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Itinerant Missionaries Brought the Gospel into the Florida Territory – Part 7

This issue of Here and Now continues the featured series on some of the pioneer itinerant missionaries who came into the Florida Territory – as it was called prior to Florida’s 1845 admission to statehood – and undertook the challenges to share the Gospel in this spiritual and physical frontier wilderness.

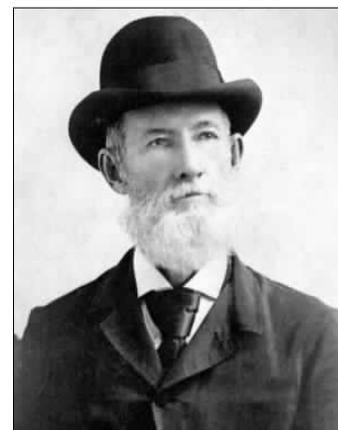
Jeremiah M. Hayman: A Pioneer Baptist Preacher in West Central Florida

Jeremiah M. Hayman (1822 – 1902) a native of Bryan County, Georgia (about 30 miles west of Savannah), at age 15, along with his family, moved to Madison County, in North Florida. After six years attempting to eke out a living at farming, the Hayman family in January, 1943, moved south to the interior of Florida, settling at Lake Lindsey, in Hernando County.

It was the Armed Occupation Act of 1842 that pointed the Haymans to that area of Florida. The Federal legislation – offered 160 acres of land to armed settlers who built a house and farmed at least five acres for five years – was designed to encourage immigration south of the Withlacoochee River. In his personal diary Hayman recorded the beginnings of a spiritual conversion that occurred in that same year:

“...For the last two years...I was moralist. But the gospel which was conveyed to my understanding by the living ministry and the Holy Scriptures, and an examination of my dangerous situation as a sinner before God, urged me to repent of my great transgressions, especially of the sin I had so fondly indulged, that of self-righteousness.”

Having experienced a change in his spiritual thinking and outlook, Hayman did not change his lifestyle. Then during a funeral sermon preached by John Tucker, an itinerant missionary Baptist preacher, Hayman finally made public his confession of faith. That very afternoon, July 7, 1844, he and one of his sisters were baptized by Tucker in Lake Lindsey. When the Eden Baptist Church at Lake Lindsey was constituted, Hayman joined the church and subsequently became the church clerk. Later, he was ordained a deacon.



Jeremiah M.
Hayman

Having received God’s call to preach, Jeremiah Hayman realized his limitations due to the lack of an education. The urge to preach, however, would not go away.



Baptist Church,
Bartow

He was living alone, and was lonely. He proposed a proposition and pledge to God: If God would bless him with a good wife; he would work full-time as a minister. Although God did present an opportunity for Hayman to meet and marry Martha J. Carlton, “the woman of his dreams,” Hayman stalled on fulfilling his end of the bargain with God.

Soon calamity hit the young couple. Their first child died at birth. In January 1849, a second child, a girl, was born. But by November, the baby died. Nothing Hayman undertook seemed to prosper. This pricked his conscience about his unfulfilled vow to God.

Shortly after, Hayman sold his rural cottage and moved to a place on the Alafia River in Hillsborough County. He learned of a Baptist church there with no regular preacher. His duty was clear. Members asked him to preach. On June 18, 1851, he preached his first sermon, taking John 1:29 as his text. Within five months, Hayman was ordained as a minister on November 10, 1851, at a session of the Baptist association in Hernando County.

In a brief time, Hayman was preaching for the Salem Church, near where Plant City is now located, and at Indian Pond, afterward known as the Socrum Settlement, in Polk County, where Bethel Church was later organized. He also preached for a group of blacks at Manatee, near Bradenton.

In January 1852, he commenced preaching at Thonotosassa, in Hillsborough County, and in the following March he preached at Old Tampa, then called Clear Water (two words). Also in March of the same year, he commenced preaching at Bethesda Church in Hernando County, and later in June, he started preaching at Peas Creek, near the present site of Bartow, in Polk County.

At the end of his first year’s ministry, Hayman’s journal revealed he had traveled 1,450 miles, mostly riding by horseback and occasionally by means of horse and buggy through woody areas. In that time, Hayman preached 69 sermons, baptized 28 persons, and had received \$12.62 in pay.

The Alachua Baptist Association in 1853 employed Hayman as a missionary, keeping up his several part-time pastorates, and adding such others as he could. His added preaching locations were Long Pond (now Valrico) in Hillsborough County, and Spring Hill, near Brooksville, in Hernando County. That year he baptized 13 persons and received in compensation \$63. In 1854 and 1855 he was employed as an itinerant missionary by the Southern Baptist Convention, all the while continuing his part-time pastorates.

He wrote in his journal that, “for these two years I would sometimes preach in the woods, being on the frontier, and very few schoolhouses or meeting places to use. But the Lord seemed to bless my humble labors, and I was greatly encouraged to go on in the discharge of my duty as a minister of the gospel.” During that two-year period, he preached 186 sermons, traveled 3,094 miles, baptized 42 persons, and received about \$235 in pay.

Hayman lived in Bartow, which was still called Fort Blount. As the Florida Seminole War was still raging, and the presence of hostile Indians surrounded Bartow, caused him to move to Tampa in 1855, for the protection of his family. To his support his family, he took employment as a carpenter and painter. However, Brother Hayman continued to preach the gospel in Tampa and nearby settlements. In Tampa services were held sometimes in the courthouse and sometimes in a room in the Masonic Hall.

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The Haymans remained in Tampa through “the terrible plague, yellow fever,” which raged from 1858 until 1862. Many residents sought refuge in the rural areas, but Hayman remained in town, “considering it the best thing I could do for the cause of Christ and the good of humanity.”

Once the yellow fever plague was eradicated, Hayman is credited with organizing and being the first pastor of the First Baptist Church of Tampa. However, in his diary, Hayman wrote: “In July 1860, Dr. Joseph S. Baker came to Tampa, and we organized the First Baptist Church,” thus sharing the credit with Baker. Hayman served three separate tenures as pastor of the Tampa church: 1859 – 1861; 1863 – 1870; and 1875 – 1882. Between pastoral tenures, he was employed as a missionary for the South Florida Association from 1872 to 1875.

During his formative years Brother Hayman’s ministry consisted of itinerate preaching throughout western central Florida. In 1862 Hayman moved from Tampa to his former residence near Bartow where he resided until his death in 1902. Up until that time, his remaining years of ministry were spent in DeSoto, Manatee, Hillsborough, Hernando, Polk and Pasco Counties... During his ministry, Hayman traveled 38,000 miles ministering sacrificially to hundreds of isolated areas.

[Source: Adapted and edited from a monograph written by Hampton Dunn and presented to the Florida Baptist Historical Society, annual meeting held at Stetson University, May 3-4, 1996.]



First Baptist Church, Tampa

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Florida Baptist Historical Society Office Contact Information:

P.O Box 95, Graceville, FL 32440

Phone: 1-850-360-4179

Email Don Hepburn: Society1@FloridaBaptistHistory.org

Email Penny Baumgardner: Society2@FloridaBaptistHistory.org