

Vol. 9

Serving Florida Baptists through historical research and resources

No. 7

July, 2017



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SPECIAL NOTICE – SOCIETY OFFICE HAS MOVED

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The Society's Board of Directors is pleased to report that it has met the challenge of re-locating its office. After nearly two decades of residency, the Society vacated the Clark House on The Baptist College of Florida campus. On June 30 the Society's office re-located within Jackson County. It is fitting that the Society has been able to remain in the area where the oldest continuously functioning Baptist church is located – Campbellton, First Baptist. And it is equally significant that the Society's "new" office space is located in a "historic" commercial office building that was constructed in 1900. Although over 117 years old, the 2,700 square feet building is constructed of brick and mortar and appears to be airtight against the elements. "I am so very, very grateful for all God has provided," Board chair Judy Jolly observed. She went on to say, "I am just so grateful that what appeared to be a sad ending [being requested to vacate the Clark House] has, instead, become a beautiful beginning."

The Society's employed part-time administrative ministry assistant will be available by Email and telephone most weekday mornings, Monday to Thursday. **This move is expected to enhance the Society's ministry to churches and individuals that seek information and research assistance in Florida Baptist history.**

Please be in prayer for the Historical Society board as they are faced with the next challenge of providing ministry services in 2018 with a Cooperative Program budget allocation that is expected to be reduced by 20 percent to \$20,000 by the State Board of Missions. The ministry of the Historical Society functions under the auspices of the State Board. In contrast, Florida Baptists will indirectly contribute over \$70,000 to the support of the Southern Baptist Library and Archives which does not benefit the Florida Baptist Historical Society. This funding is based on the percentage allocation by the SBC Executive Committee of Cooperative Program gifts received from Florida.

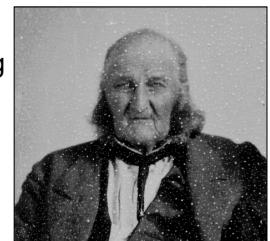
Itinerant Missionaries Brought the Gospel into the Florida Territory – Part 6

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.

Joshua Mercer: Itinerant Preacher – Missionary – Part Two (The Conclusion)

The June issue of this Newsletter began the mission story of pioneer Florida Baptist Joshua Mercer who was an itinerant preacher responsible for starting many churches as he served as a domestic missionary for Georgia and Florida Baptist associations. He also is credited with establishing one of the first educational academies for Baptists in Florida.

(Continued next page)



Joshua Mercer



Campbellton Baptist Church,
Established 1825

Soon after the organization of the Florida Baptist Association (1843), one of the pastors wrote to the *Christian Index* and reported: "I have been informed by one of our missionary committee that Brother Joshua Mercer will be employed as the home missionary. We shall be much rejoiced to see some of our Georgia ministering brethren among us this winter." The writer recalled that, "One church, I believe the Campbellton Church, had been constituted, but for the want of regular preaching, it had become pretty much disbanded. About this time Elder [pastor] Joshua Mercer came to Florida and commenced his labors, and to his indefatigable efforts we must attribute in a great measure the prosperity of our denomination."

The letter writer described Joshua Mercer as "a man of a powerful and vigorous intellect, though he did not enjoy all the advantages of a finished education. His eloquence is of a superior order, and when he pours forth his meek and burning thoughts, clad in forcible language, one feels as though he was carried along on the bosom of a rapid but gentle stream. We had the pleasure of participating in several of Brother Mercer's meetings. I heard him preach on one occasion and was reminded very forcibly of the distinguished Andrew Broadus, whom I heard in my native state." That was poetic language used to basically say, "The man could preach good!" This correspondent went on to conclude: "For twenty-five years he has been proclaiming the truths of the Gospel, and according to the testimony of his works as well as of his brethren, he has used faithfully the sword of the spirit in fighting the battles of his Master."

Around March, 1843, a notice appeared in the Georgia *Christian Index* indicating that Joshua Mercer had moved from Baker County, Georgia, to Marianna, Jackson County (Florida). In June of that same year, Mercer sent another letter to the *Index* to report on his missionary efforts and it was published two months later. "Our religious affairs are in a gloomy condition here; and how can this be any better, if faith comes by hearing, and they have not the opportunity to hear. I am now on the west side of the Chattahoochee, and entirely alone, as a Baptist minister." Although he noted he could spend all his time as an itinerant preacher, Mercer said that he had to "maintain my family" which he was doing with the help of his youngest son Henry. He called upon Georgia Baptists for missionary help. "The Baptists of Georgia are able to fill Florida with missionaries; and, brethren ought we not to do it? If we ought, shall we not do it?"

Mercer's missionary endeavors led him, along with Thomas Lang, to serve as the presbytery that certified the formation of the Union Academy (later named Greenwood) Church in Jackson County on March 16, 1845. So committed to this newly established church that the Mercer family comprised eight of the nine persons who were the charter members. The Mercers included Joshua and his wife Mary Wells, as well as their three adult sons and three adult daughters. The one other charter member was pioneer resident Mary E. Horne. This group then called Joshua Mercer to serve as pastor. Mercer served a total eight years at the Union Academy Church; first from 1845 to 1848 and then returned in 1851 and served until 1854 when he resigned.

Concurrent with his service to the Union Academy congregation, Mercer served as the pastor of two other Jackson County churches: the Bethlehem Church (1844-1853) (now known as Campbellton) and the Sardis Church (now known as Shady Grove).

With the growing number of Baptist churches being started in the Panhandle – many the result of Mercer's labor – Mercer led in the organization of the West Florida Baptist Association in 1847. He later served as its moderator from 1850-1859.

Mercer also is credited with establishing in 1851 what may have been the first school in Florida to be operated by a Baptist, the Orange Hill Male and Female Academy, in Washington County. The courses of study included English, Latin, Greek, mathematics, modern languages and music. This was in a day before free public schools existed. It is probably no coincidence that Mercer was greatly influenced by his family when it came to matters of education.

When the organization meeting for the Florida Baptist State Convention was held November 20, 1854 at the Concord Baptist Church, near Madison, Mercer was one of the seventeen delegates present. He, along with Davis P. Everett and G. W. Underwood represented the West Florida Association.

Joshua Mercer continued to preach throughout West Florida until 1855, when he became an agent for the Bible Revision Association. The Association, established in 1852, sought to provide in the South a "Baptist" version of the English Bible that interpreted baptism as immersion "in" water not "by" water. As one of its agents, Mercer continued his itinerant travels to distribute the new versions of the Bible and preach until 1861, when declining health and the infirmities of growing old prevented further service in the ministry.

Mercer is believed to have died February 4, 1869, at age 81 [although some records reflect a January 4 death]. Family tradition notes that several Mercer sons transported Mercer's body, their grieving mother, and the senior Mercers' belongings from north Florida to the community of Gordon, Alabama. The small community is located near the Chattahoochee River which serves as the Alabama-Georgia state boundary. In the mid-1800s the community of Gordon was then a part of Henry County, but today it is a part of Houston County, Alabama. Mercer was buried in Gordon. His wife Mary lived until 1880 when she died on September 17.