

The Florida Baptist Historical Society seeks to **preserve the legacy** of Florida Baptist pastoral leaders and laity, the past and present functioning Baptist churches, the State Convention's cooperating ministries and milestone events that were historically significant to Florida Baptists. The Society's mission is accomplished through a variety of ministry services provided to Florida Baptists. To underscore this emphasis the Society's monthly newsletter, LEGACY, seeks to highlight the legacy endowed by the people, churches and events in Florida Baptist history. During the next several months this newsletter will feature those persons whose legacy in Florida Baptist life was achieved in part, by their service as president of the Florida Baptist State Convention.



Erik Cummings

During the 157th annual meeting of the Florida Baptist State Convention held November 12-13, 2018, the messengers elected **Erik Cummings**, pastor, New Life Baptist Church, Carol City, as the State Convention president for the year 2018-19. Rev. Cummings holds the distinction of being the 94th person and second African-American pastor, elected as the leader of Florida Baptists. Since 1854 (excluding the seven years at various times the State Convention did not meet), the persons elected as president have included 78 pastors and 16 laypersons.

The role of State Convention president is primarily serving as the State Convention's ceremonial representative to Florida Baptists and the general public. But more importantly, the State Convention president, has the authority to appoint persons to serve on State Convention special and permanent committees, serves as an ex-officio member of the State Convention's State Board of Missions, as well as preside over the annual State Convention meeting.

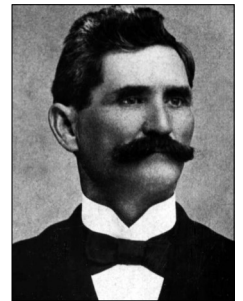
The first person to serve was **Richard Johnson Mays**, from Madison, Florida, a successful plantation owner who subsequently was ordained and served as a bi-vocational pastor and church starter. **Rev. R. Fleming**, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Thomasville, Georgia, is the only out-of-state resident to serve as State Convention president for two years, 1856 and 1857. At the time, several Georgia churches were affiliated with the Florida Convention. **W.N. Chaudoin** holds the distinction of having served the most years -- a total of 21 -- in two separate terms (1880-1885; 1889-1903), and who concurrently was employed as the first corresponding secretary for the State Board of Missions.

Although the majority of these leaders were Anglo men, the State Convention messengers have elected two African-American pastors [**Elroy Barber** (1999) and **Erik Cummings** (2018)] and one woman to lead the State Convention. **Virginia R. Parker** (Mrs. Henry A.) became president of the State Convention by default as a result of the resignations of President A.R. Fagan (who moved from the state) and First Vice President Fred H. Cooper (due to health reasons). Mrs. Parker, who was serving as Second Vice President at the time, succeeded to the presidency March 1, 1974, and presided at the 1974 annual meeting.

Several of these former 94 presidents will be featured in future issues of LEGACY. However, in the January and February issues, we are providing brief profile summaries on the 16 laypersons who served as State Convention president. An interesting historical fact is that the period from 1904 to 1920 was a "laymen's era" as four men were elected and re-elected consecutively to serve as president. This may have been a by-product of the then growing organization of Southern Baptists' "Laymen's Missionary Movement" which sought to involve local church laymen in stewardship commitment and missionary support. The first eight laymen who served as State Convention president are presented in a chronological order that follows:

C. A. Carson (1862-1920) served five consecutive terms from 1910 to 1914 as Convention president. He previously served four terms (1904 -- 1907) as second vice president. During his tenure, the State Convention appointed its first statewide worker to promote Sunday School and B.Y.P.U. work and enlisted a statewide evangelist. Prior to his State Convention involvement, Carson served between 1897-1903 as a Florida State Senator representing Osceola County. As a Kissimmee businessman and member of the First Baptist Church, Carson also served Florida Baptists as a member of the State Board of Missions and served ten years as the chairman of the Columbia College board of trustees.

Newton A. Blicht (1844-1921) served two terms from 1914 to 1916. During his terms, the State Convention adopted the so-called "efficiency plan" designed to help churches in stewardship and mission outreach. It also approved a limit of two consecutive years service as Convention president. Prior to his Baptist service, Blicht served in the Florida House of Representatives for Levy County in 1883, and from 1887-1891. He was a Florida State Senator from 1893-1903. And in 1907 and continuing until his death in 1921, Blicht was an elected member of Florida's Railroad Commission. Blicht was a member of First Baptist Church, Tallahassee.



N. A. Blicht

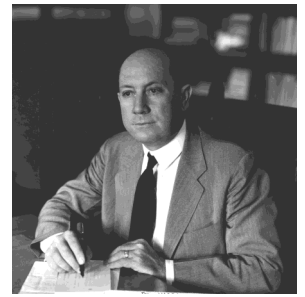
Frank Bentley (1864-1932) served in 1917-1918. During his two terms, the effort to establish a Convention owned and operated Florida Baptist hospital was initiated and gained momentum, but was never realized. Bentley was president of Bentley Gray Dry Goods Company in Tampa until his retirement in 1930. He helped organize the Tampa Y.M.C.A. and in October, 1931, Governor Doyle E. Carlton appointed him as the Tampa Bay harbormaster. He served as a deacon at First Baptist Church, Tampa.

O. K. Reaves (1877-1970) served in 1919-1920. Under his leadership, the State Convention closed Columbia College, after ten years of operation as a "dedicated" Florida Baptist school. In response, a renewed effort to resume and improve relations between the Convention and Stetson University was undertaken. Reaves was a lawyer, a member of the Florida State House of Representatives in 1911, and Judge of the Sixth Judicial Circuit Court from 1915 to 1921. Judge Reaves was a member of the First Baptist Church, Bradenton, at the time of his election as State Convention president.

A. A. Murphree (1870-1927) served in 1922-1923. During his tenure, the Convention learned of the official name change for the Florida Baptist Orphanage to the Florida Baptist Children's Home. And the State Convention authorized the State Board of Missions to borrow funds and construct a "headquarters" office building in Jacksonville. Murphree, as a former college professor, had the distinction of serving as the president of two state universities, Florida State College (now Florida State University) from 1897 to 1907, and the University of Florida, from 1909 to 1927. He was a member of the First Baptist Church, Gainesville, during his Convention presidency.

E. C. Collins served in 1932-1933. Reversing an action taken in 1916, the State Convention set a new limitation of only one consecutive year a person could serve as Convention President. In 1933, it approved an agreement between the Florida Convention and the Southern Baptist Convention which defined the percentage split and defined promotion expenses for the annual Cooperative Program income raised in the state. Collins was a lawyer and judge of the Criminal Court of Record for Dade County who presided over the trials of, among others, notorious gangster Alphonse Capone and accused assassin Giuseppe Zangara. He was an active member of First Baptist Church, Miami.

William Sims Allen (1888-1951) served in 1942. The State Convention, having been unable to underwrite the start of its own Florida Baptist hospital, sanctioned a Baptist Hospital planned for Pensacola and directed the State Board of Missions to provide a \$10,000 contribution to the effort. It learned several local Baptist groups in Jacksonville, Miami and Plant City were engaged in raising funds to establish local Baptist hospitals. Allen was a career educator who served as acting president of Baylor University (1931-1932) and later as president of Stetson University (1934 -1947). He was a member of the First Baptist Church, DeLand.



William Sims Allen

Doak S. Campbell (1888-1973) served in 1948. The State Convention committed to a goal for the year 1948 to perform 15,000 baptisms and organize 25 new churches. The Convention also endorsed an aggressive effort to assist local churches as they undertook ministry outreach to college and university campuses. It is probably not surprising that the commitment to campus evangelism came during the state convention presidential watch of Doak Campbell who had accepted the presidency of Florida College for Women (now Florida State University) in 1941, where he served until his retirement in 1957. He was a member of the First Baptist Church, Tallahassee.

The February issue of LEGACY will continue with the profiles of the remaining eight laypersons who served as a President, Florida Baptist State Convention.

Recognizing the LEGACY of Church Longevity of Mission and Ministry

Each year the Florida Baptist Historical Society recognizes and honors those Florida Baptist churches that have achieved a milestone anniversary in their life and ministry. This recognition is primarily through the presentation of a Certificate of Recognition. Observing anniversaries is an opportunity for the congregation to reflect upon its past and to recognize what God has accomplished through their ministry, as well to re-commit to the sharing of Jesus Christ to and through the community which they serve. The Society also assists these and any other Florida Baptist churches by providing resources and assistance in researching their respective history and/or pastoral leadership. Each church typically sets their anniversary observance during the year on a date that may coincide with the actual anniversary of being organized or tied to some other significant Sunday.

In 2019 a total of 54 churches will achieve the noted 25-year milestone anniversary as follows:

175 years/Organized 1844

Fellowship, Ocala
Sandy Creek, Ponce de Leon

150 years/Organized 1869

Barberville First
Lake Butler First
Lake Ellen, Crawfordville
Mt. Tabor, Palatka
Oviedo First
Pleasant Grove, Pensacola

125 years/Organized 1894

Corinth, Jasper
Cottondale First
Frink, Clarksville
Green Pond, Polk City
Mayo
Olive, Pensacola
Red Level, Crystal River
St. Andrew, Panama City
Tarpon Springs First

100 years/Organized 1919

Eustis First
Highland, Molino
Normandy Park, Jacksonville
Walnut Hill

75 years/Organized 1944

Arlington, Jacksonville
Grace, Starke
Kings Road, Jacksonville
Leisure Lakes First, Lake Placid
Lighthouse Community, Dania Beach
Lorida First
New Hope, Marianna
Trinity, Marianna

50 years/Organized 1969

Faith, Rockledge
Getsemani, Miami
Good News, Jacksonville
MorningStar, Fort Myers
Neptune Road, Kissimmee

50 years/Organized 1969

Pasadena, Dade City
River Road, Palatka
San Pablo, Jacksonville
Santa Rosa Shores, Gulf Breeze
Seminole First
Shiloh, Plant City
West Pensacola

25 years/Organized 1994

Bay Life, Brandon
Carrollwood, Tampa
Celebration, Lake Mary
Community, Fedhaven
Coral Gables Hispana
Cornerstone Fellowship, Sebastian
Crossroads, Fort Myers
Crossroads, Lakeland
Ethiopian Evangelical, Tampa
Faith, Lakeland
Mexico Beach First
New Hope, Valparaiso
Vision, Bonita Springs