

LEGACY, as the monthly newsletter of the Florida Baptist Historical Society, has as its mission to highlight the *legacy* forged by the people, churches and events in Florida Baptist history. During the next several months this newsletter will feature those churches and their leadership who between 1821 and 1849 contributed to the development of the Florida Baptist State Convention. Each monthly issue will feature at least one church established in the 1820s, 1830s and the 1840s respectively. **While dozens of Baptist churches were established during these decades, most have not survived time. The featured churches continue to function in 2020.**

Florida Territory Missionary Baptist Churches Established in the 1820s

Clay County, Long Branch Baptist Church – 1825

A church that claims to have been started in 1825 and has functioned continuously is the Long Branch Baptist Church in what was then Duval County. The church is located near the present-day boundaries of Clay and Duval counties, near the northwest corner of Clay County. This rural church will observe its 194th anniversary in 2020. Its historic tradition notes that the church grew up at the location of the Long Branch Cemetery which contains grave markers dating back to the late 1700s. No early written records for the church exist due to being destroyed when one of its earliest buildings was demolished. The church, which continues to be located in its historic setting, is an active Missionary Baptist congregation.



Florida Territory Missionary Baptist Churches Established in the 1830s

Westville, Limestone Baptist Church – 1832

The concern for sharing the gospel and starting new churches along the Alabama-Florida border of Western Florida which resulted in the sending of itinerant missionaries into the Florida Territory. This missionary effort grew during the 1830s and 1840s that by 1847 three Alabama Baptist associations united in an “effort to care for the evangelistic interest of that quarter.”

One traditional story contends that a Baptist church called Limestone was established in what is now Walton County near the Darlington community around 1832. An early itinerant pastor was believed to be William Henry Alford, who came to Florida from Butler County, Alabama. The earliest records of the church do not exist, although the church’s records from the mid – 1800s were in the custody of the Alford family. The existence of a nearby cemetery lends credence to the possibility that a church could have been established there by the 1830s.



Early records of several Baptist associations in Alabama denote the sending of itinerant preachers into this area of the Florida Territory.

Travel on the Choctawhatchee River which flows through Holmes County could have facilitated the itinerant preacher departing from Eunola, Alabama, and traveling across North Florida. Unfortunately, no pioneer Florida or Alabama associations' records list the Limestone Church or the Westville community as a cooperating church. The Limestone Church continues to function in the present day.

Florida Territory Missionary Baptist Churches Established in the 1840s

Monticello, First Baptist Church – 1841



The third missionary Baptist church established in Jefferson County, was the Baptist Church of Monticello. Initially a group of Baptists held services in the Jefferson County Courthouse and later met in the Jefferson Academy. The church was constituted in October, 1841, with six charter members who were Jesse Goodman, Sampson Barrington, Emily Clark, Amelia Palmer, Julia Bacon and Elizabeth McCants.

The officiating presbytery – ordained ministers who examined the Baptist orthodoxy, as well as the faith and practice of the persons seeking to organize the missionary Baptist church – included Elders (the moniker for pastors)

John Broome, Richard Johnson Mays and Jesse Goodman. The church members called itinerant preacher Richard J. Mays of Madison County to serve as the first pastor to lead the monthly services. Mays served until 1855. Under Mays' leadership in 1846 the church was able to construct its first permanent building. By 1860 the church's membership had grown to 173 persons, which included 49 Anglos and 124 African-descendants who were slaves working on area plantations. **Pictured is the church building built and dedicated in 1916.**

Tallahassee, Aeon Baptist Church – 1842

The Aeon Missionary Baptist Church was organized and established November 7, 1842, in the western portion of Leon County. Thomas Lang was among the group of Baptists who had migrated from the Carolinas and the Virginias in search of suitable farmland. The group formed the nucleus for the church's charter members. Lang likely served as a member of the presbytery -- area pastors who reviewed the Baptist orthodoxy, as well as the faith and practice of those persons who were seeking to organize the church.

The name "Aeon" means "fountains of water." The first regular worship service of the church was held in January 1843. According to the original church minutes, which still exists, the membership roll was comprised of 35 Anglo and 39 African-descendent persons. Pastor Lang was a leading force in seeking the formation of an association of Baptist churches, that subsequently became the Florida Baptist Association in 1843. Lang, as an itinerant preacher, served four churches concurrently in which he led their respective once a month services. These included the Aeon Church, the Shilo [sic] Church also in Leon County, the Providence Church located in nearby Gadsden County, and the Bethpage Church in adjoining Jefferson County. Elder (the moniker given to pastors) Lang's service as pastor of the Aeon church was terminated in March, 1848 when he was excommunicated for "irreligious" and "immoral conduct" which were not defined in the church minutes.



It's Really 68, not 47, Churches will achieve milestone Anniversaries in 2020

In last month's LEGACY newsletter, we announced that 47 churches in 2020 will observe a milestone (25-year benchmarks) anniversary. Unfortunately, by our use of a faulty report document, we inadvertently overlooked identifying 27 other churches. **In fact, there are actually 68 churches observing milestone anniversaries this year and all have been provided a Certificate of Recognition by the Society.** Although there were many more churches established in each of the noted milestone years, many churches either disbanded or merged with other congregations.

This corrected listing, which follows, contains only those churches that continue to function in 2020:

175-years (organized 1845)

No Changes

Cluster Springs, DeFuniak Springs
Eden, Brooksville
Ephesus, Hilliard
Greenwood, Greenwood
Live Oak, Callahan
Milton First

150-years (organized 1870)

No Changes

Gainesville First
Mt. Olive, Marianna
New Hope, Mayo
Palatka First

125-years (organized 1895)

No Changes

Ferndale, Ferndale
Hurricane Creek, Westville
Kathleen, Kathleen
New Orange, Chipley
Oak Grove, Wauchula
Westville, Bonifay

100-years (organized 1920)

Corrected

Archer, Archer
Auburndale First
Bethany, Bonifay
Lake Worth First
Moore Haven First
Round Lake, Alford

75-years (organized 1945)

No Changes

Castle Heights, Tampa
Gardenview, Jacksonville
Lake Region, Winter Haven
North Rome, Tampa
Northside, Plant City
Samsula, New Smyrna Beach
Southwide, DeFuniak Springs
West Highland, Pensacola

50-years (organized 1970)

Corrected

Alva First
Antioch, Eagle Lake
Bayou George First, Panama City
Choctaw Beach First, Freeport
Islamorada First
Iglesias Bautista Nazareth, Miami
Iglesias Bautista Resurreccion, Miami
Simmons Loop, Riverview

25-years (organized 1995)

Corrected

Bethesda Christian Center, Plantation
Bible Walk, Pompano Beach
Christian Fellowship, Jacksonville
Church of Oakland, Jacksonville
Eglise Baptiste Haitienne Horeb, Orlando
Evangelical Baptist Church of Calvary, Palm Beach Gardens
Fraternity Baptist Church of Southwest Florida, Lehigh Acres
Genesis Missionary, Jacksonville
Good News, Fort Myers
Grace Tabernacle, Fort Walton Beach
Gulf to Lake, Crystal River
Hopewell, Jacksonville
Iglesias Bautista Misionera, Sarasota
Iglesias Bautista Renacer, West Palm Beach
Jesus Christ Community, Jacksonville
Maranatha Haitian, Orlando
Metropolitan, Pensacola
Mission City, Largo
New Tampa First
Openwater, Odessa
Outreach, Lakeland
Palm Coast Community, Palm Coast
Primera Iglesias Bautista, Opa Locka
South Tampa Fellowship, Tampa
Temple Morija Haitian Mission, Miami
Trinity, Lakeland
United Missionary, Jacksonville
Westchase Community, Tampa