

The Florida Baptist Historical Society seeks to **preserve the legacy** of Florida Baptist pastoral leaders and laity, the past and present functioning Baptist churches, the State Convention's cooperating ministries and milestone events that were historically significant to Florida Baptists. The Society's mission is accomplished through a variety of ministry services provided to Florida Baptists. To underscore this emphasis the Society's monthly newsletter, LEGACY, seeks to highlight the legacy endowed by the people, churches and events in Florida Baptist history. During the next several months this newsletter will feature those persons whose legacy in Florida Baptist life was achieved in part, by their service as president of the Florida Baptist State Convention.

As noted in the January issue of LEGACY, since 1854 (excluding the seven years at various times the State Convention did not meet), the persons elected as president have included 78 pastors and 16 laypersons. The January LEGACY featured brief profiles on the first eight laypersons, and in this issue profiles on the remaining laypersons is presented.

Mrs. Henry A. (Virginia R.) Parker (1912-2014) served in 1974. It was an elected office that she neither sought nor ever imagined she would hold. Yet a series of circumstances thrust Virginia Reaves Parker into a historic role as **the first woman to** serve as president of the Florida Baptist State Convention. Mrs. Parker was a homemaker and dedicated pastor's wife, while a member of First Baptist Church, Orlando, where her husband Henry Allen Parker (1913-1994) served as pastor, and who himself, a little over a decade earlier, held the honor of serving as State Convention president in 1962-63.

In a *Florida Baptist Witness* guest editorial, published March 21, 1974, after she became president, Mrs. Parker wrote that she was sure some constituents of the State Convention reacted as if her ascension to the office was "a revoltin' development" or a movement of "woman's lib in our convention." However, she noted, "Others, however, feel that God has brought to pass in 1974 that which would take 50 years to accomplish through ordinary channels. And when people see God's hand working in lives and events, there is generated excitement and anticipation. I have felt this excitement expressed verbally and in the many letters you have written assuring me of your cooperation and prayer support." In Virginia Parker's eyes, the election had followed a "logical pattern—minister, layman and woman," knowing that she as second vice president would serve in a mostly honorary role with little responsibility.

Originally, messengers to the 1973 Florida Baptist State Convention in Orlando elected Rudy Fagan, pastor, First Baptist Church, Bradenton, as president. Fred Cooper, director of Information Services at Stetson University, was tapped as first vice president. Virginia Parker, wife of Henry Allen Parker, pastor of First Baptist Church, Orlando, was voted second vice president, the fourth woman, up to that point in the Florida Baptist State Convention's history, to be elected to the second vice president position.

However, two months after his November election as president, Fagan resigned as pastor of the church to become executive director-treasurer of the Southern Baptist Stewardship Commission, effective March 1, 1974. Subsequently, Fred Cooper, a layperson, as first vice president would have



Virginia R. Parker

been first in line to assume the office of president. However, “with previous knowledge of Fagan’s new opportunity,” in January, 1974, Cooper wrote Harold C. Bennett, executive director-treasurer, Florida Baptist Convention, resigning the position of first vice president. In his resignation letter, Cooper stated, “I feel that it would be impossible to give the time and leadership such a high calling requires.”

For the first time in Florida Baptist history, and perhaps even the Southern Baptist Convention, two persons from the same family—a husband and wife—both served as president of the same state convention. As previously noted, eleven years earlier in 1962-63, Henry Allen Parker served as president of the Florida Baptist State Convention.

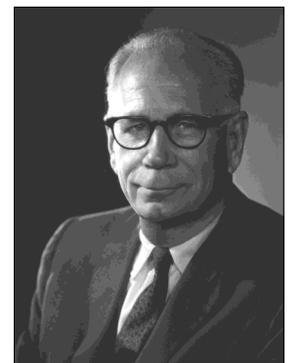
As she convened the November 16, 1974, meeting in Lakeland, Mrs. Parker requested and messengers approved her request to appoint past State Convention presidents to preside during specific sessions, a job that in other years were performed by the vice presidents. She selected three former presidents who included: her husband Henry A. Parker of Orlando (1961-63); James L. Pleitz of Pensacola (1971-72); and Joe Bamberg of Milton (1972-73).

The most notable actions taken by messengers attending the 1974 annual meeting was the approval of a revision to the State Convention's Constitution to establish a procedure in the event the Convention's elected officers should resign or become unable to continue serve. The procedure assigned the responsibility to the State Board of Missions to nominate and elect officers to serve until the next annual meeting. Another major action taken by messengers was the approval of a proposal to permit the coverage and participation of church staff persons in the prior pastor-only Church Annuity retirement program, partially funded by the Florida Baptist Convention and managed by the Southern Baptist Annuity Board.

Historical Footnote: In addition to Mrs. Parker, eight other women were elected and served (year noted in parenthesis) as second vice-president of the State Convention. These included Mrs. J. H. (Margaret) Lockhart (1961); Mrs. Clyde (Rosella) Lipscomb (1968); Mrs. Doyle E. (Mildred) Carlton, Jr. (1973); Mrs. Stanley (Theresa) Buss (1984); Mrs. N. B. (Nancy) Langford, (1990); Mrs. A. D. (Tanna) Dawson, (1994); Mrs. Eugene L (Lois H.) Wenger (1996); and Gail A. Adams (2009).

Cecil B. Carroll (1910-1970) served in 1955. During the State Convention session over which he presided, the messengers voted to accept the Baptist Bible Institute as the second affiliated educational institution of the State Convention. Messengers also approved a request to permit the Florida Baptist Children’s Home to expand by establishing child care facilities in other parts of the state. Carroll worked from 1930 until his death in 1970 for Independent Life and Accident Insurance Company. His denominational service included terms on the Florida State Board of Missions and on the SBC-Executive Committee. Carroll was an active member of Southside Baptist Church, Jacksonville.

J. Ollie Edmunds (1903-1984) served in 1961. During his tenure as Convention president, Edmunds also was serving as president of Stetson University in Deland, Florida, a post he held from 1948 until his retirement in 1967. In an ironic turn of events, messengers approved a renewed effort by the State Convention to take control of all of Stetson University’s property and to elect all the trustees of the university. The action revived a decades old argument over ownership and total trustee control of the Baptist school. However, in the spirit of seeming reconciliation, the messengers approved a resolution of “gratitude, appreciation and love to Dr. Edmunds,” the university faculty and students. Edmunds, prior to his University service, was an attorney and a Duval County judge and businessman.



J. Ollie Edmunds

Thomas M. Johns (1898-1977) served in 1965. During his year of service, the State Convention approved the process to accept a proposal from the Palm Beach Baptist Association to establish a State Convention-sponsored junior college. Messengers agreed that the plan was contingent upon: (1) the association raising \$1.5 million; (2) the State Convention budgeting incremental allocations towards a total \$675,000 commitment between 1965 and 1968; and (3) conducting a statewide fund solicitation campaign to raise an additional \$ 1 million for the proposed school. Johns was a former school teacher and was serving as the Superintendent of the Florida Baptist Children’s Home (1932-1968), at the time of his election to the State Convention presidency. He led in the relocation of the Children’s Home from Arcadia to Lakeland in 1945, and implemented the programs of vocational training, casework services, foster care, and family-style cottages at the Children’s Home.



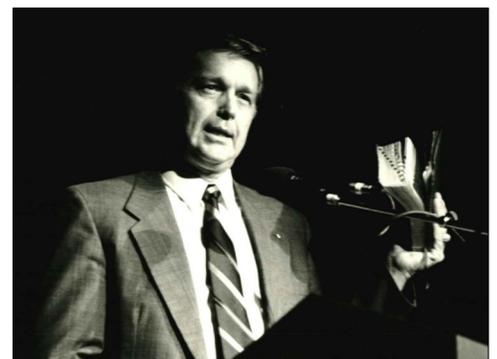
Doyle I. Carlton

Doyle I. Carlton (1908-1998) served in 1969. Unfortunately, due to a hospitalization, Carlton was unable to preside over the annual meeting in 1969. The two vice presidents -- Girod H. Cole, Jr., and Don O. Houser -- presided over the several sessions. One of the more significant actions messengers approved was a motion that the State Convention-Stetson University relationship be studied with the goal to consider "to either end this relationship or to propose a definite plan" for a continued relationship. Carlton was a citrus grove owner, businessman and banker who had a key role in the growth and development of Merritt Island. Carlton, who dedicated his life to the service of church and community, was an active longtime deacon at First Baptist Church, Merritt Island. [His father, Doyle Elam Carlton, Sr. (1885-1972) was a faithful Baptist who served as Florida's twenty-fifth governor (1929-1933).]

Barney B. Burks, Jr. (1930-2017) served in 1977. The issue of Baptist polity received unusual attention at the annual meeting as messengers considered a motion by Harry Varnadoe of Palatka who proposed to revise the State Convention's Bylaws to permit association executive committees to name their representative to serve on the State Convention's State Board of Missions. In a passionate response to the motion, James Monroe of Fort Walton Beach, among other things, called the proposal "un-Baptistic" because it would create the situation of one autonomous Baptist entity dictating -- through the selection of Board members -- to another autonomous Baptist entity. Despite spirited and extended discussion, messengers approved the motion to change the bylaws. Burks, along with his brothers were owners of the Big Ten Tire Company, and later served as Mayor of Pensacola from 1973-1977. After his mayoral service, he entered into a career of banking and financial brokerage and served as board president at Pensacola's Baptist Hospital. He was a member of the First Baptist Church.

Edwin L. Mason (1916-2016) served in 1980. Messengers approved a recommendation directing the State Convention president to appoint a seven-member committee "to study the purpose and future direction of Baptist Bible Institute," which Mr. Mason did before the State Convention meeting adjourned. Also noteworthy is that this annual meeting was the first for the newly elected Executive Director-Treasurer of the Florida Baptist Convention Dan Stringer. Mason practiced law and served as Justice of the Peace, Judge of Small Claims Court and Legal Coroner of Dade County. Mason also served on the Dade County Commission. In 1959, he was appointed to serve on the Florida Railroad and Public Utilities Commission, which required the Mason family to re-locate to Tallahassee, where he subsequently became a deacon at the First Baptist Church. After his retirement, Mason and his wife Violet, served as Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board volunteers to Ethiopia, Kazakhstan and Albania.

O. G. "Tim" Locher (1939-) served in 1993. During the annual meeting messengers considered and approved an unprecedented 20 revisions to the State Convention's governing documents, which included three Constitutional amendments, three revisions to the State Convention's Bylaws and 14 revisions to the Bylaws, State Board of Missions. Also approved were two foreign mission partnerships -- Tanzania, Africa, and the Caribbean. Locher was a U.S. Navy fighter pilot before becoming a pilot for Delta Airlines. Locher was a former City Commissioner for the City of Hollywood, from 1976-1978, and later served six-years on the State Board of Missions. He was a member of Sheridan Hills Baptist Church, Hollywood, before retiring and moving out of state.



O. G. "Tim" Locher