



LEGACY

Our Mission: Researching, preserving and promoting the Legacy of Florida Baptists

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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.

Florida Baptist Historical Society: 125 Years of Ministry Service

As early as the November, 1894 Florida Baptist State Convention annual meeting held in Plant City, there was a call for "compiling the history of our denomination in this state." This request came from three men who had a rich background of historical perspective and reading. All three were from the Alachua Baptist Association.



Daniel B. Farmer, Sr. (1847 – 1905) was a native of Maine who served as a pastor for 25 years in the Ocala, Florida, vicinity before he returned to Holliston, Massachusetts, where he died. Farmer was known for his evangelistic and doctrinal preaching and had one of the finest ministry libraries in the state.

Napoleon A. Bailey (1833-1897) received his A.B. degree from Union University in Murfreesboro, Tennessee in 1857. Bailey moved to Florida in 1860 due to bronchial problems and became pastor at Monticello until 1867. He was pastor at the Citra Baptist Church in 1894. He later moved to Georgia, where he served four consecutive churches until his death in 1897.

E. H. Rennolds, Sr., was just as interested in history but from a different perspective. Rennolds (1839-1912) was born in Virginia and raised in Tennessee. He lived out history as a member of the ill-fated Tennessee 5th Regiment in the Civil War. By 1884 Rennolds and his wife joined the Baptist Church at Whitney Station in Alachua County. Although an ordained preacher, Rennolds viewed himself as a layman and served as deacon, Sunday school superintendent and teacher, and church clerk. Between 1884 and 1898 Rennolds served as clerk of the Alachua Association and began developing an interest in collecting and preserving the history of the association and its cooperating churches. He subsequently was elected and served from 1893 to 1902 as the assistant recording secretary of the Florida Baptist State Convention, which led to his being designated at the Convention's Historical Secretary by 1894. Rennolds would go on to become one of the most important men in the first century of Florida Baptist historical interest and research.

The "**Alachua Three**" made five basic points at the 1894 Convention. They noted that the state convention in its 40th year of existence needed to: (1) gather material; (2) protect resources; (3) interview witnesses; (4) appoint a committee; and (5) compile the history of the state convention. This forward-thinking trio probably was responsible for the early emphasis of Florida Baptists on document preservation. It was more than aspirational thinking, as it became a plan of action by Rennolds.

In the November, 1895 Florida Baptist State Convention held at Leesburg, messengers heard a report from the **State Convention's Historical Secretary E. H. Rennolds, Sr.** He explained that during the prior year he had secured a total 227 files of the annual meeting minutes of Florida Baptist associations and the state convention. He further noted that he had collected 40 biographical sketches of deceased and living ministers. Rennolds concluded his report by announcing his plan to visit other associations to secure and preserve their records.

That early commitment to document preservation continues 125 years later as the Florida Baptist Historical Society. Our Mission: Researching, preserving and promoting the Legacy of Florida Baptists. This legacy-development mission is realized through a variety of ministry services provided to Florida Baptists, including: a Biography Collection containing over 4,000 profiles on pastors and laity; a Church History Collection that contains historical information on nearly 1,000 Florida Baptist churches; a collection of Florida Baptist Association Annuals; as well as efforts focused on securing the records of cooperating ministries and events, all of which are historically significant to Florida Baptists. Using these and other resources the Society seeks to fulfill its mission by assisting persons and churches seeking historical information on their pastors and churches.

[SOURCE: Portions of the Society's history were excerpted from Jerry M. Windsor, "A Sketch of the Florida Baptist Historical Society," *The Journal of Florida Baptist Heritage*, Volume 7, Fall 2005, pp. 57-59.]

And Now Back to Our Continuing Series

As noted in previous issues of LEGACY, 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 first two issues of LEGACY featured brief profiles on those 16 laypersons. Concluding this month, we provide brief profiles on selected pastors who served as State Convention president through the end of the twentieth-century.

Kenneth C. Whitten, 1995

Kenneth C. Whitten (b. 1954 to present), at the time of his election as State Convention president to serve in 1995, was pastor (1989 to present) of the Idlewild Baptist Church, Tampa.

The 1995 annual meeting was a "watershed" meeting as the State Convention finally severed all relationships with Stetson University ending the 100-plus years love/hate relationship that had existed since the school was founded. In addition to approving the discontinuation of funding being provided to the University, the State Convention requested the return of \$568,148 in principal from a Stetson-controlled endowment fund which the Convention had originally established and funded in the 1940s.



Kenneth C. Whitten

In related actions, messengers approved the removal of the Florida Baptist Historical Collection (comprised of printed volumes and records) from Stetson and transferred it to the State Convention's other educational institution, then called the Florida Baptist Theological College (now known as the Baptist College of Florida).

Included in the record 46 recommendations presented by the State Board of Missions, messengers approved: changed the Florida Baptist Historical Society from a state convention agency to a fraternal organization under the auspices of the State Board of Missions; approved the transfer of management of the Retirement Center to the Florida Baptist Financial Services from the Florida Baptist Family Ministries; redefined and expanded the Florida Baptist Foundation as the Florida Baptist Financial Services; and approved a host of revisions and additions to the governing documents of the State Convention, the Theological College and the Financial Services agencies.

And as if messengers had not had enough business, **they approved two high profile resolutions among five considered.** One resolution expressed "staunch and unwavering opposition to casino gambling." However a resolution that expressed "significant disappointment" with the decline of moral leadership by the Walt Disney Company (through its non-family film productions and support of homosexual activities), generated extended discussion and five proposed amendments. Finally, three amendments were accepted, before the amended resolution was adopted.

Ted H. Traylor, 1996

Ted H. Traylor (b. 1953 to present) was serving as pastor (1990 to present), Olive Baptist Church, Pensacola, at the time of his election to serve as State Convention president in 1996. Later in 2000, Traylor was elected as first vice president of the Southern Baptist Convention and in 2004 as president of the Southern Baptist Pastors' Conference.



Ted Traylor

The 1996 annual meeting resulted in the historic action by messengers to approve the addition of a proposed Bylaw 2 to the State Convention's governing document. The bylaw defined for the first time what constitutes a cooperating church and cooperating association affiliated with the State Convention. For churches, cooperation was defined by three elements: theological faith and practice consistent with historic Baptist practices; contributing financially through the Cooperative Program; and providing annual church letters on the statistical health of the church. Florida became the first Southern Baptist state convention to define cooperation and affiliation between a local church and the state convention. Among the 27 other recommendations considered and approved by messengers was the establishment of a missions' partnership with Baptist churches affiliated with the Western Cuba Baptist Convention.

M. Keith Thomas, 1997

M. Keith Thomas (b. 1956; d. 2013) at the time of his election to serve as State Convention president in 1997, was pastor (1990 – 2003) of the First Baptist Church, West Palm Beach. He later served the Cottage Hills Baptist Church, Mobile, Ala., (2003 – 2011), and the Cornerstone Church, The Woodlands, Texas, from 2011 until his death in 2013 at age 57 from pancreatic cancer.

Messengers considered and quickly approved most of the 40 recommendations (most of which dealt with revisions to the State Convention's and State Board of Missions' governing documents) presented by the State Board of Missions, except for one. **It was a proposal to sell the Miami property of the Florida Baptist Children's Homes and re-locate the facility to another South Florida site.** Messengers were told the proposal was presented because the Florida Baptist Family Ministries had received a \$2.4 million offer from an unnamed corporation. After some questions and answers were heard, messengers approved the recommendation. (Years later the Homes' management reported that a sale was never consummated.)

Jerry B. Garrard, 1998

Jerry B. Garrard (b. 1946 to present) was serving as pastor (1985 – 2006) of the Celebration Baptist Church, Tallahassee, at the time of his election to serve as State Convention president in 1998. Following his 21-year ministry in Tallahassee, Garrard accepted a position as vice president of institutional advancement at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

The highlight of the 1998 annual State Convention meeting was a historic **SBC International Missions Board-sanctioned commissioning of 88 persons to serve on the international mission field.** State Convention President Jerry Garrard declared that the event, "would be the first commissioning service of its kind ever done at a state convention meeting." Jerry Rankin, president, IMB, further noted that the group being presented at that commissioning service "was the largest number of persons ever commissioned at a single time."

Elroy Barber, 1999

Elroy Barber (b. 1945; d. 2001) holds the distinction of being the first African-American pastor elected to lead the Florida Baptist State Convention in its then 144-year history. Previously, in 1998, he served as the first Black first vice-president of the State Convention. At the time of his election Barber was serving as pastor of Westside Baptist Church, Hollywood from 1993 until his sudden death of a heart attack at age 55 in 2001. During his eight-year ministry at the Westside church, Pastor Barber led the congregation to start 20 mission churches that reached six ethnic groups.



Elroy Barber

Messengers to the 1999 annual meeting **approved a recommendation from the State Convention's Committee on Order of Business that would reduce from five to four sessions all future annual state convention meetings** beginning in the year 2000 and beyond. The net effect of the meeting schedule revision was the elimination of the Wednesday morning session with the annual meeting beginning on Monday evenings and concluding by Tuesday evenings.

During business sessions messengers approved eighteen recommendations from the State Board of Missions, the majority of which were revisions to the governing documents of the State Convention, the

State Board of Missions, Florida Baptist Theological College, the *Florida Baptist Witness* and the Florida Baptist Family Ministries.

The sequential order of State Convention Presidents between 1990 and 1999:

John C. Mitchell, 1990

Kenneth C. Whitten, 1995

Guy S. Sanders, 1991

Ted H. Traylor, 1996

Edward D. Johnson, 1992

M. Keith Thomas, 1997

O.G. “Tim” Locher, 1993

Jerry B. Garrard, 1998

George Thomasson, 1994

Elroy Barber, 1999

[This concludes our series on nineteenth and twentieth-century FBSC presidential profiles.]

A Note About the First Three “Real” Thanksgivings in Florida

James C. Clark, a university professor and one of Florida’s leading historians, in his book titled, *Hidden History of Florida* [published 2015], makes an unusual observation about the first Thanksgiving. He notes that most of us were taught to believe the first Thanksgiving in 1621 was held between the 53 Pilgrim/Colonists (survivors of the Mayflower journey) and 90 members of the Wampanoag tribe at Plymouth, Massachusetts.

But historic research now reveals a surprising new perspective. We quote from his book: “**Nearly a century before the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock, the first thanksgiving celebration was at Tampa Bay in 1529**, a second was celebrated in 1559 in Pensacola and a third in St. Augustine in 1565, when the Spanish shared their meal with the Timucua Indians. Historians believe the meal in St. Augustine consisted of salted pork and garbanzo beans rather than turkey and stuffing.” At Plymouth, that first feast likely did not feature turkey, but rather locally sourced items such as fowl, deer, mussels, lobster, grapes, plums, corn and herbs.

[Additional source: <https://historyofmassachusetts.org/the-first-thanksgiving/>]

To the readers of LEGACY, we pray that each of you will experience a blessed Thanksgiving celebration.

