

THE LEGACY OF 193 YEARS OF UPHOLDING THE GOSPEL

As the decade of the 1820s came to an end, three other churches that were established then have survived the test of time and continue to function in 2018. But as is the case with so many pioneer churches, only fragments of written records are available to tell the story of their organization and founding.

East Florida Legacy – Long Branch Baptist Church, 1825

Located in East Florida approximately 50 miles from where Florida’s first Baptist church was organized in 1821 (See Pigeon Creek BC story in the January LEGACY newsletter) a church that claims to have been started in 1825 and continues to function today is the Long Branch Baptist Church. The church is located near the present-day boundaries of Clay and Duval counties, near the northwest corner of Clay County. This rural church observes its 193rd anniversary this year. Its historic tradition notes that the church was established at the location of the Long Branch Cemetery which contains grave markers dating back to the early 1800s, including possibly early members of the church. Likely during its earliest years of functioning, the membership was probably comprised of a few large families which held preaching services once a month when an itinerant preacher – such as James McDonald or John Tucker – came through the area. No early written records for the church exists due to being destroyed by fire, which was typical for many pioneer churches. The church, which continues to be located in its original historic setting of the cemetery, is an active Missionary Baptist congregation.



Long Branch Baptist Church

The Legacy of Ebenezer Baptist Church, Jefferson County, 1828

Ebenezer Baptist Church holds the distinction of being the third west central Florida Baptist church to be established. The name Ebenezer means “Stone of Help.” The church was constituted in 1828, on the Casa Bianca plantation of Joseph White in Jefferson County. It was located approximately two miles south of Monticello. It began with twelve members and Benjamin Manning, Sr., was pastor. The founding members included: B. Abraham Mott, Joseph Chancy, Light Townsend, James McCorde, Abraham Lamb, Sarah Burney, Nancy Townsend, Isabelle Mott, Martha Brigham, Phoeby Townsend, Mary McArdeell and Martha Lamb. Sparse records exist of the church’s early history. Within a year of being organized, the church purchased two acres of land upon which they built a church house and established a cemetery. Subsequently the church relocated to a four-acre site on the Bolton Plantation.



Ebenezer Baptist Church,
Jefferson County

William B. Cooper later served as pastor for 25 years. The congregation continues functioning as a Missionary Baptist church in the community of Monticello and observes its 190th anniversary this year.

The Church also holds the unique distinction of being the birthplace where the first Baptist association in Florida was organized. Located at the front of the church property is a granite marker standing approximately five feet high with the following inscription (see inset photo):

FLORIDA BAPTIST ASSOCIATION

The first permanent Missionary Baptist Association in Florida was organized here at Ebenezer Baptist Church October 16, 1843, eleven years prior to the formation of the Baptist State Convention.

John Broome, moderator

Sam C. Craft, clerk

Plans for the Organization had been made at Indian Springs Church, March 5, 1843.

Another Pioneer Legacy Congregation – Indian Spring Baptist Church, Leon County, 1829

Approximately fourteen miles east of Monticello, near the Lake Miccosukee area, settlers organized the Indian Spring Baptist Church. (In the ensuing years an “s” was added to the name Spring.) This pioneer church was constituted on July 18, 1829, by Henry Miller and Theophilus Hardie who served as the visiting presbytery. There were eleven charter members: Arthur and Sarah Burney, Nancy Hagin, Ebenezer and Nancy Folsom, Helen Farmer, Joseph and Elizabeth Miller, Fannie Hay, John Smith, and Amos Albritton. The church called Theophilus Hardee as its first pastor. The northern Leon County church this year will observe its 189th anniversary since founding. Located 17 miles northeast of downtown Tallahassee, the church still meets in a wood frame building constructed in 1854.



Indian Springs Baptist Church,
Leon County

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.

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]

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