active in some ministry for our Lord was rewarding. Our administrators, faculty, staff, and students were excited about God's work so we were in a spiritual community like we had not experienced before. Needless to say, we grew spiritually.

We had two small children when we moved on campus and then God blessed us with another child while we were students. We moved into a four-room apartment before our third child was born. There was a wonderful spirit on campus and that spirit remains there to this day.

The school had moved from Lakeland to Graceville because there were more small churches in that tri-state area that needed pastors and staff members. As a result, I was called as pastor of West Pittman Baptist Church soon after we enrolled in school. We were going to school all week learning theology, preaching, church history, and religious education and then putting them into practice in the evenings and on weekends. I don't know how the church lived through it all, but they seemed to do well. Our professors encouraged us to hold revivals, two-week Vacation Bible Schools, church community surveys, and study courses. The church responded and the Home Mission Board recognized our little church as an outstanding church in Church Development Ministry. As a result, I was invited to speak on several occasions including trips to Kentucky and Ridgecrest Baptist Assembly. We had strong encouragement from the administration and faculty. This is still true today for the students of The Baptist College of Florida.

After graduation, we moved to William Carey College and then to the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, but we have retained strong ties with the school in Graceville. The school has continued to show interest in us and all graduates. We have visited the school through the years and have rejoiced in the growth and influence the school is having on the work



*Campus, 1962*

of our Lord. Through the years, God has called outstanding administrators and faculty members to the school. The president of the school today and the faculty are the best to be found anywhere. I had the privilege of working with these choice educators as the first school chaplain and I continue to serve as a trustee and I appreciate and admire them.

In 1988 our trustees saw the need to change the name of the school from Baptist Bible Institute to Florida Baptist Theological College. The new name better described the school. It had become a college and the main focus was theological studies. The school through the years has continued to be true to its purpose, to train God-called men and women as they join God where he is at work. As the world has grown in technology and methods, the school has changed to meet the needs of his servants. Our school now offers degrees in a number of areas to better equip God-called men and women to minister in the new millennium. With the many changes in our school, there came again the need for a name change. The name, The Baptist College of Florida, better describes our college at this time, which continues to be true to its purpose, but has continued to grow to better live out that purpose.



The Baptist College of Florida is unique. There is not another college that offers to God-called men and women an opportunity to equip themselves for service with such specialized training. Another factor that is most appealing is the tuition cost. Our school has earned and received favorable recognition from the leadership in our convention and our churches. As the school has remained true to its purpose, it has grown to meet the needs of God-called people.

Once, while talking with a politically motivated convention leader, I shared a testimony on the worth of our school. He asked, Do you have graduates in important positions? I thought a minute and couldn't think of a graduate who has authored a book or one who served as a college president; however, I could think of hundreds of graduates scattered all over our country and other parts of the world faithfully making a difference in the lives of people. God called men and women who love Him, exalt Jesus, believe God's Word, and serve Him with great joy and conviction. Yes, I know a lot of our graduates in very important positions.

I am proud to be a graduate of The Baptist College of Florida, and most thankful for its president, staff, faculty, and student body.

***Testimony of Tommy Green who was graduated from Baptist Bible Institute in 1977.***

God called me to preach in the Spring of 1974. I realized it would be necessary for me to be trained to do the work of the ministry. My pastor had heard of Baptist Bible Institute in Graceville, Florida, and recommended that I contact the school for information. From the first phone call I made to Baptist Bible Institute through today, my life has been blessed through the relationship I have had with The Baptist College of Florida.

My first visit to the school in May of 1974 impressed me with the spiritual emphasis on the campus which was so unlike

the atmosphere on the campuses of the secular schools I had attended. Before I left the campus, President Dr. James Southerland invited me into his office and prayed for me. That visit in the president's office convinced me that I should attend Baptist Bible Institute.

In Graceville both campus life and community life enhanced fellowship, supported family life, and increased faith. The fellowship among the students and the faculty was amazing. Dr. Benefield and I played tennis, and on one occasion played doubles in a campus tennis tournament. Many students tried to better Professor Joe Woods' ping pong skill but few succeeded. The fellowship of students sometimes included a twenty-three mile trip to Dothan, Alabama, for entertainment, shopping, and fast food. In 1974 to 1977, there was no fast food restaurant in Graceville and we joked about being foreign missionaries in a place that had no McDonald's or Hardees. Felters Seafood Restaurant and the Circle Grill were the popular restaurants.

Baptist Bible Institute's campus life was governed by written and unwritten policies such as no tobacco, no alcohol, and no work on Sunday. Our toddler daughter who had had no contact with persons who smoked, was shocked one Sunday to see smoke rising from the head of one of our church members. She ran to her Mother yelling, "Mama, Mama, his head is on fire!" Our toddler, Melanie, received much nurturing from caregivers in the childcare center, which was then called the chicken coop. The coop had been remodeled to house the childcare center on one end and the campus equipment storage center on the other end.

The unwritten policy of no work on Sunday circulated among students and was backed up by a reported incident of Dr. Southerland taking down laundry he found hanging out to dry on Sunday.

God provided for our family through people and churches that had connections to Baptist Bible Institute. A number of families received support from jobs made available to them by

the community and many received financial aid from area churches. We lived at 8 Ezell Street Trailer Court in a trailer purchased by my mother-in-law. When we left the school, a WMU group purchased the trailer and donated it to the school. My home church, Fellowship Baptist Church in Rome, Georgia, gave us financial assistance as did the First Baptist Church of Quincy, Florida. On the recommendation of Dr. J. D. Allen, Providence Baptist Church in Clayhatchee, Alabama, helped us financially. On Dr. Allen's recommendation Providence Baptist Church later became my first full-time pastorate. My wife obtained a job at the Panhandle Area Educational Cooperative under Lester Kitching who later became chairman of the Baptist Bible Institute Board of Trustees, and was one who signed my degree when I was graduated. Churches in the area of Graceville welcomed students into their fellowships. We were members of First Baptist Church in Graceville for a year and attended a Sunday School class taught by Mrs. Leroy Benefield. She was always a great encouragement to preachers and their families who were beginners in the ministry. When Mrs. Benefield was working on a masters degree, my wife, Anita, helped with proofreading, and typing her papers.

Baptist Bible Institute required students to attend chapel services. Those who attended would remember Dr. Southerland's statement frequently offered to discouraged students, "Just stay one more day." For me those days added up to the day that I received a B.Min degree.

God taught me well through the professors at Baptist Bible Institute. The first two classes I took were New Testament under Dr. J. B. Allen and Preacher Music under Professor Lynn Bartlow. Those two classes reinforced for me that I was right where God intended for me to be to be trained for the gospel ministry. I have always said that it was God who called me to preach and Dr. Benefield who taught me to preach. Dr. Curtis taught me how to pastor and to care for people in our pastoral ministries studies. My involvement in associational

work began because of Dr. Curtis' encouragement when he advised me to attend the Holmes County Annual Meeting even though I would miss a day of class.

Other professors, Dr. Jerry Lee, Professor Cecil Davis, Dr. Wiley Richards, and Dr. E. L. Scruggs trained me to become the best preacher and pastor that I could possibly be for the Lord. Dr. Scruggs also recommended me to my first pastorate at Sandy Creek Baptist Church in Ponce de Leon, Florida.

While I was enrolled, the degree program was initiated, and I received the bachelor of ministries degree in December 1976.

While I was at Baptist Bible Institute, I believe God gave me an excellent education. I have been through twenty-six plus years in four pastorates and find myself still drawing from the lessons learned at Baptist Bible Institute.

***Testimony of Tommy W. Fountain who was graduated from Baptist Bible Institute in 1985.***

Describing the four years I spent at the Baptist Bible Institute has brought back many fond memories. I believe that the Baptist Bible Institute instilled within me three important elements for ministry.

First, FAITH became a reality for me and my family. Many of our student friends suffered and sacrificed financially. We were extremely fortunate to serve two very generous churches while attending Baptist Bible Institute. God's faithfulness in response to our faith was demonstrated especially in two ways. First, for two years I traveled ninety-six miles each way to school every day. During this time I never had a wreck or an automobile breakdown, and I received only one speeding ticket. Second, our faith worked in the ministry of the local church. I preached and taught each Sunday and Wednesday what I had learned in my Bible classes that week. Dr. Curtis, Dr. Lee, Dr. Batson, Dr. Benefield, Dr. Richards, and even Dr. Hammack were quoted frequently (though without credit given). I even

threw in a little Dr. Burns or Deac Jones every once in a while. These great men of God taught me doctrines and the duties from the Word of God which made my ministry possible then, and which still enable me to exemplify my faith in Jesus Christ to this day.

The second element instilled in me at Baptist Bible Institute was the importance of FELLOWSHIP. Good Christian fellowship was an important part of the life of students and faculty at Baptist Bible Institute. The cafeteria was our hangout before school started each morning; the laughter there would be so loud sometimes that you could not cram for the test you were having first hour. It was, however, a great time of conversation and fellowship. My father, a bi-vocational pastor at that time, was battling cancer at the young age of 48, and the professors and the student body surrounded me with love and kindness during all those days. Dr. Hammack prayed with me and encouraged me to such an extent that I actually began to like him. The library was also a great place for fellowship even during exam week. I cannot leave out Fletcher s and the drug store downtown nor the oyster bar.

But the greatest fellowship we enjoyed was in the chapel services. Dr. Lee s sermon on Heaven, Dr. Richardson s message on the Holy Spirit, Dr. Curtis twelve to fifteen minute energetic sermons: all these energized and activated a wonderful sense of spiritual fellowship. The same must be said for Dr. Batson s expositions of the Pauline Epistles. My favorite guest preachers were Paul Brooks and Gene Smith. I remember on several occasions when the glory came down while these men were preaching. You can t ask for any better fellowship on this earth than what we enjoyed at the Baptist Bible Institute when we were all together worshipping God.

The third important element instilled in me at Baptist Bible Institute was FUN! Even in the midst of all the long hour of study and class time (and on the highway for me) life was enjoyable and just plain fun. From Dr. Hammack s stories about

pastoring in Louisiana to the time Dr. Burns taught a class not realizing his pajamas were hanging out. The entire campus was filled with men and women of God who had a great sense of humor. When life got boring, Dr. Benefield would stir something up just for a good laugh. The emotional mood swings one could encounter in the Old Testament Surveys and intensives of Dr. Lee are very real to me even yet. You would laugh, you would cry, your toes would get stepped on, and your hearts would be pricked. But then, Dr. Lee would encourage you with such simple applications that would meet your need for the day.

I was one of the youngest and smallest students on campus and often my buddies would try to pull pranks on me. I feel like I got the last laugh when the student body elected me to preach on Senior Day with the chapel completely full and running over. Let's face it: that was fun.

***Testimony of Marcus D. Caraway, Graduated from the Baptist College of Florida in 1994.***

I would like to thank the Florida Baptist Historical Society for the opportunity to speak of an institution for which I am truly grateful. It is a joy to hear the other testimonies. I find it so amazing how God has worked in the lives of people from various backgrounds. He moves in such a way that their paths cross at the Florida Baptist Theological College for a specific purpose.

Though my crossing was somewhat different than those who have already shared and those with whom I have talked to down through the years, there are non-the-less some similarities. I felt the call to ministry at a later age in life than most. In January of 1988, I felt the call of God to the pastorate. Having been brought up in a Christian home and faithfully taken to church since my birth, I had a solid background as to God's word. Saved at the age of fifteen and actively involved in the Lord's

word at the present age of thirty-three, I truly felt there was no need for formal training such as college. The Lord revealed to me within two weeks that I was going. Where, was still the question. In February of 1988, my wife and I were headed to the Blue Springs Baptist Assembly. A time of training for bi-vocational Ministers of Music was being held. As I drove on I-10, Kathy and I discussed and wondered how the Lord was going to lead us where we needed to go. It was not long before we came to a sign on the side of I-10, Baptist Bible Institute. God was beginning to put the pieces together. After returning home from Blue Springs I began to make some inquiries about the college. I made contact with a pastor and his wife, Tom and Joyce Little, who did not live far from us. We found that he was a graduate from the college. My wife and I went to their home and spoke to them concerning God's direction in our life. They affirmed and rejoiced with us about the move to the college. Some weeks later, Kathy and I took a tour of the college, and knew that was where God wanted us to be.

There was much to do to prepare for the move to the Baptist Bible Institute. The time finally arrived and we moved on campus June 25, 1990. There were so many who helped us move in and get adjusted to our new setting.

I remember like it was yesterday. It was the second week of my first semester in the fall of 1990. I walked into our apartment and fell across the bed. Kathy asked me how my classes were going. I told her, If I continue to learn as much as I have in these past two weeks over the next four years, I don't know if I can hold it all. I'm thankful we're here. Prior to October of 1990, there was a special event announced. Kathy and I knew we did not want to miss it. The special event was the inauguration of a new president, Dr. Tom Kinchen. Though a change in administration was being recognized, the service affirmed that FBTC was for the purpose of bringing glory to God as it prepared men and women for ministry.

I am most grateful to the Lord for the direction He has given

me and my family. The Baptist College of Florida, has fulfilled and continues to make a deep impact upon the ministry that God has called me to. I am thankful for the men and women of the college. They not only have a vision from the Lord but they graciously share that vision with the men and women who come there for training.

***Testimony of Jim Vaughn who was graduated from Florida Baptist Theological College in 1998.***

I dropped out of a big city college in 1976. Seventeen years later at forty years of age I returned to the same college to finish my degree. I returned to that same school to take advantage of my existing credits and because that private institution had a very good reputation. Although the institution had a Christian element in its purpose, I was not quite comfortable there. I had changed from a communications major to a music major when I returned and found the academic standards to be outstanding. The institution was highly respected and the music staff was well-known. The uneasiness concerning Christian standards remained and financial considerations became an additional difficulty. I looked to God for direction and He clearly directed me to what was then Florida Baptist Theological College now the Baptist College of Florida.

During the winter break, I went to Florida Baptist Theological College to take a look. I had assumed that this Bible school would be a little less challenging than where I was coming from. After all it was in Graceville, it was inexpensive compared to the big city private college, and the music school building would fit inside the big city school's cafeteria. I expected an education but not necessarily a challenge. That impression was quickly extinguished when, thirty seconds into my interview, music chairman Dr. Pat Malone handed me a hymn book and said, Pick one; I'll play, you sing. That level of challenge continued throughout my



years of study at the Florida Baptist Theological College.

In general, music schools require some element of experience and expertise to qualify for admissions. Many weed out those without requisite skills. At the Baptist College of Florida it was assumed that if you were called, you could be prepared. I found close personal support a rule among the staff in relation to all of their students. There was not a single instance when I felt that I was just another of many students counseled by my academic advisors.

The entire staff at Baptist College of Florida exhibits a desire to see their students excel. They are willing to move to the student's skill set instead of molding them all into a box. Since I had changed my major in my junior year I found it necessary to take all of the music major courses after having completed my general education requirements. Typically, such major courses were scheduled into a degree plan along with other general credit elements. Of course, I had scheduling difficulties, but my professors made an extra effort to make it possible for me to move ahead with my class. As I think back on my time at Florida Baptist Theological College, I find many examples of this kind of attitude on the part of the college faculty. The music department expanded its staff with an adjunct professor of instrumental music so that I might qualify on an instrument with which I was familiar. I was challenged to move to a skill level in my instrument that I had never attained in twenty-seven years of playing. As a result of my training at Florida Baptist Theological College, I often play my instrument as a soloist and in community symphonies and bands.

At the time that I entered my senior year at Florida Baptist Theological College, its school of music earned full membership in the National Association of Schools of Music, which is the nationally recognized certifying body for the best in music academics. Normally, membership in NASM is a lengthy process. Our school earning membership on the very first review was a unique accomplishment. I noted that in that same year my

former big city school gained only its associate membership.

The Florida Baptist Theological College, now Baptist College of Florida, is largely a college of future preachers. But all students, including those not planning to be preachers, are required to study the foundations of theology, Bible, and the evangelical church, particularly the Baptist church. Although most of my academic work was in the music department, I found the staff of the other departments were supportive and concerned and interactive as a part of my college experience.

When I came to Florida Baptist Theological College, I expected I would find a staff of seconds as professors. When I left there I understood clearly that all of them would be welcome at the most prestigious of institutions in unparalleled academic excellence. Florida Baptist Theological College professors are not there because they are seconds; they are there because of a first. They are first committed to follow God's direction in practicing what they preach. They choose to follow God by teaching at a tiny college in Graceville, Florida, and in doing so they gave students a big city education in a uniquely priceless environment of spiritual as well as educational mentoring.

## **The Historical Significance of The Baptist College of Florida**

*Dr. Fred Donehoo, Professor, Retired*

The Baptist College of Florida, organized in 1943 as Florida Baptist Institute, has followed a development similar to other denominationally related colleges in the past. Many such have begun as high schools and progressed through various stages finally emerging as baccalaureate post-secondary institutions.

In the case of The Baptist College of Florida, a group of pastors sought to establish a school that provided its students with basic skills and Biblical instruction. Its stated purpose has not changed over the years— to promote, provide for, operate and control a program of education and training for ministers and other religious workers (2000-2001 Catalog, p. 5).

Across the last fifty-seven years, the school's curriculum and levels of instruction have evolved from a high school format to one offering fourteen degrees ranging from a Bachelor of Arts in Theology to a Bachelor of Arts in Elementary Education. All of these programs of study, as have those in the past, contain at least a Bible minor and a significant core of ministry preparation. Whether these degrees focus on theology or teacher education, they are designed to prepare the recipient for Christian ministry.

Across the years some 2,300 students have graduated from The Baptist College of Florida. Today they are literally scattered around the world. Seven hundred fifty serve in Florida, 387 in Alabama, 229 in Georgia, 44 in Mississippi, 45 in Tennessee, 37 in Louisiana, 46 in Kentucky, 76 in North Carolina, over 25 in foreign countries, and the rest serve across the United States. These alums serve as denominational leaders, pastors, education directors, ministers of music, chaplains, counselors, newspaper editors, youth directors, state and federal employees, teachers and administrators in Christian schools, and teachers and administrators in public schools and colleges.

The impact of an institution on its world can be measured only in terms of the contribution of its graduates to their society. In this regard, we can be sure of only three things. First, we have sent 2,300 graduates

into the world. Second, these graduates, who are grounded in God's Word and committed to His kingdom, have a high probability of applying the values and knowledge learned at The Baptist College of Florida to the problems and opportunities they encounter from day to day. Third, in the future, as the numbers of these graduates grow, the positive influence of the institution will continue to increase.

### **Factors in the Molding of The Baptist College of Florida**

*W. Wiley Richards, Senior Professor of Theology and Philosophy, The Baptist College of Florida.*

When Dr. Donahoo persuaded me to present a summary to this conference featuring The Baptist College of Florida, his choice had some basis for it since I had written the history of our school entitled *Telling the Story of Jesus: The Golden Anniversary of Florida Baptist Theological College*. As I tried to settle on an underlying impetus which impelled the growth of the school (apart from God's oversight), I remembered something from my youthful days in Pensacola. At that time, a business in the town was named Pensacola Buggy Works. However, the company sold Chevrolets, not buggies. Whether they ever sold buggies at all, I do not know. This much is clear. They were selling transportation. To accomplish that goal, they could adjust to the changes in culture and technology.

Similarly, God has kept us from thinking that the school's goal was the presentation of a particular sheet of paper called a diploma, certificate, or degree. We are marketing a certain kind of education. The



*Dr. W. Wiley Richards  
1963-present*

titles on the awards merely reflect the changes in the focus of the education in vogue at the time.

With that understanding of our program in mind, I want to turn attention to four factors which have helped mold the school into what it is today. I call these the Academic Factor, the Stetson Factor, the Accommodation Factor, and the Vision Factor.

### The Academic Factor

We can cover the academic factor with a summary of the diploma being offered at a given time. In the beginning stages, the founders adopted a clear-cut objective, to provide a seminary-type curriculum to local pastors who had little formal training. In Lakeland at that time, many pastors could not even point with pride to a high school diploma. To help them, the school leaders set up curricula leading to the high school diploma, but also including large numbers of Bible courses. The school leaders constantly emphasized the goal of providing high school training.

Culture overtook the school and forced a change. The demand for academic equivalency for military training provided GIs during World War II led to the development of the high school equivalency program, the GED. This forced the school to take a new direction. The result was a two-year certificate, roughly equivalent to an associate degree. The faculty eventually abandoned the two-year diploma on the grounds that the quality and kind of course work did not parallel what was developing in the public school level as secular educators began establishing community colleges across Florida. For example, when I enrolled at the Pensacola Junior College in 1953 following my two years of duty in the U.S. Navy, I later learned that the administrators tracked my educational progress, along with other students, as proof that the two-year concept was viable.

The adoption of the four-year degree resulted from several factors. First, most students enrolling in the mid-seventies already possessed a high school diploma. I remember one class in which all but two students had a high school diploma or its equivalency. Both passed the GED before graduation.

Also, many students looked beyond our program to such schools as William Carey College and Mobile College as a way of obtaining academic credentials which were readily recognizable by the general public. To get the bachelor s degree required three years here plus at least two more years of study. As a result, students often came here for two years and then transferred. Clearly, we had to address the issue.

Finally, the result of a conversation between President Jimmy Southerland and President Bob Witty, founder of Luther Rice Seminary, highlighted the issue. On a tour in which both participated, Dr. Southerland jokingly remarked, Bob, I could support your program if you just wouldn t award those degrees. Dr. Witty, not to be outdone, replied, Jimmy, if you will forgive me for awarding degrees, I will forgive you for not giving them. Whatever the impetus, we soon moved toward a four-year program and gained initial accreditation by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools in 1981.

#### The Stetson Factor

Another element which helped mold the school can be traced to what I dub The Stetson Factor. As far as the leadership of Stetson was concerned, they may have been only vaguely aware of our existence, but we were keenly aware of theirs. After all, the limited funds from the Florida Baptist State Convention had to be divided between the two schools. Without that financial support, our school could not survive.

We went to great lengths to demonstrate we were not in competition with Stetson. As to students, we limited enrollees to men and women called later in life whom God was calling into full time service. They had to be at least 21 years of age. Even those who possessed a college degree could not attend. The idea was to send them to a school with graduate programs, such as Stetson or one of our seminaries.

#### The Accommodation Factor

It should be obvious by this time that the school constantly adjusted to circumstances in order to meet the needs and expectations of its

various constituencies. Since the alumni are a primary source in recruitment, the school attempts to maintain open dialogue with them even in matters pertaining to the curriculum.

Also, we focused on a particular side of the pastoral ministry, the role of the rural pastor. Each fall, we had a full week devoted to developing pastors for rural churches, a further proof of our non-competition with Stetson. This tension abated somewhat through the years, but it did not go away completely until Stetson severed its relationship with the Florida Baptist State Convention.

The uneasy alliance between the school and its parent organization showed itself in other ways. The matter of the number of students we were allowed to enroll was a constant reminder of our unique status. Maximum enrolment was set periodically. When it was set at 300 we could not exceed that number until the convention met in November and agreed to the next increment, say, 400. To gain approval, our leaders had to demonstrate that the present faculty could teach the new students without additional costs to the convention. Neither could we build additional facilities unless the building, maintenance, and operating costs were pledged in advance.

### The Vision Factor

Our school, as is true of most educational institutions, gradually conforms to the image its president seeks to project. In the early days, the faculty probably supported those whose goal was to make it into a high school which provided sound teaching for pastors.

As far as I can tell, the next major shift came from the desire to create a school to train rural leaders. Dr. Stainback visualized pastors who could serve as cultural, agricultural, and religious leaders in their communities. The image of BBI as a school to train preachers for rural churches gained a solid foothold, somewhat unfortunately. The surrounding area, as is true of the entire nation, was rapidly shifting from an agrarian to an industrial technological society.

With cultural change has come changes in the way Christians understand ministry. Forty years ago our denomination began emphasizing that worship is more than what happens on Sunday. To cite

one of the clichés of the day, we were taught that the laborer who dug the foundation for a new worship center was as called as the pastor who would later grace the pulpit.

We are enrolling students who understand their call in much broader terms than did the older generation. Consequently, the school strives to provide educational opportunities for them without doing an injustice to the spirit of its charter as well as the way the alumni see the purpose. Instead of narrowing the scope around one focal point, such as training adults for ministry or grooming rural pastors for spiritual-cultural roles, the school now attempts to capitalize on the contemporary concept of an enlarged view of the call of Christian service. The school motto of *Changing the World through the Unchanging Word* has a deeper meaning than personal or corporate evangelism, even though training personal soul-winners remains as a fundamental school commitment.

The advent of the importance of life-style evangelism, however, almost forces a different perspective on the sense of God's call. The school is now moving toward a broader academic base from which to launch outreach methods. It struggles with the necessity of understanding the world views of other religions and cultures. Multiculturalism is more than a catch word. It represents the ways African Americans, Hispanics, Asians, and Bubbas from North Florida see culture. To intensify a focus on any one group will necessarily exclude many others.

How to balance those options is our challenge. How well we succeed could well determine our legacy. Whatever we do, we would do well to follow the model of Pensacola Buggy Works. We remember our goal is providing education, not a particular set of diplomas.



## **Dr. Southerland Interview Video Summer 2000**

**Dr. Hammack:** Welcome to a few minutes with Dr. James Southerland, former president of Baptist Bible Institute, now The Baptist College of Florida. Dr. Southerland came to our college in 1957 and served as president until 1977. Since that time he has been retired and enjoying life in our area.

I've asked him to come and share with us about his experience here at The Baptist College of Florida, so that we might be able to capture in video form some of what he has experienced and add that to our history.

Dr. Southern came to our college in 1957 after the Florida Baptist Convention took control of it. It was moved from Lakeland in 1943. What did you find here when you got here in Graceville in 1957?

**Dr. Southerland:** Well, I guess we should ask the question, What you did *not* find. Because there was not much to be found. Now, that's not speaking disparagingly. It's just something that we accepted and came within the vision and faith, because there wasn't much here. But, what was here was brought together by dedicated men and women who wanted to prepare a place for men and women to train for some of the Baptist ministries in our churches. What I *found* was dedicated faculty, not many, but dedicated, and I think maybe that along the way you will ask about some of those faculty members, although, I don't know. Needless to say, it was a dedicated faculty.

We had also, a dedicated student body. We had less than 100 when I came here. We had a little over 100 as far as counting the figures are concerned, but that counted the children who were taking piano lessons. So that brought us a little over 100—but we found a little less than 100 enrolled. Most of those students were part-time who commuted. Not many were here on the campus. We did not have the facilities—we did have some,

but not much, in order to take care of them. So, we found a dedicated student body and a dedicated faculty.

We found some buildings. One building was what is now the music building. That building was later converted to Ray Hall. That was where everything was. Everything! Except my office. We did not have a chapel. But we had in Ray Hall about everything that we could get by with. But it was a good experience for the simple reason that it brought us all together in a real good experience.

I found there a men's dormitory. My office was in an old building that had been an old residence moved to Sanders Avenue. It was sort of an unsightly building, but we took care of it the best way we could. The Dean's office was elsewhere. That's about all that I found except a building that was renovated that was called the Greenwood Building. This building was given by the Greenwood Peanut Company. The Greenwood Building was located where Lake Albert is now. The lake was here, by the way, but this was at the end of the lake, the west end. It was in sort of a depression, and everytime we had hard rain, prolonged rain, we were flooded out. It was a sight, I'm telling you right now! We were flooded out, but we all had good spirits about it. We knew there would be a better day for us here, and there was, and there is now. A much, much better day.

That just about covers all that we had that I recall on the spur of the moment.

**Dr. Hammack:** Which of these buildings now on campus did you personally oversee the building of?

**Dr. Southerland:** Alright. The first task was to build a chapel. That was the first one. Now, Dr. Steinback was president and he had raised through Dr. R. G. Lee most of the money to build it and had the building designed. The way it is designed now is the way it was designed when Dr. Steinback was here. But it



*R. G. Lee Chapel, built 1958*

wasn't built. The strange thing about that was people talked about the chapel before I came and so I looked around for the chapel and finally when I had an interview with the people here, I asked, Where is the chapel? They said, It's on paper! I said, Oh my! That's going to be my first building. But I did, by the grace of God, raise the balance of the money, and the furnishings, and that sort of thing. Alright, that was the first building.

***Dr. Hammack:*** May I interject a question here before we go on to the other buildings? How did you handle chapel services before you built the present chapel?

***Dr. Southerland:*** In the hallway of Ray Hall.

***Dr. Hammack:*** In the hall?

**Dr. Southerland:** Yes, we all gathered standing up.

**Dr. Hammack:** If I recall, that hallway was about ten feet wide and about sixty feet long. And you stood up for chapel services? Was your chapel about thirty minutes?

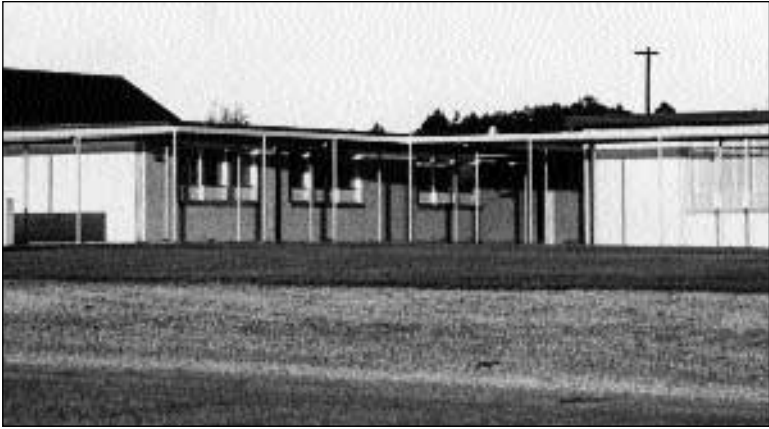
**Dr. Southerland:** It was thirty minute chapels. We had services like they do in Russia! Stand up! But they didn't last two hours—just thirty minutes. And they did it with gusto! You know, when you are deprived of something—and you believe in it—what you have, you use it. And, so that's what we did—we used it. They came to chapel. Of course, there were not as many, we had less than 100. At chapel time, we had fifty people here on campus for their classes. So it was not as bad as it may seem. They fit in there closely knit together.

**Dr. Hammack:** Close communion?

**Dr. Southerland:** Close communion! That's what it was. I'm telling you now. But we had a good time.

**Dr. Hammack:** That sounds wonderful. What about the next building? Which one was it?

**Dr. Southerland:** Oh well, maybe not in order, but I'll tell you about it. The next building was the Classroom Building, Soloman Hall. We raised money for that in conjunction with what is now the Administration Building. We raised money for two buildings, but actually, the first building was the Soloman Hall Classroom Building. We soon thereafter raised money for the Graceville Building. The one where the original offices were. They were built pretty close together and we raised the money for them both. I organized a campaign and hired an outside organizer for the campaign. We might say, that failed. We had a lot of advertisement



*Ed Soloman (classroom) Building, 1964*

*Dr. Soloman was editor of the Florida Baptist Witness for 18 years and was instrumental in raising the money to build the classroom building.*

toward it, but it didn't measure up to our standards. The person we had was a good person, and a God-fearing, gracious person, but for some reason the project just did not go over and maybe that was because we had too much territory to cover and did not have the personnel to cover it. Maybe we should have had a concentrated campaign here in this area. But anyway, it did not fail, we raised money, but it was not up to our expectations.

So it fell upon me and I tried to raise it, and did raise it through churches. The Convention gave us the privilege of going through the churches for it, which we did. I was the coordinator of that campaign. So we got the buildings built.

Then the next one was the library building. It was a building that we, I'm trying to bring back something in my mind that I haven't reviewed in so many years. But, what is the name of that building?

**Dr. Hammack:** The Ida J. McMillan Library, Carlton Center.

***Dr. Southerland:*** Mrs. McMillan was a widow and she lived in Pensacola. She gave a good gift for it. We had not had good gifts so we named the building for her. To give it a name, more than anything else. I think that building was easier to raise money for than any of them because it was given with the understanding that we were going to have a first class library building. It wasn't just a room in an area. And we built through the plans and built the building after we raised the money. The money came in for that. The Convention helped us some on it and we did get it raised.



*Ida J. McMillan Library Building*

What you see now is an addition. The front of it is an addition to the original one that I had built. The one I had built was sufficient for our day. The addition is more of check-out counter, places like that, and some areas that were unused that we would not have used ordinarily—if that's a good way to put it. We've grown into it. That's right—that's what's happened.

**Dr. Hammack:** Tell me about the Student Center.

**Dr. Southerland:** The Student Center. Well the Student Center, we built it as we did the others. Had an architect to draw them all and—let me see if I can draw back from incidents. Well, all I can say about the Student building is that we built it like we built the others. We got out and faced people and raised the money. And remember, I did not have a public relations man, or anyone to help me raise the money. We got one later. But he left us—not during my time—he left us, it was after my time. But he helped us raise some money for it. But you know who the chief fundraiser always is. The president!

**Dr. Hammack:** Yes sir, the president is the chief fundraiser and the chief recruiter, I might add.

**Dr. Southerland:** About all I can say about that building is, we raised it about the same as we did all the other buildings.

**Dr. Hammack:** We're grateful for what you did in that area. I'd like to go to the purpose of the college, faculty, and curriculum for just a minute. The school itself was organized for the purpose of training folks who had surrendered to Christian ministry. That's the reason why it exists and you've picked up on that. When the school was moved to this area, I was told that possibly the thinking was that there were about 1,200 churches in the panhandle, lower Alabama, and Georgia within about 100 miles of here that needed their leadership trained. You apparently were successful in tapping that recruiting market and training many of these. How did you go about doing that?

**Dr. Southerland:** Contacting the pastors and training the pastors. They are the ones who would tell the people. Also, in any other way that we could. Another major effort was when the conventions met, we (not only the state conventions) and I say

plural, several in the tri-state area, we would send a representative to them. Oklahoma, in fact, it was not Oklahoma, it was another state convention, had me to speak for BBI, which I did. The associational missionaries, as we called them at that time, we would have meetings with them. We would talk with them about the purpose. Whenever we had an opportunity, we would go. Whenever I had an opportunity to preach, I'd go and preach. And that was most of the time; like Dr. Kinchen is, gone, you know, but, I'd preach about the college. It was not about the college per se, it was about training. Our big point was, we were training men and women for the gospel ministries of our Southern Baptist churches. In the beginning, that was our emphases. We had to sell our Southern Baptist Convention and state conventions upon the purpose of our school. We had to start with our associations. We had to sell them! Even people here in Florida at that time were not all behind BBI. We had opposition to BBI after I came as president; and that, of course, was not an easy opposition to overcome. But it was not one of these angry oppositions, it was just the opposition of, 'Why are you doing this?'

Our seminaries are doing it. The seminaries were not doing all of it. And furthermore, these boys who were called to ministry, a lot of them had large families. They couldn't go to the seminary. And we emphasized that. A lot of them did not have a high school education but had a strong mind, a willing heart, and could learn; which you folks right here have learned—that you don't have to have a college education to be a preacher. We emphasized, not people on the seminary level, but we made it clear—we do not want you if you are a college graduate. I made that clear. You



*Dr. Walter D. Draughon, Jr.  
1962-1991*



should go on to the seminary. We want you who are not college graduates. For some reason peculiar to yourself, you cannot go the long securitious route of both college and seminary. You need us if you had some college and had to drop out.

**Dr. Hammack:** Let me ask you a question. I believe Dr. McKenster was your dean and your second dean was Dr. Walter Draughon. Now, when this program of education was implemented, you started out offering essentially a junior type of curriculum once you got it here. But it was my understanding that you went to a ninety-hour diploma program that you offered for several years. Then you began to offer the degree program, a four-year bachelor degree in 1974-1975. Following that, attention began to the possibility of arranging for regional accreditation. Could you speak to that?

**Dr. Southerland:** What little I can. Dean Draughon and I, we recognized that our hands were tied in getting funding from some sources. The school that we had inherited was excellent, but did not have the appeal for fundraising. People primarily wanted degree-granting schools and so they wanted, not only that, they wanted it accredited by the Southern Association. So, we were handicapped that way. We were not a member of an association, so we just had to face the facts. If we were to maintain our purpose of training the non-college person, or non-seminary person, how are we going to do that and keep our purpose with the Convention. It looked like a conflict. Walter and I talked about that a whole lot. We got some advice and so forth. The first move we made was to go to a three-year program. And after we had got a good start in that and it was going, we thought we should talk with our trustees and see if we can't begin granting degrees. The outcome of it all was many questions by the Convention itself. We had to plan a good approach to this thing. And I think we did. Walter got behind it. I left it up to Walter primarily to work out the details. Walter

worked long and hard. He was the backbone as far as the academic part was concerned. I was the promoter of it, not only with the Convention, but with the Southern Baptist Convention. I let them know what we were doing. Dr. Roy Honeycutt from Southern Seminary who was dean, or maybe he was president at that time. He didn't succeed Duke did he?

**Dr. Hammack:** You caught me off guard, sir.

**Dr. Southerland:** Well, let's say Dr. Honeycutt was either president or dean, invited me to speak to the faculty of Southern Seminary. They had heard of what we were doing and wanted to understand our work better with the thought of maybe going into this type of work too. Out of that came the Boyce Bible School. That's a major thing that we did here. So, I talked with the faculty members about it. Finley Edge, who was a long-time personal friend of mine, in fact, a college classmate—he was in on it, as far as the conversation. So, out of it came the further discussion of Southern Seminary about what they should do. (Not with me, I had no part in their discussion) But they wanted to hear about what we had to offer and why we offered it. I told them we were offering the three-year basic seminary course. That's what we were offering, but only to a certain group who qualified for it. But, we would continue with our source—with our diploma program. They wanted to know the subjects that we offered and how did we do it. I explained it to them. Well, I didn't hear much more from them about it. But the next thing I heard was Boyce Bible School.

**Dr. Hammack:** I'm glad you shared that with us. So you achieved your objective of getting your degree program and then it was accredited in 1981. You accomplished your objective in that regard. Now, will you give me an assessment of the impact of The Baptist College of Florida on our denomination and on the kingdom of God from your perspective.

**Dr. Southerland:** From my perspective. Its more than I can even describe. It met the need that existed when I was here, but it has also met a further need to our own Baptist people in Florida who do not understand why we are Southern Baptists.

**Dr. Hammack:** We appreciate your coming and sharing with us. We are going to share this tape with our audience in Daytona Beach on Monday and in addition to that, we are going to have this on file for anybody who would like to view it at the Florida Baptist Historical Society archives in the Ida J. McMillan Library. We ll be glad to share this with anybody else. Thank you so very very much. I deeply appreciate your sharing this time with us.

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*The faculty of The Baptist College of Florida begins each academic year with a prayer retreat. In the fall of 2001, our Senior Professors, Drs. J. W. Lee and W. Wiley Richards, reflected on the heritage of The Baptist College of Florida. This digest maintains the informal nature of the meeting, yet contains insightful oral historical materials.*



*Dr. J. W. Lee  
Senior Professor  
Old Testament*



*Dr. W. Wiley Richards  
Senior Professor  
Theology & Philosophy*

**Dr. Richards:** I first became acquainted with The Baptist College of Florida during my student days at Samford University (formerly Howard College). Samford, at that time, had a program called H-Day in which students ministered during worship services at local churches. I went to Clayhatchee, Alabama, to preach for a minister named Johnny Walker. Sunday afternoon he said, They are starting a new college over there in Florida. Since you are from Florida, lets go look at the school. We drove down to Florida and the campus consisted of three buildings. There was not any chapel or administration building. The music building was a combination

of classrooms and everything else. I found out later that they conducted chapel services in the hallway.

Thirteen years later when I joined the faculty (1968) the administration building had been added. As I recall, the only two houses were the duplexes on the North edge. The rest of the campus was cow pastures. In front of my house on the Southwest corner of Lake Alfred, Mr. George W. Morrow had moved a wooden building. Since he moved to Graceville from Greenville, he started Greenwood Enterprises. Mr. Morrow wrote all his correspondence in green ink. The Greenwood building became the student center, and of course, when it rained you sloshed over there because of the low ground. The next year (1969) when Dr. Lee arrived, they built what is now the Farris Student Center. Therefore, you see how far we have come.

Every fall the school had a Rural Church Conference. During the weeklong rural conference, all activities were cancelled. The school had a reason back then to host a rural church conference. At that time, Stetson University was *the* college of Florida and we had to demonstrate that we were not in competition with Stetson. The last they were going to train was country preachers, so we found a little niche that we could meet and advertise without having to conflict with our elder sister.

**Dr. Lee:** It has been a long time since 1968 when Wiley came and then 1969 whenever I came. Money has always been a tight factor with our institution. I have the pay-stubs to verify that. For instance, my first housing allowance was \$150, a federal withholding tax of \$19.80, and a balance of earnings of \$263.53. Just a little over \$500.00 for the paychecks of August 1 and August 15 of 1969. I have all the pay-stubs in-between, and you can see over the how they have grown.

Now it was very difficult at times to stretch the money as far as it had to go. So, you had to have a little help. It was not uncommon back then to go to the business office and say, I would like to borrow \$15, \$25, or \$100 against my next salary.

And if it had to be a larger one, they could even do it for a year. And it was a very common thing for them. In the business office, they were rather lenient at this point. It was either that or let you go hungry.

**Dr. Richards:** You need to understand about that income tax that Dr. Lee was a rich guy. I had been there several years before I made enough money to pay income tax.

**Dr. Lee:** When it came to Christmas time most often, it was Merry Christmas! and that was it. Then the administration came up with the idea of something special for the faculty at Christmas time. They started giving gifts; they sent a list around asking faculty to sign up for their preference of either a turkey or a ham. We were very grateful to get that. It is so different today—with what our school does at Christmas time with a percentage of salary as a Christmas bonus.

When I first heard of the school, I did not know much about it. Here is my earliest catalog I have of the Baptist Bible Institute. This is 1964-1965, inside I have a little note that was given to me by Dr. J. Wash Watts in May 1964 in New Orleans Seminary, and I was studying under him in Old Testament and Hebrew. Dr. Watts visited Baptist Bible Institute. He told me he had been to Graceville and met a number of professors with ties to New Orleans Seminary. He said, They asked for a recommendation for a professor, so I gave them your name. I know they are not going to call you now, but I gave them your name anyway. They want an Education professor for the religious education curriculum and your field is Old Testament, besides you are too young. You would be younger than most of the students. At that time most of the students were in their 30s; there were very few below that age group. I still was in my upper 20s. That was my first knowledge about the school.

In 1969 the Southern Baptist Convention met in Miami. Wiley, our wives, and I had dinner together at the Convention

and he told me he was coming to Graceville to teach at the Baptist Bible Institute. I asked him what he was going to teach. He replied that he was to teach English. Oh, I felt bad; I thought he was leaving the ministry. I was disturbed over this. The following spring Dr. Blackstock resigned his position as professor of Old Testament due to the death of his wife. They invited me to join the faculty. Wiley and I were both about 36 years of age when we joined the faculty, and we were about the same age as most of the students.

**Dr. Richards:** In those days, I taught all the English classes; we called the English classes English 101 and English 102. We had all the English students in the class and the majority of the students had not finished high school. We taught all different levels at the same time. Since we did not require a high school diploma, we were classified as a technical school. The students had to take eighteen class hours to receive 75% credit of their GI bill. We had to keep accurate records on the veterans so they could get their money. To help students take eighteen hours we enrolled every student in a one-hour choir class. We had a large choir in those days because the veterans had to have the extra-hours. Now I do not know about the quality of the music, but, son, we had the volume. Well, somewhere along the line we found out that if we developed a separate track for high school graduates, we no longer had to be classified as a technical school. The only change we made was in the English curriculum; we added English 151 and English 152 for high school graduates. We then granted a diploma in Theology for high school graduates and a certificate in Christian training for students lacking the high school credentials. We have never bothered to change the odd English numbering system.

**Dr. Lee:** We had a number of students that came to school with their wives. Many wives were more academically prepared than their husbands were. It was hard for man when his wife excelled

and he did poorly. This created conflict in many homes. One student received an invitation to preach at New Home Baptist Church. He preached his first sermon at the church. On the return trip to Graceville, he kept asking his wife, Well, how did I do? He should never have asked her that question. She told him; it almost brought about a divorce.

We had another couple from Daytona Beach. The husband owned a successful carpet business. His wife was a successful bookkeeper. When they came to school, she made straight As and he made straight Ds. He was humiliated. He decided to return to Daytona and re-enter the business. I heard he was planning to leave and that evening after work I went to his house. It was dark and we sat in the dark on the floor. All their furniture had been loaded and the electricity was turned off. I began to talk to him about his call to preach. We talked for hours, and then he said, Dr. Lee, do you reckon I could get anybody to help unload the truck? I called several students to help unload. The next morning he returned to class. He graduated and became a Corrections Officer in Mississippi. He stopped to visit in my office on a return trip to Daytona and told me, I have more prospects. Every man I work with is a prospect and I am leading many to the Lord. He gave me some money to help students. I went through my grade books, started with the bottom of the grades, and gave the money to those students. This student later graduated from William Carey College in Hattiesburg, Mississippi.

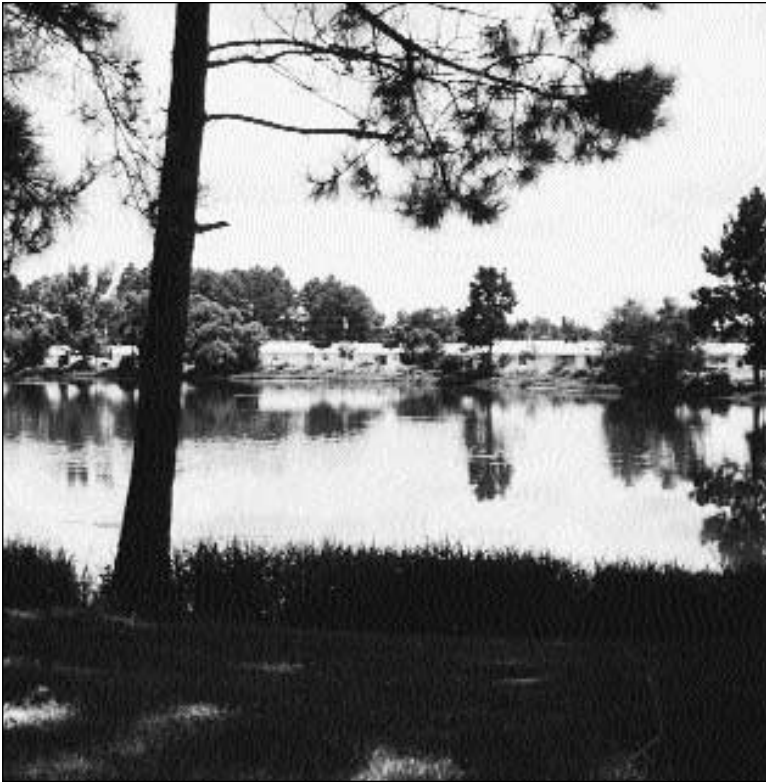
***Dr. Richards:*** We have seen many changes. We offered a three-year diploma in those days. Over a period of time, most of our students came with high school diplomas. The school actually started as a high school, if you know the history of our school. The three-year diploma, however, hurt us. Students left here and transferred to William Carey College in Mississippi, Mobile College, or Louisiana College. Only these three sister institutions accepted our students. Thus, we hurt ourselves as an



institution because they attended our school for two years and then transferred to one of these other schools. It did not take a genius to figure out we had to do something. Then, in 1977, we began a four-year program and sought accreditation. At this point, I would like to mention that we owe accreditation to Walter Draughon, Jr., I do not know how he did it. We did not have any committees. If something had to be done, he did it. Most of us did not know what was going on. In 1981 we received accreditation from the Southern Association. Walter Draughon simply ran it through. I do not know how he did it. It was nothing short of miraculous. Accreditation put things in a different light; I had to give up teaching English because I did not have eighteen graduate hours in English. I moved to teach Christian history and philosophy/ethics. Since I did not have eighteen graduate hours in philosophy, I started taking philosophy classes at Florida State and eventually earned a second doctorate.

**Dr. Lee:** We began our classes on Mondays at 1:00 P.M. when I first came. We kept Monday mornings open for folks coming back from their churches to allow them time to recuperate and prepare for classes. We did not have chapel on Mondays; we conducted thirty-minute chapel services on Tuesdays through Fridays. We had a number of outside people come to campus to preach and the students did not respond well. Therefore, the administration decided to let the faculty do the preaching in chapel. We were expected to preach at least once every month. The students responded more positively.

In addition to the Rural Life Conference, we conducted revivals called Spiritual Life Week. We had a number of individuals who lead conferences including Dr. Jaroy Weber of Dauphin Way Baptist Church in Mobile. When he pastored First Baptist Church of Lubbock, Texas, he served as President of the Southern Baptist Convention. I had known Jaroy Weber since I was a child. My dad led the music for him at several revivals.



*Lake Albert*

We also had Perry Sanders from South Carolina. For forty-two years, Dr. Sanders served as pastor of the First Baptist Church of Lafayette, Louisiana.

We also had Herschel Hobbs on campus in those days. Dr. R. G. Lee preached his famous *Payday Someday* sermon. I went to the school and checked my children, Roger and Linda, out of school so they could attend chapel. I told them, you all do not know R. G. Lee, but someday you will say you heard Dr. Lee preach his sermon in our chapel. The other day Roger mentioned, Dad, you know in this course I am teaching, I

mentioned R. G. Lee and the students had never heard of him. I remember hearing him preach in chapel his great sermon *Payday Someday*.

When R. G. Lee spoke for the last time in our chapel, it was packed with people who had come from all around the area. He preached on prayer. Soon after he became ill and was at the point of death.

We have a picture of R. G. Lee hanging in the chapel dressed in white. He always preached in his white suit and shoes. His daughter, Hildred, was an executive with Esso Corporation (now Exxon). She presented the chapel picture to the school. While she was on campus, we invited her to our home for dinner. While we shared the evening, she asked me if I would like to hear about her father's death. I said, If you do not mind telling me. She told me that the last three months of his life he hoped to live to be 100 and preach, but his legs gave out on him in his early 90s and he realized he would not be able to make it. His daughter took off from her job to stay with her father. She read to him every day. One day, Adrian Rogers and some other men from the church went to visit him and she was reading to her father. Dr. Lee stopped her daughter and said, Hilred, Do you see what I am seeing? She said, I don't know Papa what are you seeing? He said, I am looking right in the door of heaven. She said, I don't see it. Dr. Lee said, Well, there is Jesus. And there is Momma, Hilred, you don't see? Dr. Lee was blind and could not see, yet three days after his vision he died.

**Dr. Richards:** Dr. Lee has a special relation with our school. In the early days, we were owned by the South Florida Association. He had a special interest in schools such as ours. It seems to me that Dr. Lee had a suspicion of traditional higher education. He saw in these little schools the salvation of the convention. He worked with Dr. Stainbeck, the college president at the time. Then after the convention took over the school and

Dr. Stainback left, Dr. Lee lost interest in the school. The college had now become a traditional denominational school. Yet, he was very influential in the early days.

***Dr. Lee:*** It was before our time, but when we had no chapel, Dr. Lee preached a two week revival in a tent in front of where the chapel is now. All the money given during the revival went to build the chapel. His church in Memphis made up the difference in the cost to build it.

## **The Role of Dr. R. G. Lee in the Early Years of The Baptist College of Florida**

*Dr. Mark A. Rathel, Assistant Professor of Theology, The Baptist College of Florida and Secretary-Treasurer, Florida Baptist Historical Society.*

Homiliticians regard Rev. R. G. Lee, pastor of the First Baptist Church of New Orleans and Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis, Tennessee, as one of the finest preachers ever produced by the Southern Baptist Convention. People still recall his famed white suit and powerful picturesque language. He delivered his famous *Pay Day Someday* sermon over 1,000 times. This beloved Southern Baptist leader played a vital role in the early years of Baptist Bible Institute (now The Baptist College of Florida). As an expression of thanksgiving for his support, college leaders named the chapel the R. G. Lee Chapel. Today, the R. G. Lee Chapel is the most noteworthy architectural landmark on campus.



*Dr. R. G. Lee*

Dr. Lee's support of the fledgling Baptist school began when the school was located in Lakeland, Florida. Lee and beloved musical leader B. B. McKinney led conferences on the Lakeland campus as a fundraiser for dormitories. The struggling school showed a

motion picture of Lee's famed *Pay Day Someday* sermon and received an offering for the school. In 1954, Lee endorsed a failed plan for the Southern Baptist Convention to adopt Baptist Bible Institute as a convention agency.

Dr. Lee preached a tent revival on the Graceville campus of Baptist Bible Institute in 1954. He led Bellevue Baptist Church to donate \$50,315.15 for the chapel building. Dr. Lee personally gave of his time in support of B.B.I. President, James Southerland sought out Lee's assistance for a week-long *Festival of Faith*, a fund-raising effort held at Immanuel Baptist Church in Panama City. Dr. Lee refused to receive any of the offering—not even money for his expenses.

Dr. Lee wrote of the chapel, The people who give of their money to build this chapel will make the investment that will bring great returns. . . for the glory of God. Amen, Dr. Lee.