



Here & Now

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An update for Florida Baptist Historical Society Board of Directors and Friends

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Dear Board Members and Friends of the Florida Baptist Historical Society,

It was 25 years ago that Dr. Earl Joiner talked to me about serving on the Board of the FBHS. I consented and served on the board until I started teaching at the Baptist Bible Institute in 1991. Then in 2002, the FBHS organization had the need of a new director when Mark Rathel joined the faculty at the Baptist College in Graceville. Carol Hammack talked to me about the position and after a few conversations I gladly took on the part time work at the society. Therefore, from 2002-2016, I have fulfilled ministry and calling by serving Florida Baptists in this important ministry. As announced I will be retiring from the historical society on December 31, 2016. Jerry Mae has a long list of tasks for me, and I have one large writing project and two smaller writing projects on the horizon.

It seems appropriate in this Thanksgiving season to say thank you to some very wonderful people I have met in this work. Let me do that with a heart of gratefulness and appreciation.

In 1955, I felt I wanted to teach and coach. I loved athletics and my two neighbors and heroes were into athletics and were going to college to teach and coach. One went to the University of Tennessee on a football scholarship and the other went to Troy State. Their dad died when they were young and so did mine. They had a sister and so did I. They had a widowed mother who needed help and so did I. I watched them closely.

Then on June 28, 1956, all that changed. I was called to preach at a youth assembly at Shocco Springs near Talladega, Alabama. I openly wept because I knew there would be no coaching career, no hope of income enough to help my mother, and a lot of years of education in my future. The urge to teach was still there, but the call to preach was paramount. My life then centered around a call to preach, an urge to teach, and a need for research and writing. All this came together in 2002, when Dr. Hammack and Dr. Kinchen invited me to work with the FBHS. And what a ride it has been. I have met some of the finest and most committed Christians I have ever known in this work. Let me highlight some of my favorites.

One of my favorites would have to be Dr. Franklin Fowler. Dr. Fowler and his wife Dorcas live in retirement in Richmond, Virginia. His father Frank J. Fowler, was appointed the first native Floridian Southern Baptist foreign missionary. The family served in Argentina and later Dr. Fowler went to medal school and served as a surgeon in Patton's army in WWII and then as a pioneer medical missionary to Paraguay. Jerry Mae and I love the Fowlers. Some of the best hours we have ever spent have been in the presence of Franklin and Dorcas.

Virginia Love and Bill Gray made wonderful impressions on both of us. Bill is the son of Rufus and Marian Gray. The Grays were in a Japanese internment camp in WWII when Rufus was killed by the Japanese. Marion and son Billy survived the camp. Marion later remarried and Virginia is a daughter of the second marriage. Billy is a medical doctor/psychiatrist and Virginia is an attorney in Chattanooga, Tennessee. This brother and sister are two of the most interesting people you could ever meet. They have been generous with the FBHS with their trust, time, information and artifacts.



Rufus, Marian
and Billy Gray



Charlotte Williams
Sprawls

Now let me mention Charlotte Williams Sprawls. Charlotte is the daughter of Charles Bray Williams: a Greek scholar, pastor, professor, writer and scholar. Charlotte enjoys telling people she is the daughter of Charles Bray Williams who was born in 1869. People like to correct her and say no, you were his granddaughter! And Charlotte points out no, I am his daughter. This is all important for a number of reasons, but my favorite is that Charles Bray Williams is the only Florida preacher to publish a New Testament translation!

Now for a unique lady Jerry Mae and I met at Live Oak Baptist Church at Vernon, Florida. I was there for their 100th anniversary and Mrs. Gertrude Weaver gave her testimony. She reminded the congregation that she had personally known every pastor and member of that church in its 100 year history. I later talked to her about it and she said she joined the church when she was eight years old and the original pastor and members were still there. Needless to say she was the church mother of that congregation!

Now for the most unique person I have met in my work at the FBHS. One of my research interests has been the long time service of pastors in a local Baptist church. I have been surprised to learn of numerous pastors who served the same Baptist church congregation for over 50 years. Then I met Carl Watson Todd. Bro. Todd did something that I do not believe will ever be duplicated by a Baptist preacher. Listen to this: Bro. Todd served three different Baptist churches, in three different states, for over 50 years at the same time. Let me say that again: Bro Todd served three different Baptist churches (Bethel in Bonifay, Florida; Shady Grove in Arlington, Georgia; County Line in Abbeville, Alabama), in three different states (Florida, Georgia, Alabama) for an average of over 50 years each (Bethel, 57 years; Shady Grove, 57 years; County Line, 47 years). That is a record I don't think will ever be broken.



Carl Watson Todd

Serving Florida Baptists has been a joy for me. Jerry Mae and I look forward to some extra travel, some transitional service, and more time for family, reading and reflection. We do it with grateful hearts.

Happy Thanksgiving.

Honoring those who honor Christ,

Jerry M. Windsor
Secretary-Treasurer
Matthew 6:33
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