



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,

Walking around on the main floor of the British Museum is an exhilarating experience. In the old British Museum there were magazines dated to the 1700's out on the open shelves for you to just pick up and read. The magazines were bound but beautiful and well preserved.

One of the things I have enjoyed doing was to take magazines and journals from the 1700's and read what current writers were saying about Baptists and Christian work of a particular era.

A topic that keeps coming up in late 1700's English journals is the matter of Sunday School. Britisher Robert Raikes (1736-1811), is considered the father of the modern Sunday School movement. John Wesley (1703-1791) endorsed the movement and so did William Fox (1736-1826). Wesley as the organizer of Methodism and Fox as a Baptist layman gave important support to a systematic study of God's word and that paid dividends for all of us.



David Cunningham

David Cunningham in *A History of Florida Baptist's Sunday School*, gives a wonderful view of Southern Baptist Sunday Schools in Florida from 1843-2005. David gave an inside view of Florida Baptist Sunday School that is thrilling and insightful. His work is a very important Florida Baptist document for research and informed reading.

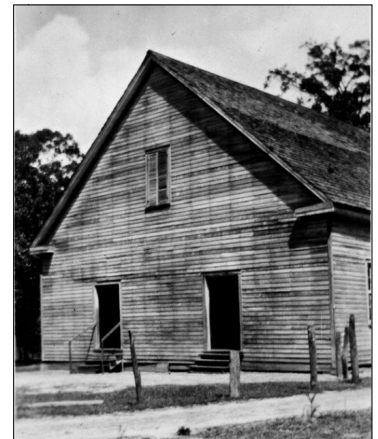
Don Hepburn and Earl Joiner in *Favored Florida, a History of Florida Baptists from 1784-1939*, has over 25 references to Florida Baptist Sunday Schools with helpful personal and pictorial information about state Sunday School leaders.

N. B. Langford, long time pastor of First Baptist Church in Panama City, told me one time that "you better take care of your Sunday School and finances" or "they will take care of you." I think Baptist interest proves that true. Especially Florida Baptist history. Sunday School enrollment is the "canary in the coal mine" for evangelism, finances, music and attendance.

Hepburn and Cunningham point to the Providence Baptist Church, near Quincy, as being the first Baptist Sunday School begun in the state. It was begun in 1843 and one was begun in Key West in 1844.

According to our research at the FBHS the third Baptist Sunday School in the state was begun at Rehoboth church near Chipley, in 1849. (*West Florida Minutes, 1849*, p. 8), Bethlehem (now Campbellton) in 1852 was number four. New Providence and Apalachicola (1853) were schools number five and six in Florida. Union Academy (became Greenwood) and New Hope (1856) were schools seven and eight. Sardis and First Baptist Brooksville (1857) were schools nine and ten. Chattahoochee, and the second Sunday School in Greenwood were begun in 1858, bringing us to a total of twelve schools. Monticello was number thirteen and all other Baptist Sunday Schools in Florida were begun after the Civil War era.

Early records report the value of the Sunday School to our Baptist churches. The Rehoboth



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Sunday School (1849) was referred to as a "Sabbath School" and was a prime factor in that church receiving 35 new additions in that year. (*West Florida Minutes*, 1849, p. 8).

The 1859 minutes of the West Florida Association rang out an ante-bellum challenge that's true today. The associational committee on Sabbath Schools reported that the "cause of Sabbath Schools is of vital importance to our religious interests. Next to the preaching of the gospel, we deem the subject of Sabbath Schools Instruction as requiring our most earnest efforts; surely no Christian labor is more important than the truths of the Bible to the young and rising generation."

Honoring those who honor Christ,



Jerry M. Windsor
Secretary-Treasurer

Matthew 6:33
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**First Baptist Church Sunday school class -
Lake City, Florida, 1888**

Identified in the photograph are (back row) Edith Knight, Belle McFarlane, Rose Douglass, and Nina Roberts. In the middle row are Lou Jones, Tom C. Chalker (teacher), Vida Barnett, and Bertha Edge. In the front row are Carrie Roberts, Lonnie Sheppard, and May Vinzant [later Perkins].



**First Baptist Church Sunday School workers -
Bartow, Florida, 1920**

Seated L-R : Irene Cole, Mildred Morris Hall (Mrs. John Hall), Altha Brothers Rhodes (Mrs. M.T. Rhodes), and Ellen Smith.

Standing L-R : Antoinette Martin (Mrs. C.H. Martin), Reverend R.E. Reed, Vera Martin Ormesby of Safford, Arizona, John B. White, Mrs. White, Reverend W. W. Williams of Jacksonville, state Sunday school director.

Credit for Providence Baptist Church, First Baptist Church, Bartow, Florida, First Baptist Church, Lake City, Florida photos: State Archives of Florida, *Florida Memory*, <http://floridamemory.com>