

PROBLEMS AND PROCESS
IN WRITING A CHURCH HISTORY:
THE JOURNALIST'S APPROACH

BY

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AT THE ANNUAL DIRECTORS MEETING
OF THE
FLORIDA BAPTIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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AN ADDRESS GIVEN TO
THE FLORIDA BAPTIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Hebrews 13:8

God acts in history to redeem. Judaism and Christianity are based in historical action.¹ So history (including current events and future events) is the arena where our faith functions. Hebrews 13:8 is a good illustration. How have we experienced faith in action? That's a question for church history.

Church historians have a number of target dates during the next few years that can be used as excuses to write or update church histories to demonstrate God acting in their midst.

There is the 150th anniversary in 1995 of the organizing of the Southern Baptist Convention. A millennium turns in the year 2000 (when the 20th Century ends or 2001 when the Twenty-first Century arrives). Baptists will celebrate 300 years of associational work in 2007; 200 years of American Baptist cooperative life in 2014; and 355 years of a Baptist witness in North America during the remainder of 1994, recalling Roger Williams' brief stint as the New World's pioneer Baptist.

Local churches have their own assortment of dates to remember. The March 1994 edition of the *Newsletter* of the Florida Baptist Historical Society lists an association and two churches celebrating 150-year anniversaries, six churches celebrating 125-year anniversaries and 10 churches celebrating 100-year anniversaries in Florida this year. Other examples in Florida and elsewhere:

- A few years ago, after receiving the history of the First Baptist Church of Deerfield Beach, Florida (*Deerfield's First Church*, 1991), the current church membership realized its 80th anniversary would come during 1992. Since the church was getting ready to initiate a building campaign for the second phase of its Christian Life Center, the leadership decided that holding an 80th anniversary celebration to recall our pioneering folks, to look at what led us to construct the original Christian Life Center and then to move ahead with the needed new construction would help us appreciate history and move into future ministries with the building campaign.
- When Daviess County, Indiana organized its historical society to pace the community's 150th anniversary in 1966, the historically inclined members of the First Baptist Church of county seat town Washington, Indiana decided that would be a good excuse to review their church's pending 125-year history in 1965. Efforts were made to enable the two events to coincide as part of the church's witness to the community. A number of Christian leaders were active in the civic sesquicentennial, and three Scripture passages (from Psalms 24, 145, and 122) served as a preface to the secular history, *History/Washington, Indiana/Sesquicentennial 1816-1966*. (No author or

publisher is indicated.) That document begins with the declaration, “A town is people, their culture, faith, values, ideals, interests, their endeavors, and achievements.”

- The First Baptist Church of Washington D. C. was organized in 1802 in an almost new District of Columbia. The church has come through nearly 200 years of excitement, tragedy, success, embarrassment, and change. At least two of its worshippers have been Presidents of the United States, although the work of one of its Sunday School teachers, Jimmy Carter, is more pleasant to remember than the church’s public tiff with Harry S. Truman about his plan to offer diplomatic recognition to the Vatican. America has changed since 1802 when visiting preachers held services in the U. S. Capitol Building to today when issues of the separation of church and state encompass a multitude of divergent issues.
- The ethnic Baptist churches of South Florida (and elsewhere) offer vivid opportunities and reasons to write church histories as a means of focusing on and preserving for future generations the adventure, anecdotes, and personal bravery of the church members from Cuba, Haiti and elsewhere who moved to Dade, Broward or Palm Beach counties to start new lives and found Jesus the Rock of their salvation was also the Rock providing stability during a time of great change.
- And if you can’t find any specific excuse to prepare a church’s history, there is always the simple fact that an historical celebration can be fun for a church, its members and its former members.

Once a church or one or more members of a church decide it is time to write or update their history, where should such an effort start?

Historical societies offer guidelines. Dr. E. Earl Joiner, curator-director of the Florida Baptist Historical Society, wrote “A Short Guide to Writing the History of a Church.” The Historical Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention has a number of documents to help such an effort, including “How to Celebrate Your Church’s Anniversary”, *Baptist Heritage Update*, Vol. 7 Number 2 Summer 1991, “How to Observe Baptist History Month” Spring 1991 and “The Ministry of Baptist History”, April 1991. The annual Product Catalog of the Historical Commission of the SBC is also useful, e. g. “Resources for Meeting Heritage Needs”, 1991-1992 Product Catalog.

But what happens when the historical trail has been lost, destroyed or simply not recorded? These problems obstruct any writing process. Three sad tales are worth remembering:

Roger Williams is credited with starting the First Baptist Church in the western hemisphere, the First Baptist Church of Providence, Rhode Island, after his baptism in March 1639. Although he left that congregation a few months later, feeling his baptism by a church member was not in proper succession, the church continued. Its primacy was challenged by the First Baptist Church of Newport, Rhode Island, organized the year before the Providence church. But the Newport church, although older, didn’t start as a Baptist church. The surviving records indicating it functioning as a Baptist church go back only to about 1648. So the lost decade of the history of the Newport church prevents its being considered the oldest Baptist church in North America.²

John Mason Peck is one of the most exciting characters in American history, yet what happened to his personal collections is one of the saddest.

Peck was sent to the Illinois and Missouri territories in 1817 by the Triennial Baptist Convention. When he arrived, the people of St. Louis bragged that there was no Sabbath west of the Mississippi

River.³ The first Baptist church in St. Louis was organized by Peck the following year. Torbet credits Peck's missionary efforts with laying "the foundation of a permanent church life in the West."

Peck was involved in the founding of the American Baptist Home Mission Society, the Western Baptist Educational Society and numerous schools in the two territories, Rock Spring Seminary (later Shurtleff College), and the American Baptist Historical Society. He arranged funding for Isaac McCoy, missionary to the Indians in Indiana and Michigan. During Peck's missionary trips, he discovered the destitute and elderly Daniel Boone in Missouri and brought Boone's illustrious Kentucky frontier achievements to public attention and favor.⁴

Some have speculated that Peck's efforts to make Illinois territory a free state allowed Northern territories and states west of the Mississippi River to avoid becoming slave states. According to Paul M. Harrison, in his 1965 Introduction to the reprinting of the edited *Memoir* of Peck, "Peck's role was crucial in the antislavery controversy" before the Illinois legislature. Unfortunately, when Peck's friend Rufus Babcock edited the *Memoir*, Babcock was prejudiced against politicians and current events, despite their playing a significant role in Peck's life. So Babcock disregarded Peck's work among the Illinois politicians during the antislavery movement. Who knows whether or what personal affect Peck might have had on one Illinois politician who would become President of the United States during the early 1860s.

Since Peck was so aware of the importance of safekeeping historical records, he donated 53 volumes of handwritten diaries and journals to the Mercantile Library in St. Louis for their preservation. Alas, after his death in 1858, the library moved. During the move, his papers were placed on the library floor, and one night a janitor saw the pile, thought it was trash, and destroyed that lifetime of irreplaceable records.⁵

The First Baptist Church of Deerfield Beach, Florida lost its earliest records in a fire. Later the date and place of the fire also were forgotten. Its sister church (founded under a joint pastorage), the **First Baptist Church of Delray Beach**, also reports that its earliest records were destroyed. Possibly this was due to the same fire.

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Therefore it became necessary to fall back on the journalist's approach when writing the history of the Deerfield church—*reporting* a church's history.

First a journalist must consider whether any prospective article has news value. The determinants of news value are timeliness, proximity, prominence, consequence, and human interest.⁶

When it is determined that an event had new value, then the journalist considers the who, what, why, where, and how of the incident.⁷ The importance of each of those "five Ws and H" guide the writer in crafting the article's outline and content.

For example, when the First Baptist Church of Tice, Florida built a new sanctuary during the 1970s, the pastor was featured in a big photograph in the local newspaper "topping" the construction. He had a crane lift him from the ground to personally place the Cross on top of the new steeple. In this case a simple "**what**" story – that a construction project was finished – would not have been attractive (newsworthy) enough to get the event well-publicized in the metropolitan daily newspaper. However, the "**how**" of that steeple's Cross placement made this story. Had the church gotten Billy Graham to preach the first sermon in that new sanctuary, that might have focused the story on the "**who**" of the post-construction celebration. Had that Baptist church invited the Pope to preach, then it would have been a "**why**" story. If the celebration was scheduled for Christmas, Easter or the Pastor's birthday, it might have been a "**when**" story. Conducting the ceremony anywhere except at the new sanctuary would have been a "**where**" story. But the "how" photo of the pastor high-riding that sling attached to the crane caught more attention than even the Rev. Dr. Graham simply standing on the ground could have done.

Timeliness is concerned with the currentness of a story. If your house is on fire now, you don't want people to wait until next week to tell you about it. You want to respond immediately. However, if a

3,000-year-old Indian burial mound is found on your property, that 3,000-year-old story is timely today, because it had just been discovered, despite the antiquity of the burial.

Proximity means closeness. For example, a Baptist deacon in a neighboring (or distant) town winning a million dollars in some lottery affects your church because all the people in your town will be asking your church members about whether all Baptists (proximity, since the “all” includes you and your neighbors) have changed their opposition to lotteries.

Prominence deals with popular knowledge or appeal of an individual or incident. If the town fire department’s only building catches fire, that is more prominent than if some unimportant tool shed by the railroad track catches fire. When Liberty College’s basketball team went against number-one ranked and defending national champions University of North Carolina in the NCAA basketball tourney the weekend of March 19, 1994, the sports press focused on the Rev. Jerry Falwell as the most prominent fan associated with that comparatively unknown Virginia school.

Consequence means an incident is important if it produces noteworthy, memorable results. Revivals have become commonplace in American church life, but their results produce both short-term and long-range consequences.

The Reformed Protestant Dutch Church of Tappan, New York, is getting ready to celebrate its 300th anniversary in 1994. When Kenn Doller, the historically-inclined member of that church, visited the Deerfield Baptist church earlier this year, he described his church’s place in American history. The community had been split between Patriot and Tory sympathizers during the Revolutionary War. Patriot generals Washington and Lafayette quartered their troops in the town. When British Major John Andre was captured during the intrigue by turncoat Benedict Arnold, Andre was tried and convicted of spying in a trial conducted in the church sanctuary, since the town courthouse had been destroyed by the war. Andre was hung and buried behind the church building.

Although the 200th anniversary of the First Baptist Church of Washington, D. C. won’t be here until the year 2002, I hope that church has already considered asking former Sunday School teacher and President of the United States Jimmy Carter to write an essay for inclusion in that future history book about the role of a person’s faith and religious convictions in a high-pressure job like the Presidency – and the importance of having a local church as a mooring place while you’re under that stress.

The Deerfield Baptist church’s history mentions that blacks began attending the church in the early 1960s during the pastorate of the Rev. G. Robert Rowe (pastor from 1951 to 1967). Rowe and his wife Janet had been missionaries to Haiti. When Rowe preached the Sunday morning sermon during the October 1992 80th Anniversary Celebration at the church, he was asked about that inter-racial opening. He said he believes the Deerfield First Baptist Church was the first Southern Baptist church in Broward County to open its doors to non-whites.

Human interest means that if it grabs people’s hearts or emotions, it is a story worth telling.

Popular sophomore Jason Dugmore suffered severe spinal injury in a swimming accident during Fall 1990. It was said he would never walk again. Consequently, when he got out of his wheelchair and walked across the platform to receive his graduation diploma in June 1992, the high school auditorium “went nuts” with joy, recalls youth pastor Roger Vezeau. The photograph in the next day’s *Fort Lauderdale Sun-Sentinel* showing a beaming Assistant Principal Peggy Truitt and a triumphant Dugmore serves as a prime example of “human interest”. (Both Dugmore and Truitt are members of Deerfield’s first church.)

Once you decide you have a church history worth writing because it contains one or more of the determinants of news value, then the journalist goes about gathering facts and quotations to mold and enliven the article or history book.

The journalist’s approach to gathering facts is done by at least seven steps:

1. Reading available church documents.
2. Researching other contemporary documents such as newspapers and associational records,

3. Identifying long-time older members of the congregation and interviewing them by the GOSS technique. The GOSS technique was developed by a junior college journalism teacher in the early 1970s (his concept was featured in an issue of *Editor & Publisher*, but I've forgotten his name and its publication date). The letters stand for Goal, Obstacle, Substitute and Success. Every newsworthy achievement starts with a goal. Assume every goal-achievement has had to face some obstacle. Find out how the achiever substituted action to bypass the obstacle. Then write about the resulting success.
4. Asking individuals to identify others who might know something about the event, and then asking those persons to identify still others.
5. Researching as many documents about the incident as you can find.
6. Writing separate ("sidebar") articles about church events and personalities, and
7. Wrapping the final report with comments from current membership of the church.

Here's how *Deerfield's First Church* was written.

Reading available church documents

There was no current history of the First Baptist Church of Deerfield Beach in 1991, nor was there a History Committee. (Such a committee had existed years earlier and had written some annual reports during several years.)

I was told there were three written histories of the church: One apparently written in 1939 for a church ceremony that year by a deacon who was also the town's first mayor, an update written by a pastor's wife in the early 1960s and an anonymous update written in 1975.

In May 1991, Pastor Pat Cronin and church secretary Eileen Conley found a box of old records and let me rummage through them. The box contained church bulletins from scattered years during the 1960s and 1970s, a Convention Record Book containing some member records back to 1938, a Church Membership Directory with church business meeting minutes from 1970-1974, and a multi-ring binder with memorabilia from the 1950s. Stuck inside this binder was the church's financial records from 1920-21 and church business meeting minutes from 1921-1924. This provided the church membership roster for the early 1920s, and indicated the Deerfield church was contributing to the Florida Baptist Children's Home in Arcadia and to the 75 Million Campaign, the Southern Baptist Convention's 1920s forerunner of the Cooperative Program.

The binder also contained the dedication service (mortgage burning) program of the second sanctuary, May 21, 1939, a list of pastors from the beginning to that date, and the 1970 *Church Yearbook Directory*.

A separate folder in the box contained the anonymous history of *The First Baptist Church, Deerfield, Florida*. I initially assumed this had been written in 1938, since the community changed its name from Deerfield to Deerfield Beach in 1939. I later concluded this was the historical presentation made by Mayor G. E. Butler, Jr. at the May 21, 1939 dedication of the church.

Basic research in other contemporary documents such as newspapers and associational records

A number of "old-timers" in the church were sent letters asking for memories and recollections. A pile of reminiscences and newspaper clippings (*Deerfield Beach Observer* and *Fort Lauderdale News*) began to accumulate. A survey was made of available Miami Baptist Association annuals at the association's library in south Dade County (the church eventually became a charter member of the 1948 spin-off Gulf Stream Baptist Association).

The Miami annuals only went back to 1914, but that 1914 book listed the Deerfield church's organizational date as 1912, one year older than the 1913 estimated by the Butler history. The Butler estimate was used in all church references to its history following 1939, such as the cornerstone for the current (fourth) sanctuary and all references in Gulf Stream Association annuals going back to 1952, the earliest GSBA annual available. (Alas, even official documents like the first four GSBA annuals can't be found, although Executive Director Bill Hinds would certainly like to acquire copies from those four years if anyone has them to spare or share.)

Determining long-time older members of the congregation and interviewing them by the GOSS technique

By this time we had a rough outline of the church's history. Every few days I would prepare a history draft update, containing all the information I had gathered to that time, and would write out strategic questions about missing pieces of information. It was like solving a jigsaw puzzle piece by piece, and these questions represented the missing pieces. These early drafts were circulated to a number of persons who had expressed interest in the history-writing project. These persons were asked to also suggest other persons who might fill-in some of the missing pieces.

For example, the 1939 history indicated that our first pastor was the Rev. Samuel Gibson and that the church was organized in the home of Mr. and Mrs. M. A. Robinson. Gibson had been holding community worship services in that home since 1910. Mrs. Robinson was identified as the 1908 Sunday School initiator and 1910 church's founding influence. Gibson also was pasturing the First Baptist Church of Delray Beach. Which church organized first, Delray or Deerfield? The Delray church's history said it was organized in January 1912. The Miami association's 1914 annual indicated both churches had been organized in 1912. I made the assumption that Gibson organized a church in the town where he was living first, and then organized his Deerfield charge, making Delray and Deerfield South Florida's ninth and tenth churches. Should that ranking be reversed?

Mrs. Robinson wasn't listed in the early 1920s membership record, the earliest one I could find. Had she died after starting the church in 1912? That question kicked around for a long time. Finally several interviews produced the story that while Robinson was a staunch Baptist, his wife was a determined Methodist. Although she is credited with being the driving force behind the organization of Deerfield's first church, she never joined it, much to Deacon Robinson's sorrow. She taught in the Sunday School for decades, as several testimonials later recalled her service to the Baptist congregation. Several persons in the Deerfield church and the Methodist churches in Pompano Beach and Lighthouse Point helped answer this question.

The first sanctuary was destroyed by the 1928 hurricane and the second sanctuary was destroyed by a fire in 1941 (it was renovated to become the church's first parsonage and today is the church's childcare center – the ancient baptistery is hidden beneath recent carpentry work). That second sanctuary had a melodious bell. What happened to that bell?

The church's second pastor, called in 1917, was named Boehme (spelled phonetically as Beam in the Miami association annual, which indicated he also pastured the Delray church, a fact that wasn't recalled by the Delray church's written history). What was Boehme's first name? We still don't know. But he left South Florida to serve as a YMCA volunteer chaplain during World War I.

As some questions were answered and new ones took their place, we saw certain individuals had long-time memories of the church, making them natural focal points in the reporting of our story. So a number of persons were interviewed at length, basically by the GOSS technique.

Blanche Horne Slaughter, a resident of Broward County longer than any other person and the member of the First Baptist Church of Deerfield Beach whose membership goes back into our history farther than any other person, joined the church during Rev. Boehme's pastorate (1917-1918).

"I felt close to Rev. Boehme, pronounced Bame," Blanche said. "He also pastured the Delray church. Some of us would go there to hear him preach. Since we didn't have a baptistery in the Deerfield church, I was baptized at the Delray church ... My best girlfriend, Ella May Robinson (daughter of Mr.

and Mrs. M. A. Robinson) and I were hired as church janitors. We were paid \$4 a month to dust the church every Saturday afternoon. We'd get the books straight in the pews. There were no flowers and pretty lawns like you see in South Florida today. We didn't have the water for flowers or grass then. So Ella May and I would go out into the woods and along the (Hillsboro) canal to pick flowers to place in the church for worship service."

What is the most exciting thing you remember about your many years at this church?

"The most important thing to me was that I accepted the Lord as Savior and was baptized," Blanche responded. "And I was living here when both my children were born." (Four generations of her family belong to the church.)

Blanche and her sister, Sue Horne Archer, described their community before U.S. 1 was built. Their home was in three counties since the old Dade County became Palm Beach and later Broward County in that vicinity. Mr. Horne had a citrus grove where the Deerfield Country Club is today.

Rum runners and narcotics traffic forced the Coast Guard to conduct a virtual blockade of South Florida during Prohibition, the two sisters recalled. The Hillsboro Canal was a convenient port for rum-runners. Local citizens were always on hand to help the federal agents burn any seized contraband, although it was suggested that more bottles were captured by the feds than the locals burned.

"We didn't know what the adults were doing. We were just dumb kids," Blanche said.

"Unlike today's kids who know what is going on," Sue interjected. "There were a lot of rum runners here. You didn't know what your next door neighbor was doing."

Mrs. Jackie Stewart, daughter of church pioneer and railroader W. S. Gaskin, was interviewed about her father being one of two men who constructed the church's first sanctuary, at the site now occupied by Midas Muffler on Hillsboro Boulevard east of the Florida East Coast Railway.

J. B. Wiles, Jr., now in his 90s, first passed through Deerfield on his way home to Ft. Gains, Ga., after unsuccessfully seeking employment in Miami after World War I and spending his last money to buy a bicycle. It took him two weeks to bicycle home. Years later he returned to Deerfield to buy and operate a farm there. He was active in civic affairs and was elected a county commissioner during the Depression.

Wiles has been featured as a good source in a number of projects by the Deerfield Beach Historical Society. Several church members suggested that he be interviewed, especially about the fire that extensively damaged the church's second sanctuary on New Year's Day 1941.

He was happy to recount many tales about old Deerfield and his comments are sprinkled throughout *Deerfield's First Church*.

My final question to Wiles was one that journalists frequently use: Is there anything else you want to add?

"You want me to talk about the church fire, don't you," he replied as a statement more than a question. "The only real thing I've done in the church was burn it down."

J. B. explained that as a county commissioner he had taken some convicts from the county jail to do cleanup work in what was then the new public cemetery in Deerfield Beach, between the church and the Hillsboro Canal. As the convicts were burning cuttings, a palmetto frond caught fire and was carried through the smoke to the roof of the sanctuary. Although the building was saved, its interior and roof were extensively damaged. As reparation the county helped renovate the structure, which became the church's first parsonage. (It is now the church's Crossroads Childcare Center.)

Asking individuals to identify others who might know something about the event, and then asking those persons to identify still others

I call this the "bouncing" technique, since the journalist is able to "bounce" from one person to another. Each bounce adds details and insights. One day while I was a reporter for the Fort Myers *News-Press*, co-worker Patrick Kelly received a tip that what the tipster thought was the largest yacht to ever pass down the Caloosahatchee River (Okeechobee Waterway) had just passed Fort Myers. By "bouncing" from one source to another, Kelly was able to identify the yacht, its captain, get its radio call letters and interview its owner and his family while they cruised toward Bradenton.

Researching as many documents about the incident as you can find

The reporter has knowledge about books and periodicals that can add information about a subject, and the persons interviewed also can suggest books to read. Librarians can be very helpful. Today newspapers typically subscribe to topic-search on-line databases to provide more information.

Keep thinking about connections between what you are researching and what other persons might know about it. And keep asking questions! Bounce and bounce again.

With this compilation of facts, clippings and recollections, we were ready to open the interviewing to the entire church fellowship, interested persons from the community and the Deerfield Beach Historical Society.

A "Show and Tell" session was held at the church Thursday night, Sept. 19, 1991. Here's what was handed out as a promotion for that program:

A Sunday School started in Fall 1908 led to the organization of the First Baptist Church of Deerfield Beach and the tenth Baptist church in Southeast Florida (Palm Beach, Broward, Dade and Monroe counties).

Unfortunately, our early records were lost in a fire

But church members have strong recollections of our history. We want to bring those persons together so they can recall facts that otherwise will be lost from our congregational memory. Maybe we can even find important documents (like the 1912 annual minutes of the Miami Baptist Association or the 1948 organizational minutes of the Gulf Stream Baptist Association) which a number of agencies will want to copy.

The goal is to produce a written history of our church to file with agencies such as the Historical Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention and the Florida Baptist Historical Society, and to produce a videocassette which church members can obtain for their home use.

If you have some souvenir of our church's history, or memories of that history, or just want to come out and hear what others have to show and tell, come out Thursday, Sept. 19

The evening's agenda was divided into roughly 20-year segments and people were asked to come forward to "show and tell" from each era:

1908-19 Getting Sunday school and church started

1920-40 Killer hurricanes and times of boom and bust

1941-59 Crossroads fire and two wars

1960-81 Current sanctuary and Sunday school buildings built

1982-92 Christian Life Center Phase I built, current events and plans for the future

It was a delightful program producing many fond memories, a pile of photographs and old newspaper clippings, and some enlightening comments before the microphones.

We had planned to have a committee prepare the videotape, but committee leadership failed to develop. Nor did any young people come forward with what we had hoped would be experience videotaping a high school's yearbook, a concept popular in some Florida high schools today. (The Deerfield Beach High School would become a magnet for students throughout Broward County public schools studying television production in 1994.)

The audiotape recorded at the podium and soundtracks of the two videotaping cameras produced some additional comments which were added to the one-on-one interviewing of some individuals before the "Show and Tell".

Writing separate (“sidebar”) articles about church events and personalities

After the broad outline of the church history was written, a one-page *Condensed History* was prepared for the 1991 *Church Pictorial Directory*. A two-page summation was given to the church staff for their visitation programs to explain us to prospects.

Separate articles about our activities were written for the local newspapers. Several articles were prepared for the Florida Baptist *Witness*, describing the educational ministries of Florida Baptist Theological College and the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary meeting in our educational facilities: “Theological training in three languages offered in South Florida” (*Witness* dated June 16, 1992, page 11); and reporting on developments at our mission church, now the First Baptist Church of Coconut Creek, “The church cooperation built” (*Witness* dated July 23, 1992, page 3).

A third article, about the proposed South Florida Baptist Training Center (“The Floridian”) at the corner of Federal Highway and Hillsboro Boulevard was submitted to the *Witness*, but wasn’t used due to the prior publication (May 23, 1992, page 6) of an article by another writer about that topic.

Concluding the final report with comments from members

When the church history project was almost completed, it was “topped” with a series of quick, table-hopping interviews of people during a Wednesday night church supper. (This opinion survey technique is so familiar it is often used by middle school journalists to stir discussion of their current interests.) Why did you join this church? What appeals to you about this church? How do you feel about this church?

These comments served to give a very positive and contemporary ending to the story.

Then comes the hard part: **editing**. Don Fry of the Poynter Institute in St. Petersburg trains professional journalists throughout the nation. His presentation includes many steps, but I always think of his mandate to “massacre the babies”. That’s the way he tells writers to look over their enormous research and eliminate the small, cuddly, interesting details that weigh down and distract from the main focus of the writing. Any researcher can tell you it hurts to eliminate any gems found during research. Often this is necessary. Should the paragraphs be eliminated from this paper about Daviess County, Indiana and the First Baptist Church of Washington, D.C.?

The Deerfield church’s history contains several appendices, including the list of raw documents available to research this church’s history. Other appendices provide a statistical and leadership listing from the available Miami association and the available Gulf Stream association annuals.

Hurricane Andrew hit South Florida after the church history was written but before it was printed. This episode in the church’s life was added as an appendix.

I had wanted to include the church’s Constitution and By-laws. However, we have a policy of reviewing those documents every 10 years. While the By-laws were up-to-date, we were in the process of reviewing the Constitution for voting at the next annual business meeting. The trustees therefore suggested that neither of these documents be included in the 1992 publication of the church’s history. (Both of these documents were made available by the trustees to any church member wanting them after the annual business meeting of 1993.)

Copies of the printed history were sent to the Florida Baptist Historical Society at Stetson University, the Florida Baptist Theological College Library in Graceville, the Historical Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention in Nashville, Tenn., the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Library in Louisville, Ky., the First Baptist churches of Delray Beach and Pompano Beach, and the Miami and Gulf Stream associations.

Afterthoughts

As afterthoughts, there are two other items that should have been included.

One was a biography of Pastor Pat Cronin and his wife Brenda. This was easily compiled later by asking them for their resumes and then interviewing them for details. Pastor Pat was Gulf Stream Baptist Association moderator for two terms and a member of the State Board of Missions. Brenda was the primary force in getting this former construction worker to consider studying for the ministry.

Another afterthought was to go into detail about the region's demographics. This was done as a separate writing project to help the church consider alternative ministries in 1993.

With help from agencies gathering demographic data, we were able to get U.S. Census data such as the number of persons in our vicinity, racial and ethnic diversity, marriage/divorce statistics for the community, age characteristics and financial projections. The School District provided demographics on students attending schools by age, kindergarten through high school in northern Broward County. The Chamber of Commerce and daily newspaper marketing department provided their interpretations of the demographic data. The Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, Atlanta, provided analyses of communities based on Census data. A person in real estate provided extensive insights about the housing trends of our community, including the projection that due to tax policies we soon would see our beachfront's one and two-story motels become high-rise hotels.

The real estate analysis increased our enthusiasm for hosting the Southern Baptist U-2 missionary working with us in 1994 to help Gulf Stream Baptists develop a beach ministry throughout Broward. The Deerfield church agreed to provide the office space for this missionary during 1994 and 1995, Stella Anderson.

Result

The church leadership realized that the 1991 history of the church, which included details about building the first half of the Christian Life Center, would stimulate the 80th Anniversary Celebration of the church in 1992, and the 80th Anniversary would be an excellent way to kick-off a building campaign for the second half of the Christian Life Commission.

Drawing on the name of a series of popular movies, the CLC building campaign was called "Back to the Future", as we studied our history and planned for the future.

The history celebration was spread over a weekend in October 1992, and included several former pastors coming back to be with us, printing photo postcards for church members to use, and the sale of the 55-page single-space history compilation *Deerfield's First Church*. Inclusion of the two "afterthoughts" mentioned above would have created about a 112-page document, without any photographs (although two photographs, the Crossroads Childcare Center and the fourth sanctuary, are shown on the original printed cover of the booklet).

Construction of the second phase of the CLC is being completed in 1994.

1. For example: Genesis 1:1; 2:15; 12:2; Exodus 3:7-8a; John 1:1; Hebrews 13:8; and Revelation 1:17b. Cf. G. Ernest Wright, *God Who Acts*, (London: SCM Press, 1952), especially p.57 and Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. *Toward An Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1978), the thesis of his entire book but especially p. 269.

2. See Robert G. Torbet, *A History of the Baptists* (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1950, pp. 220f. and footnotes.

3. Davis Collier Woolley, managing editor, *Baptist Advance* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1964) p. 38

4. Torbet, *op.cit.*, p.376

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 269f., 329f., 374-377. See John Mason Peck, *Forty Years of Pioneer Life; Memoir of John Mason Peck. D.D.*, edited by Rufus Babcock (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1864) This has been reprinted as part of the Perspectives in Sociology series by Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale, 1965, with a lengthy updating Introduction by Paul M. Harrison. See pages xii-xiii for the cited Harrison comments about Peck's antislavery efforts and the destruction of his diaries and journals. Harrison was able to write his Introduction by induction from Peck's printed books and articles, not the destroyed personal papers. Note that Peck was such a keen observer that the 1864 *Memoir* is worth reprinting a century later because it shows clear insight into sociological phenomena such as the frontier revivals.

6. Curtis D MacDougall, *Interpretative Reporting* 8th Ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1982), pp. 115ff.

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 120ff.