

**The year 1831 marked the beginning of a Legacy of Sharing the Gospel in Middle Florida.**

Three churches, which were established within a relatively few miles of each other in neighboring Jefferson and Madison counties, became the anchor for Baptist missionary expansion in the central area of the Florida Panhandle. Those churches continue to thrive after 187 years. The two Jefferson county churches were Olive Baptist Church and Elizabeth Baptist Church both located near the Monticello community. The Madison county church was originally called Hickstown Baptist Church.

**Olive Baptist Church, Monticello, Jefferson County, 1831**

A church that later would become a footnote in the development of the Florida Baptist State Convention was established in 1831 on land that was then in the State of Georgia and later was made a part of the State of Florida.

The Olive Baptist Church, located in the present-day city of Monticello (Jefferson County, Florida), was organized by a group of settlers in the Bethel community of what was then designated as Thomas County, Georgia. These settlers were likely holding regular worship services in 1830 or earlier, and at some point decided to organize an official church. On January 8, 1831, a deed was recorded with the Superior Court of Thomas County which denoted that Thomas Dekle transferred title for "one-acre of land for the benefit and use"

of the Olive Church. No other records are available that identify the charter members or the organization of the church. Further collaboration of the church's early beginnings is provided by the presence of a cemetery on the present day church property. The cemetery contains grave markers dating back to the early 1800s.



Olive Baptist Church,  
Monticello, Jefferson County

There are no available records that can report whether or not those pioneer Baptists were even aware of the struggle between two states that would finally determine the governmental province of their church's property. The church property was but an insignificant part of over 1,300,000 acres located between the St. Marys River to the east and the juncture of the Flint and Chattahoochee rivers to the west. Between those two river landmarks were two separate east-west survey lines that sought to establish the official boundary between Georgia and Florida. The difference between those survey lines became the subject of a 46-year dispute between the State of Georgia and the Florida Territorial government, which became a state in 1845. Beginning in 1826 and continuing until 1872, the two states secured their respective surveys, as well as provided their own interpretation of a land survey that was included in a 1795 treaty which had conveyed the land from Spain to the United States. During much of the 46-year period, the two states continued to issue land grants and record property sales on the lands believed to be within their respective jurisdiction. The matter was finally arbitrated with agreement by both state legislatures on the final boundary lines and approved by the U.S. Congress April 9, 1872. As a part of the agreement, each state recognized each other's land grants or property sales that finally ended up in their respective jurisdiction.

The land site on which the Olive Baptist Church was located finally ended up in Florida's Jefferson County, just three-quarters of a mile south from the current-day Georgia-Florida boundary.

While the church was still officially in Thomas County, Georgia, the Olive Church achieved a footnote in Florida Baptist history. As the host church for the eleventh session (1853) of the Florida Baptist Association, it was within this church building that delegates to the annual association meeting took action to begin the process for the formation of the Florida Baptist State Convention the following year in 1854. The small congregation, now 187 years later, thrives in its present-day rural setting.

### **Elizabeth Baptist Church, Monticello, Jefferson County, 1831**

Also in 1831, within Jefferson County, Florida, the second missionary Baptist congregation was constituted. The Elizabeth Baptist Church was established about nine miles southeast of Monticello. Few records exist, other than some fragmentary identification of the seven founding members: James Walker and wife Elizabeth Padgett Walker, Jesse Walker, Charles and Sarah Walker, and Joseph and Caroline Kinsey. In that first year Elder Jesse Goodman (b. 1790; d. 1844) served as the pastor. The church then called Richard Johnson Mays (b. 1808; d. 1864) to serve as its lay-preacher. This preaching responsibility – which is believed to have lasted only a year – was likely limited to traveling by horseback from adjacent Madison County once a month. The Elizabeth Church officially constituted on April 12, 1834.



Elizabeth Baptist Church,  
Monticello, Jefferson County

It would be another ten years before Mays was officially ordained into the ministry by the Concord Baptist Church in Madison County. The interim pastoral experience likely served as a training ground for Mays' to express his spiritual stirrings and practice his sermon delivery. It also set the stage for Mays' growing prominence as a pioneer Baptist leader. In 2018 the church is expected to observe its 187th anniversary since founding.

### **First Baptist Church, Madison, (formerly Hickstown Church), Madison County, 1831**

Prior to his service with the Elizabeth Baptist Church, likely between 1831 – 32, Richard Johnson Mays and his good friend Alexander Moseley led several other families near Madison County's Lake Sampala, in an area called San Pedro, to establish the Hickstown Baptist Church (later to be known as the First Baptist Church of Madison). Edwin Browning's brief history of the church sets the founding as 1835.

However, an earlier founding date is plausible because of the settlement of the Mays families in this area between 1830– 31. And by 1832, the Mays family had moved to the northern end of Madison County to the present community of Lovett. Additionally, the San Pedro settlement was comprised of families and individuals who had recently migrated from South Carolina and who would have been anxious to carry on their religious traditions. It is also probable that, like so many other earlier churches, people held worship services in private homes until the attendance "warranted" the starting of a church. It is known for certain that by 1840 the Hickstown Church was re-located to the town of Madison courthouse and retained the Hickstown name until 1850 when it was re-named the Madison Baptist Church. Since 1922 the church has been known as the First Baptist Church of Madison and continues to function in the present day.

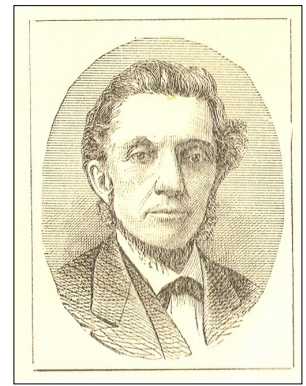


First Baptist Church, Madison

The church holds two significant places in Florida Baptist history. First, reflecting a close relationship with the Florida Baptist State Convention (which was organized in 1854 in the nearby R. J. Mays' Clifton Mansion) the Madison church hosted the annual meetings of the State Convention seven times in the nineteenth century (1866, 1868, 1871, 1876, 1878, 1880 and 1898). Additionally, during the 1880 meeting of the Florida Baptist State Convention, the State Board of Missions was authorized by the State Convention. The Board, which was made

responsible for the missionary endeavors of the State Convention, promptly elected W. N. Chaudoin (b. August 30, 1829; d. January 22, 1904) as its corresponding secretary, a post he held for 21 years. Interestingly Chaudoin served as pastor of the Madison church from 1873 to 1879.

One of its earliest pastors -- Stephen Crockett who served 1895 -- 1901 -- was instrumental in the design and construction of the church's third sanctuary in 1898 and which was used until 1951. The all wood structure had several unique architectural features, including four gables and a nearly round auditorium that had perfect acoustics. This architecturally significant building, which is being restored in 2018, was designated in 1970 as a State of Florida historical landmark.



W. N. Chaudoin

### THE LEGACY OF CELEBRATING ANNIVERSARIES

Church anniversary observances should be an important event in the life of the local church. In the scriptures we read of God's encouragement to His people to remember their history and recall the blessings and provisions which He has provided. ["So, this day shall be to you a memorial; and you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord throughout the generations . . ." Exodus 12:14 (NKJV).]

As God's contemporary people, Florida Baptists also should pause to remember how God has blessed their congregation since its founding. These remembrances can take many forms. Some churches designate a Sunday to observe and celebrate a milestone anniversary. Yet other church leaders undertake to collect, write and publish a history of the congregation since its founding. And certainly, at a minimum, it is important for a church to commit to collect and preserve its history and the memorabilia associated with the church's ministry life and development.

**The Florida Baptist Historical Society can assist church leaders in planning an anniversary observance, writing a church history, and/or undertake the opportunity to collect and preserve a church's history. For more information, please contact the Society by calling 1-850-360-4179 or send an Email to [Society2@floridabaptisthistory.org](mailto:Society2@floridabaptisthistory.org).**

A nine member board, appointed by the State Board of Missions, governs the ministry and mission of the Florida Baptist Historical Society, which is a fraternal organization of the Florida Baptist Convention [2018]

BARBARA CARROLL  
JACKSONVILLE

DAVID ELDER  
ST. AUGUSTINE

THOMAS GREEN  
JACKSONVILLE

THOMAS KINCHEN  
GRACEVILLE

ROGER RICHARDS  
GRACEVILLE

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BRISTOL

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