

Florida Baptist Heritage

Journal of the Florida Baptist Historical Society

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FLORIDA BAPTIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Cover: The Baptist Building on 218 West Church Street in Jacksonville was constructed in 1923 at a cost of \$163,000 and named the Rogers Building in 1932. The new building at 1230 Hendricks Avenue was completed in 1959.

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INTRODUCTION

Jerry M. Windsor

*Secretary-Treasurer
Florida Baptist Historical Society*

Welcome to the Seventh Issue of *The Journal of Florida Baptist Heritage*

Baptists are known for working together. Contemplation, meditation, and monasticism have always been back burner issues for Baptists. We want to do something and we want to get others to help us. Most Baptists realize that if its worth doing, a committee, group, agency, entity or board is needed for guidance, oversight, and evaluation.

And so agencies were born. William N. Chaudoin (1829-1904) never dreamed of doing Baptist work by himself. He was always looking for Baptist brothers and sisters to join him. Out of this desire for cooperation, effectiveness, and efficiency our agency system came forth. In this *Journal* we celebrate our cooperative entities at work.

In 1880 the State Board of Missions was born. Don Hepburn researched the work of the board and a very informative article is yours for the reading. Don Hepburn and Mark Rathel know more about Florida Baptists than anyone I know.

In 1894 E. H. Rennolds, Sr., began a pursuit of Florida Baptist historical research and collection that gave us our Florida Baptist Historical Society of today. I wrote the article on the history of the society.

Mark Rathel wrote a history of the *Florida Baptist Witness* down to 1918 and I picked up the story there. Wiley Richards then chronicled

the work we know as The Baptist College of Florida. Jerry Oswalt penned a history of our Florida Baptist Financial Services and Barbara Denman wrote of our Children's Home ministries in the state.

These five writers are friends of mine. When I read their articles it seems we are just sitting together having a conversation about Florida Baptist work.

I love Florida Baptists. These writers do too. This issue is more than a historical narrative. Its a volume of heart felt appreciation for Florida Baptists and their 151 years of service.

Sit back. Relax. Enjoy the journey of how Florida Baptists have chosen to work together.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jerry Oswalt", with a large, stylized initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.



THE HISTORY OF FLORIDA BAPTIST FINANCIAL SERVICES

Jerry E. Oswalt

*Dean of Chapel and Professor of Preaching
and Pastoral Administration
The Baptist College of Florida*

Introduction

Florida Baptist Financial Services originated with the name “Florida Baptist Foundation.” The process that led to the establishment of this agency began when the Florida Baptist State Convention ordered a special committee to study the feasibility of launching such an entity. That committee reported to the convention on November 13, 1945 with the recommendation that the convention initiate “at the earliest date practicable” a “Florida Baptist Foundation.” In due course, the Florida Baptist State Board of Missions, acting under the authority of the Florida Baptist State Convention, approved a charter for the new non-profit corporation and appointed the foundation’s first board of trustees. The names of the first board were published in the 1946 *Annual* of the convention.² The first report of the new agency to the convention was given by the president of the board, J. Ollie Edmunds, on November 20, 1947. Edmunds declared in his report that the date of the official incorporation of the Florida Baptist Foundation was April 1, 1947. Thus the work of the fledgling foundation began.³

The charter of the new corporation stated that its object was “to serve any benevolent, educational or missionary undertaking, institution or agency, fostered by, or having the official sanction of the Florida

Baptist State Convention or the Southern Baptist Convention.”⁴ The charter also declared the power of the foundation “to receive by bequest, devise, purchase or lease, either absolutely or in trust, any property, real, personal or mixed; and to administer such property; and to convey such property; and to invest or reinvest the same, or the proceeds thereof, in such manner as in the judgment of the trustees will best promote such objects.”⁵

The purpose of this article is to relate the story of Florida Baptist Financial Services from its beginning as the Florida Baptist Foundation until the present. The story unfolds within the framework of the tenures of the executive leadership of the agency. The sections are entitled as follows: The Early Years, 1947-1952; The G. A. Leichter Years, 1953-1962; The Gus Johnson Years, 1962-1981; The George Borders Years, 1981-2000; The Eddie McClelland Years, 2000-present.

The Early Years, 1947-1952

During its initial four years, the Florida Baptist Foundation operated with the leadership of its board of trustees, which acted as a volunteer administrative committee until sufficient funding was available to employ a staff for the agency. However, by 1951 the accumulation of funds and variety of investors had grown to the point that the volunteer committee required the part-time leadership of an employee of the Florida Baptist State Convention. J. Harrison Griffin, who had led in Stetson University’s “Million Dollar Campaign,” and had been head of the convention’s Department of Christian Education for a brief time, took on the additional responsibility of the foundation. Griffin’s leadership ended with his retirement in 1952 and the subsequent abolishment of his position with the convention.⁶ When Griffin became involved, the office of the foundation relocated to the Baptist Building in Jacksonville from its original spot in the Rogers Building in Jacksonville.⁷

The first report of the foundation to the convention after its incorporation was given by board president Ollie Edmunds during the 1948 meeting of the Florida Baptist State Convention. The report

revealed trust funds of just over \$115,550.⁸ During the early years, the designated assets of the Florida Baptist Foundation reached a peak of slightly over \$205,000, which were held in trust for three institutions, including the Florida Baptist Convention, Stetson University, and the W. M. U.⁹ Board president, H. C. Culbreath's report to the 1951 convention indicated that wills had been made to the foundation amounting to nearly \$700,000 in value.¹⁰

The G. A. Leichliter Years, 1953-1962

The board of trustees of the Florida Baptist Foundation invited G. A. Leichliter to become the first full time executive secretary-treasurer of the foundation on January 1, 1953, and he accepted upon approval of the board's proposed budget by the convention.¹¹ Leichliter served previously as director of promotion for the South Florida Baptist Hospital in Plant City for seven years, and the office for the foundation was moved to Plant City when he became the executive.¹²



G. A. Leichliter

Soon after the new executive secretary-treasurer came into office, the trustees directed their executive committee to study the charter of the foundation, looking for any revisions that were necessary for more efficient operation. The committee reported back that the current charter placed statutory restrictions on the ability of the foundation to serve all its legitimate constituencies. They were specifically concerned about the foundation's lack of authority to service deposits of what was then the Baptist Bible Institute under the current charter. Therefore, the committee recommended that the charter be amended to allow for the handling of funds for any entity approved upon request by the Florida Baptist State Mission Board. The board of trustees recommended this change to the convention in its 1953 annual meeting, and it was approved.¹³

The first report delivered by an executive secretary of the foundation to an annual meeting of the Florida Baptist State Convention was rendered by Leichliter on November 18, 1954. This and most of his ensuing reports to the convention (1954-1961) manifested a passion for the work of the foundation and a vision for its development in order to serve the financial resource needs of Florida Baptists. He took strong initiatives with limited resources to publicize and promote the foundation's mission. He urged the convention to promote the foundation as the appropriate agency to manage the endowment funds of all convention owned agencies. He relied heavily on the *Florida Baptist Witness* to communicate to Florida Baptists the work of the foundation, mentioning in many of his reports the help received from that paper.¹⁴

By 1954 the foundation had received during the seven years of its existence \$434,949.78 and had distributed to agencies and institutions \$169,441.48. Seventeen wills had been written in which all assets were earmarked for the foundation.¹⁵ The priority placed upon estate planning and designating something from estates to Florida Baptist institutions and agencies by the foundation became a hallmark of Leichliter's administration.

One of the most significant developments during the Leichliter administration began in 1955 and was completed by the time of the annual meeting of the Florida Baptist State Convention in 1957. The counsel for the foundation initiated the preparation of legal documents for an endowment agreement between the Florida Baptist Foundation and Florida Normal and Industrial Memorial College of Saint Augustine. The agreement was finally approved by all necessary entities and an initial deposit made by the college.¹⁶ This step wouldn't have happened had the charter of the foundation not been amended as noted above during Leichliter's first year at the helm.

The steady growth of the number of funds and the amounts invested in them marked the years of Leichliter's leadership. In 1958 the foundation managed nine funds for various agencies and institutions with a total value of over half a million dollars.¹⁷ Financial records are inadequate to discern the total value of the funds managed by the

foundation from 1958-1961, but conservative estimates have placed the total amount of funds handled during those years at nearly one million dollars.¹⁸

Another highlight of Leichliter's tenure was his persistent challenge to Florida Baptists to consider the need for a retirement center ministry. He hammered away at that need in the context of the promotion of the work of the foundation. Furthermore, he urged upon the Baptists of Florida the importance of their supporting through bequests and other funds deposited with the foundation the work of all their institutions and agencies.¹⁹ One of his last actions was to have the board of trustees consider the need for an updated charter. This goal was accomplished with the board recommending the amended charter to the convention in its 1961 meeting.²⁰

The Gus Johnson Years, 1962-1981

Gus Johnson started serving as the executive secretary-treasurer of the Florida Baptist Foundation on January 1, 1962. He moved into the



Gus Johnson

office from his position as director of promotion for the Florida Baptist Convention.²¹ The new executive secretary chose to move the office for the foundation from Plant City back to the Baptist Building in Jacksonville.²²

Johnson continued the major thrust of seeking bequests, setting a personal goal for the foundation to assist in writing wills totaling in value to at least \$1,000,000 a year for Baptist causes. During the first nine months of his first year with the foundation, wills amounting to an estimated \$1,500,000 for Baptist causes had been prepared.²³ Johnson

frequently indicated in the foundation's annual reports to the convention wills written by the foundation with bequests to Baptist causes in the \$1,000,000 range.²⁴

The audit report for September 30, 1962 showed the 39 funds managed by the foundation had a total balance of \$792,194.83. Among the institutions included in the funds were Baptist Bible Institute, Stetson University, Florida Baptist Retirement Centers, Florida Baptist Children's Home, The Florida Baptist Convention, Woman's Missionary Union, and Florida Normal and Industrial College.²⁵ Although the number of individual funds increased to 49 over the ensuing years, the 1970 fund balance remained under \$800,000.²⁶ However, the fund balance began significant increases in 1971, reaching beyond \$1,000,000 for the first time.²⁷ The audit in 1981, the year of Johnson's retirement, showed fund balances totaling \$3, 721,156.²⁸

One of the more important accomplishments of this segment of the history of the foundation came when the Florida Baptist Convention elected the foundation's secretary to lead a special three-year campaign in support of Baptist Bible Institute and Stetson University. The goal to raise \$500,000 for Baptist Bible Institute and \$1,500,000 for Stetson University began on June 1, 1963 and ended on June 21, 1966.²⁹ Johnson declared the campaign a success when he stated before the convention in 1966 "The goal of \$3,000,000 for the Ford Foundation matching fund campaign was reached approximately six months ahead of schedule."³⁰

Johnson possessed a clearly defined understanding of the role of the foundation at the time he assumed leadership, which he expressed succinctly: "The Florida Baptist Foundation is an agency of the Florida Baptist State Convention, set up to give financial support to all causes fostered by and/or supported by the convention. This is accomplished in two fields. First the foundation handles trust funds and endowment funds for all Florida Baptist agencies or institutions. Second, the promotional program seeks to aid these various groups and institutions by soliciting cash gifts, assisting in writing wills favoring these causes, or by establishing trusts or endowments in their favor."³¹ The work of the foundation for the almost two decades of his leadership reflected the

priorities expressed in that statement. While the charter of the foundation had been amended twice previously, it maintained *status quo* during the Johnson years, thus providing a time primarily of “strengthening the stakes.” The time for “lengthening the cords” came in the next era.

The George Borders Years 1981-2000

The Florida Baptist Foundation board of trustees reached into academia to recommend George Borders as the successor to Gus Johnson, who retired at the end of March in 1981. The Florida Baptist State Board of Missions elected Borders on February 21, 1981 and he began his work with the foundation on July 1 of that year. He had been president of Palm Beach Atlantic College since 1977 and had served previously in a variety of positions with Stetson University. The new executive secretary-treasurer expressed optimism for the potential expansion of the work of the foundation, because he believed that there were many untapped resources available to support the work of Florida Baptists.³² While Borders no doubt had a concern for enhancing the financial resources of all institutions of Florida Baptists, his background in Christian higher education intensified his interest in the colleges related to the Florida Baptist State Convention. He commented within a year of taking office that it was imperative for Florida Baptists to continue their support of Christian higher education through planned giving, wills, and trusts. He said, “The primary reason the Florida Baptist Foundation exists is to provide additional support for Christian higher education . . .”³³

During the first four years of Borders’s leadership, the foundation continued its focus upon accomplishing the goals of its charter, including strengthening efforts in estate planning and writing of Christian wills. Estate planning seminars were offered in various locations across the state, and the foundation became more involved in working closely with institutions in planning for development and investment of financial resources. The positive results of these intensified efforts became obvious in annual audits of the financial records of the foundation. When the books were closed in 1985, the



George Borders

total assets of the foundation had grown to over \$7,112,000, and 200 trusts were being managed.³⁴

Borders's vision to "lengthen the cords" of the work of the agency began to become tangible with the birth of the Florida Baptist Credit Union on March 3, 1986. The purpose of the institution was to provide full service banking for individuals and loans to churches to begin missions and do ministries. By the end of August, 1986, the new credit union had over 500 members with deposits of over \$1,260,000.³⁵ This entity exploded in growth. By the end of 1987, the credit union's assets climbed to \$4,755,952 and its membership

numbered 2,440. The institution had loaned over \$3,000,000 to churches by June of 1988, thus encouraging more new church starts.³⁶ Two years later, the membership reached 3,131, assets totaled \$9,582,986, and loans to churches exceeded \$5,000,000.³⁷ No wonder Borders began calling it one of the strongest credit unions in the country.

Meanwhile, the Florida Baptist Foundation gained momentum in its own right. During 1989 the foundation handled 275 trusts, held assets of \$14,298,956, and distributed nearly \$2,000,000 to investors based upon an annual rate of 17.49 percent. Also, at this juncture, the foundation took the important and timely step of retaining professional legal and investment counsel.³⁸

The launching of the Florida Baptist Credit Union in 1986 proved to be a watershed event in the unfolding story of the Florida Baptist Foundation, because the success of the credit union probably, at least in part, prompted the foundation to engage in the development of a ten-year strategic plan. A call to restructure the work of the Florida Baptist

Foundation came out of the strategic plan. Consequently, in late 1990 a new umbrella type holding company called Florida Baptist Financial Services, Inc. was chartered by the state of Florida. The component organizations comprising the new company were Florida Baptist Foundation, Florida Baptist Credit Union, Florida Baptist Investment Services, Inc., and Florida Baptist Auxiliary Enterprises, Inc.³⁹ The officer structure for the new holding company listed as president George Borders, as vice president for investment services Eddie McClelland, as vice president for finance John Moyer, and as vice president for operations Joseph Howell. The Florida Baptist State Board of Missions gave unanimous approval to this plan on January 24-25, 1991.⁴⁰ The overarching intention of all the subsidiary companies was to generate more financial resources to support the work of Florida Baptists.

Other than the umbrella company, only two new companies initially came out of the restructuring process. One of those, Florida Baptist Auxiliary Enterprises, Inc., is now defunct. Its purpose was to provide travel and stewardship purchasing opportunities, which it did until August 23, 2000, when its board “mothballed” it because of its failure to make adequate money to justify staff involvement. During its existence, the company provided excursions to such places as Branson, Charleston, Asheville, Williamsburg, and New York City. Perhaps the most exotic journey took 32 participants in June of 2000 to see the passion play in Oberammergau, Germany as well as parts of Austria and Switzerland.⁴¹

The other new company, called Florida Baptist Investment Services, Inc., had as its sole purpose “to procure funds to assist churches and other organizations affiliated with the Florida Baptist Convention and the Southern Baptist Convention in the construction and major improvement of their churches, parsonages, church schools and other facilities by issuing the Certificates of Participation.”⁴² In the first meeting of the board of trustees of the new company on April 19, 1991, the motion to introduce to Florida Baptists a church loan fund called Church Growth Investment Fund was approved.⁴³ This action was to be the only initiative of the new company for the time being, but by the time of the December 7, 1995 executive committee meeting of the

Florida Baptist Financial Services, this program remained the only significant thrust of the Florida Baptist Investment Services. Therefore, the recommendation was made to the executive committee that the name of the company be changed to reflect its priority. The committee approved this recommendation, and the company was renamed Church Growth Investment Fund, Inc.⁴⁴ The purpose of the company remained the same. Since its inception, this company has advanced more than \$31,000,000 in church loans.⁴⁵

An additional subsidiary of Florida Baptist Financial Services came into being on a recommendation from the Florida Baptist Foundation investment committee in the board meeting of Florida Baptist Financial Services on August 5, 1995. Named Baptist Investment Group, Inc., this company was chartered by the state of Florida and became officially recognized as a registered investment advisor on November 20, 1995. Its purpose is to assist individuals in managing their assets and investment needs. A for-profit company, it primarily assists with individual retirement accounts.⁴⁶

A major addition to the enterprises under the umbrella of Florida Baptist Financial Services transpired on November 13, 1995, when the Florida Baptist Convention voted to transfer ownership of the Florida Baptist Retirement Center in Vero Beach to Florida Baptist Financial Services. This action was initiated on May 5, 1994 at the annual meeting of the heads of all Florida Baptist agencies and institutions by an inquiry from John Sullivan, executive director-treasurer of the Florida Baptist Convention, to George Borders of Florida Baptist Financial Services and Charles Hodges of Florida Baptist Family Ministries. Additional meetings between Sullivan, Borders, Hodges, and others resulted in the appointment of an ad hoc committee of representatives from all concerned entities to work out an agreement.⁴⁷ The transfer was consummated effective July 6, 1996 into a new subsidiary named Florida Baptist Retirement Centers, Inc. The property had an appraised value of \$5,000,000 with an outstanding mortgage of \$1,800,000 to be assumed by Florida Baptist Financial Services.⁴⁸

Because of expansion under the new structure, Florida Baptist Financial Services, Inc., moved out of the Baptist Building to an

adjacent building formerly used by the Baptist Book Store.⁴⁹ In summary, by the time of the 1996 Florida Baptist State Convention the Florida Baptist Financial Services, Inc. had expanded to six subsidiary companies:

1. Florida Baptist Foundation with the basic purpose of providing assistance to individuals and churches in regard to estate planning and stewardship, including help with wills and trusts.
2. Florida Baptist Credit Union with the basic purpose of providing full banking services.
3. Church Growth Fund, Inc. with the purpose of providing good, safe investment opportunities while helping fund new church starts and supporting established work.
4. Florida Baptist Auxiliary Enterprises, Inc. with the purpose of providing income producing travel. (mothballed in 2000)
5. Baptist Investment Group, Inc. with the purpose of providing registered investment counsel.
6. Florida Baptist Retirement Centers, Inc. with the purpose of providing retirees both independent living and assisted living in villas and cottages.⁵⁰

George Borders retired as president of Florida Baptist Financial Services on March 31, 2000, completing nineteen years of service. The company expanded in an amazing way during his tenure. At the time of his retirement, the total assets of the company exceeded \$90,000,000. The total earnings distributed during the last five years of his administration reached \$6,809,840.⁵¹ Joseph Howell and Eddie McClelland, who served on staff with Borders, became co-interim executive directors of Florida Baptist Financial Services, Inc. upon his retirement.⁵²

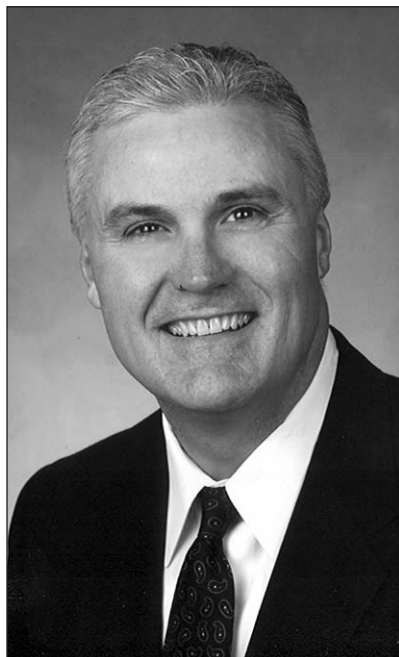
The Eddie McClelland Years 2001-Present

The board of trustees of Florida Baptist Financial Services, Inc. elected Eddie McClelland on December 8, 2000 to serve as president/chief executive officer of Florida Baptist Financial Services, Inc. and executive director-treasurer of the Florida Baptist Foundation. Some of

the highlights of his first year of service included the fact that the Church Growth Investment Fund reported over \$9,500,000 in deposits from individuals, churches, associations and institutions with over \$9,200,000 in loans to churches. Also, the Florida Baptist Foundation established two new investment funds for churches. In addition, the Florida Baptist Convention, Florida Baptist Financial Services, Inc. and the Florida Baptist Credit Union, Inc. reached a “New Covenant Agreement.”⁵³

The purpose of the “New Covenant Agreement” was to redefine the relationship between the credit union and Florida Baptist Financial Services. The necessity for a different status for the credit union came out of a legal audit which indicated that the credit union must be considered a related corporation rather than a subsidiary corporation under the umbrella of Florida Baptist Financial Services. The reason for this decision was that credit unions are considered by state examiners to be owned by their members rather than some other entity.⁵⁴

Since McClelland took the helm of Florida Baptist Financial Services, Inc., all the subsidiary corporations, including Florida Baptist Foundation, Church Growth Investment Fund, Florida Baptist Retirement Centers, and Baptist Investment Groups, as well as the related corporation, Florida Baptist Credit Union have continued to advance. As of June 30, 2003, Florida Baptist Financial Services held assets totaling over \$95,000,000. Of that amount, Florida Baptist Foundation managed \$48,000,000, Church Growth Investment Fund had deposits of \$19,000,000, and the Florida Baptist Credit Union had



Eddie McClelland

accounts totaling \$24,000,000. In 2002 more than 100 new accounts were opened with the foundation and the Church Growth Investment Fund, totaling more than \$7,000,000.⁵⁵ Complete assets as of March 2005 of Florida Baptist Financial Services, Inc. reached over \$121,000,000.⁵⁶ Meanwhile, Florida Baptist Retirement Centers has maintained a five-star rating, the highest recognition, from Florida's Agency for Health Care Administration for its overall quality of care and quality of life at the Vero Beach facility. The Buckingham Cottage for international missionaries on stateside assignment was dedicated in 2003 on the Vero Beach campus.⁵⁷

The Florida Baptist State Convention approved amended and restated bylaws for Florida Baptist Financial Services, Inc. and each of its subsidiary corporations on November 11-12, 2002. They were then approved by the executive committee of Florida Baptist Financial Services on December 12, 2002.⁵⁸ The changes in the governing documents involved essential modifications intended to expedite the continued growth of the company in its ability to meet the growing financial needs of the work of Florida Baptists.

Eddie McClelland believes strongly in the company he serves as president and CEO, recently declaring that Florida Baptist Financial Services is "only beginning to reach the needs of Florida Baptist churches. We partner with our churches and operate in the church lending ministry today to help you reach people in your community for Christ tomorrow. In the fullest sense of Kingdom reality, it truly is 'together we build.'"⁵⁹

Conclusion

All the agencies of the Florida Baptist Convention are thriving at the end of 150 years of convention history. None have done better than Florida Baptist Financial Services. From a beginning of a little over \$115,000 in fund totals, primarily made up of a \$100,000 deposit from the Florida Baptist Convention as a kind of start-up fund, the assets have grown to over \$121,000,000. From one corporation, the program has expanded to the current parent corporation, four subsidiary

corporations, and another related corporation. By no employees to the current 79, (64 of which are employed at the retirement center), the agency has been serving faithfully across the 58 years of its history.

The agency has experienced the blessings of God from its inception. He has given wise and dedicated trustees to make timely decisions about adjustments that were essential for continued viability and success. The chief executives of the agency proved themselves to be the right choices for each one's era. All manifested vision, passion for the work, and the proper amount of entrepreneurship for their cultures. No doubt each one was ordained by the Lord. God's blessings will abide upon the current gifted and experienced leadership of the agency. Therefore, Florida Baptists will continue to receive the benefits in support of Kingdom causes for our churches and institutions provided by the ongoing purpose of Florida Baptist Financial Services.

¹*Florida Baptist Convention Annual*, 1945, p. 107.

²*Ibid.*, 1946, p. 117.

³*Ibid.*, 1947, p. 89.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 90.

⁵*Ibid.*

⁶Edward Earl Joiner, *A History of Florida Baptists*, p. 221.

⁷*Florida Baptist Convention Annual*, 1947, p. 90.

⁸*Ibid.*, 1948, p. 111.

⁹*Ibid.*, 1949, p. 141.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 1951, p. 105.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 1952, p. 83.

¹²*Florida Baptist Witness*, January 1, 1953, p. 5.

¹³*Ibid.*, 1953, pp. 23-24.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 1954-1961.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 1954, p. 92.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 1955, p. 90, 1957, p. 125.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 1958, p. 144.

¹⁸Joiner, op. cit., p. 222.

¹⁹See Leichliter's annual reports to the Florida Baptist State Convention in the *Annual*, 1953-1961 and his weekly articles in *The Florida Baptist Witness*.

²⁰*Florida Baptist Convention Annual*, 1961, pp. 110-114.

²¹*Florida Baptist Witness*, December 21, 1961, p. 5.

²²Joiner, op. cit., p. 264.

²³*Florida Baptist Convention Annual*, 1962, p. 107.

²⁴See Johnson's annual reports to the Florida Baptist State Convention in the *Annual*, 1962-1980.

²⁵*Florida Baptist Convention Annual*, 1962, pp. 194-196.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 1970, p. 227.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 1971, p. 217.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 1981, p. 223.

²⁹*Ibid.*

³⁰*Ibid.*, 1966, p. 100.

³¹*Ibid.*, 1964, p. 102.

³²*Florida Baptist Witness*, March 5, 1981, p. 5.

³³*Ibid.*, February 18, 1982, p. 15.

³⁴*Florida Baptist Convention Annual*, 1986, p. 150.

³⁵*Ibid.*

³⁶*Ibid.*, 1988, p. 193.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 1990, p. 174.

³⁸*Ibid.*, p. 173

³⁹*Ibid.*, 1991, p. 178.

⁴⁰Minutes of the Board Meeting of the Florida Baptist Foundation, March 2, 1991.

⁴¹Minutes of the Board Meeting of the Florida Baptist Auxiliary Enterprises, Inc., August 23, 2000.

⁴²Original Prospectus for Church Growth Investment Fund, June 30, 1994.

⁴³Minutes of the First Board Meeting of the Florida Baptist Investment Services, Inc., April 19, 1991.

⁴⁴Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Committee of Florida Baptist Financial Services, December 7, 1995.

⁴⁵Letter from Eddie McClelland, May 5, 2005.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*

⁴⁷Minutes of the Board Meeting of Florida Baptist Financial Services, August 6, 1994.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, August 3, 1996.

⁴⁹*Florida Baptist Convention Annual*, 1992, p. 204.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 1996, p. 118.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 2000, p. 106.

⁵²*Ibid.*

⁵³*Ibid.*, 2001, p. 197.

⁵⁴Telephone Interview with Eddie McClelland, May 31, 2005.

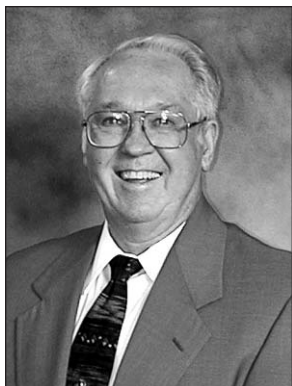
⁵⁵*Florida Baptist Convention Annual*, 2003, p. 109.

⁵⁶Email from Eddie McClelland, May 31, 2005.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, p. 110.

⁵⁸Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Florida Baptist State Convention, p. 45. Minutes of the Executive Committee Meeting of Florida Baptist Financial Services, December 12, 2002.

⁵⁹Letter from Eddie McClelland, May 5, 2005.



THE STORY OF THE FBI 1943-2005

W. Wiley Richards

*Senior Professor of Theology
and Philosophy, Retired
Baptist College of Florida*

Introduction

What an institution perceives its purpose to be both liberates and restricts. It liberates by allowing the entity to gather support and energy to fulfill its purpose. It restricts in that cultures change, necessitating a need for redefinition of the purpose in order to develop new strategies for the new era. Failure to do so is to insure increased irrelevancy and an inevitable demise.

When I wrote the history of this college to celebrate its golden anniversary in 1993 I organized the materials around four major phases entitled Part I: High School Phase, 1943-1948; Part II: Junior College Phase 1949-1961; Part III: Bible School Phase, 1962-1976; and Part IV: College Phase 1977-1993. I intend to structure this essay along the lines of the book *Telling the Story of Jesus: The Golden Anniversary of the Florida Baptist Theological College*, published in 1993. I will provide enough historical data for those not familiar with that publication to

understand the school's origin and development. But the purpose will change. I seek to show the impact on the school of the vision of its leaders. Because I joined the faculty in 1968, much of the information comes from my personal recollection. My memory of events may be faulty at times, but my overall perception can be helpful. For that reason I write this in the first person.

GED Phase, 1943-1948

Significant beginnings do not require ideal circumstances to fuel their inception. While American military strategists were seeking ways to slow down the Japanese onslaught in the South Pacific Ocean, some Southern Baptists in the Lake City area battled another adversary—the appalling lack of formal training of the local pastors located in Polk and eastern Hillsborough counties. Local Baptist leaders made several attempts to establish training schools. They established one in Plant City, dubbed the “Strawberry Seminary” in the absence of a formal name.¹

About this time, Frank Faris, born in Bristol, Tennessee, on January 6, 1882, became noted for his work among the local Baptists. At a height of 6’4”, he also stood tall spiritually. His background reads like science fiction. Attending high school in Welch, West Virginia, some of his friends in the school were family members of the Hatfield-McCoy feud. After dropping out of high school he later attended the Piedmont Medical School (now defunct) in West Bluefield, West Virginia, dropped out, became a railroad engineer, mined coal, became a master mechanic and superintendent of a heavy construction company, worked in a saw mill, joined the U.S. Army where he learned to be an aviator, became acquainted with the Wright brothers, became friends with General H. H. “Hap” Arnold, and trained many World War I pilots.²



Frank Faris

Faris eventually wound up in Fort Meade, Florida, and attended a revival being held in Kathleen, preached by Reverend A. W. Mathis, the pastor in Fort Meade. Frank Faris, at age 38, was saved and began preaching the gospel within a year. He began a five-year search for ways to improve himself. He enrolled at the "Strawberry Seminary," but lasted less than a month. According to his testimony, he clashed with the hyper-Calvinism being taught there.³

Faris later became the pastor of the First Baptist Church, Dover, serving 1935-1941. While there he set up training courses for local pastors, using Sunday School and other materials from what was then the Sunday School Board. The Dover experiment died from lack of participation and interest from the pastors. After he became the association missionary in 1941, he experienced an expanded contact with the 62 churches in Polk and Hillsborough counties. These events increased his awareness of the lack of leadership training.



T. S. Boehm

Faris eventually enlisted Dr. Theophilus Sylvester (Ted) Boehm in the cause. It was a momentous connection as the two men's personalities perfectly complemented each other. With the assistance of Dr. James S. Day, Jr., pastor of the Southside Baptist Church in Lakeland, the men arranged a meeting with representation from five associations—South Florida, Tampa Bay, Pinellas, Orange Blossom, and Southwest Florida. Representatives voted to approve the founding a school on July 6, 1943 at 2:00 P.M. The school began classes on September 7, 1943, in rooms provided by the First Baptist Church in Lakeland where Dr. Boehm served as pastor.⁴ The scholarly Dr. T. S. Boehm provided stability and direction, but Frank Faris was the heart and soul of the school.

Some sort of commemorative ceremony was held on May 30, 1944, at the First Baptist Church in Lakeland with Professor J. T. Poppell, principal of the Lakeland High School, as the guest speaker. The school graduated two students in 1946—W. P. Padgett and D. D. Townsend. At its second ceremony in 1947, it graduated Glenn J. Collins, Hubert

Barnes, J. M. Gilbreath, and Walter E. Matheny. Some of the faculty in those beginning years were T. S. Boehm, Kathleen Collins, George Curtiss, James S. Day, Jr., Leon M. Gambrell, R. M. Hall, L. Don Miley, J. C. Owen, A. Patton, R. T. Porter, Charles N. Walker, and Nell K. Walker. Roscoe M. Hall served as a trustee 1947-1948. He later settled in Jackson County where he died in 2001 at the age of 101.

The school gained acceptance when the South Florida Baptist Association provided sponsorship. Giving direction to the school was another matter. The founders gave little thought to a name, calling it a pastor's school or even associational school. They could not call it Baptist Bible Institute because what is now the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary was then known by that name. The trustees settled on Florida Baptist Institute, but the acronym of FBI posed problems in promotion. In 1947, they chose Baptist Bible Institute of Florida. When New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary became a seminary in 1949, the Florida school dropped "of Florida" and became Baptist Bible Institute, a name which remained in effect until 1988.

The purpose of the school was debated. Some leaders such as Dr. Boehm wanted a Christian academy consisting of grades 1-12 with the goal of providing a high school diploma. Leon M. Gambrell, elected president after the brief tenure of former missionary J. C. Owen, had argued stridently that the school would always be a high school. Others wanted a curriculum suited more for pastors. They even sought a relationship with a Southern Baptist seminary. However, the end of WWII changed the scope of the discussion as returning veterans clamored for educational opportunities. The G.I. Bill and development of the high school equivalency diploma, the GED, effectively scuttled plans to provide a high school diploma. The trustees necessarily narrowed the focus of the curriculum.

The leaders of the school invited prominent Southern Baptist leaders to the campus, such as B. B. McKinney and Robert G. Lee, to



Leon Gambrell

establish their credibility with the state convention. Stetson University opposed the new school because of limited state convention funds.⁵

The Junior College Phase, 1949-1961

Change was coming. Leon Gambrell resigned as president to become pastor at the First Baptist Church, Brooksville, Florida. James Day, after 18 years at Southside Baptist Church, resigned to become pastor of the First Baptist Church, Spartanburg, South Carolina. When Boehm left to accept the pulpit of the Hillcrest Baptist Church in Augusta, Georgia, new leadership became a necessity. It came in the person of Dr. Arthur H. Stainback.

The move of the school from Lakeland to Graceville was brought about by a fortuitous set of circumstances. Dr. Stainback had been elected to the presidency of the school in 1952.⁶ In the meantime, R. W. Waterman, First Baptist Church of Graceville, and J. H. Christie, First Baptist Church of Bonifay, had been interested in obtaining a school for the Graceville area. In response to a radio program in Atlanta featuring Louie P. Newton and Dr. Stainback, Christie contacted the two. Through the tireless effort of the two pastors, as well as that of George Morrow and other local and area leaders, the school had solid support. Claud Tindel sold the school 160 acres “inside the city limits” for \$15,000.⁷ Classes began in the fall of 1953 meeting in rooms supplied by the First Baptist Church of Graceville. All classes in Lakeland were closed out in 1954. Reverend C. N. Walker and his wife, Nell, moved to Graceville to continue teaching.



Arthur Stainback

Two concerns on the part of President Stainback and others dictated the move out of Lakeland. The first was the lack of preaching opportunities in the Lakeland area for the students. In the Graceville area, the opposite situation prevailed. The number of churches in the associations within a radius of 100 miles came to about 1,000, many of

which needed pastors. The move to Graceville almost immediately proved to be greatly beneficial for the school, students, and churches.

A second reason for the move lay in the heart of Dr. Stainback. He envisioned a school set up along the lines of the academy system, so successful in former generations. The school could provide housing and employment for students. Consequently, local leaders, headed by George Morrow, brought in a “caged hen project” in conjunction with the Ralston-Purina Company.⁸ They also established a small hog farm to provide both employment for the students and funds for the school. This enterprise was ill-conceived, reflecting the mindset of a by-gone era. Agricultural pursuits were becoming increasingly difficult with the American economy moving away from agri-business.

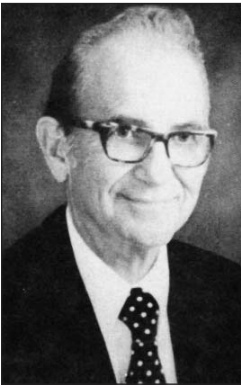
The visionaries of the times hoped to produce pastors trained in culture, agriculture, and theology. They would function almost as community leaders far beyond the pastoral roles. Those dreams never materialized, but one unfortunate image did, the reputation across the region of a school to train country preachers.

The curriculum was also evolving. Having abandoned the goal of establishing a high school curriculum infused with theology, the leaders moved toward a two-year diploma with a junior college degree. The trustees in 1953 adopted two new programs, each leading to an associate degree, the Associate of Biblical Literature and Associate of Religious Education. These two degrees were added to the Christian Worker’s Diploma. The latter became the basis for one of the Associate Degrees. In these two programs, the school moved away from an open enrollment by requiring the high school or GED diploma for admission to the associate degrees. That same year the minimum age for admission was raised from 18 to 21 years old. The school thereby adopted a two-tiered curriculum tract for students.⁹ The school was gradually moved toward college status, a startling contrast to earlier affirmations that it would always remain a high school. Changing needs dictated changing strategies to address the new circumstances.

These were exciting, heady days at the school. Mrs. Doris Davis, widow of Professor Cecil L. Davis, Sr., the Greenwood pastor who began teaching at the school in 1953, remembers the times. Dr.

Stainback's enthusiasm was contagious. At the Florida Baptist Convention, one sometimes heard the parody of a headache advertisement, "Snapback with Stainback!" However, his enthusiasm and strategies for enlisting financial support offended leaders in the Florida Baptist State Convention in Jacksonville, whose support the school desperately needed.

Gaining that support cost Dr. Stainback his job. When the Florida Baptist Convention assumed the control of the school in 1957, Dr. Stainback had to step aside. Reverend George. H. Gay, pastor of the First Baptist Church, Chipley, served as interim president from June 25, 1957, until Dr. James E. Southerland was elected to the position December 1, 1957, a position he held until 1977. Dr. Southerland was able to continue some of the financial contacts of Dr. Stainback, but not many. Dr. R. G. Lee from Bellvue Baptist Church in Memphis, Tennessee, had agreed to help fund money for the chapel. It was built in 1961 with Glen Watford as contractor. Appropriately, it was named the R. G. Lee Chapel. It underwent a major face lift in 2005.



James Southerland

God has raised up leaders suited for the tasks facing the school. Dr. Southerland moved the school forward in providing physical facilities, especially in his early years. When I visited the campus in the spring of 1968, the main student housing consisted of the Lakeview Court apartments, the duplex which now houses the school radio station, and the beginning stages of providing mobile housing units on Ezell Street. The student center was a wooden building, the Greenwood Building, located in the low area at the southwest side of Lake Albert.

Academically, the school was moved to a three-year program, roughly a model of the old Bachelor of Divinity program at the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. The expanded curriculum allowed the school to be promoted as a Bible institute rather than as a junior college.

The image of the rural pastor training was redirected. To quell the feared opposition from Stetson, the promotion took a specialized format. It became “a school to train pastors called later in life who were unable to attend seminary.” Those were almost the exact words that were used as we reported on the school at annual association meetings. To enhance this image, the school observed a rural church conference for one week each fall. Further, everyone made a concerted attempt not to solicit students who might instead go to Stetson. Wives came free when husbands were enrolled, a powerful recruiting strategy but one destined to be abandoned in the mid-1970s as finances became even tighter.

The kinds of students enrolling was changing. Almost all possessed a high school diploma or GED. Many were leaving the school after two years to transfer to Mobile College or William Carey College, two schools which gave full credit to BBI graduates. Those staying for the third year and then transferring found themselves taking five years for the BA degree. To meet this need, the trustees authorized the addition of one more year of study to implement a baccalaureate program. It became a reality in 1977, Dr. Southerland’s final year as president.

The administration was not fully comfortable with the public acceptability of the degree program. Instead of the Bachelor of Arts, the school awarded the Bachelor of Ministry degree with various majors. At graduation the school recognized those with honors with the names “With distinction” instead of the traditional *cum laude*, *magna cum laude*, or *summa cum laude*. It took several years for the school to move to traditional terminology in degree and honors programs.

The Baccalaureate Phase, 1977-2006

As Dr. Southerland’s academic career closed, the trustees elected one of their own, Dr. Joseph Palmer Dubose, Jr., as president. Construction of buildings continued at a more modest rate, but the most significant accomplishment during those years was gaining accreditation with the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). Much credit goes to Dr. Walter D. Draughon, Jr., the long-time dean of the school. Through the endless filing of additional

reports, the tenacity of the two school leaders paid off for the school. It gained accreditation in 1981.

The academic payoff came in 1986 in that SACS required a reaffirmation of accreditation at the end of the first five years for newly accredited schools. The school set up committees to investigate the existing program. Since the various committees were chaired by faculty members, their expertise provided valuable insights. To cite one example, the committee to study the school purpose discovered that the trustees, not the Florida Baptist State Convention, set the minimum requirements for admission at age 21. They also realized they had established the requirement restricting students to come from Southern Baptist churches. The trustees immediately began the process of removing age restrictions as they worked carefully with convention leadership to effect the change. The requirements were rescinded in 1985.

Further, the hallowed name, Baptist Bible Institute, came under serious study. For example, official academic directories of colleges listed the school with academies but not with four-year colleges. Also, the word *institute*, when translated into Spanish, had negative connotations. The school could not adopt the name Florida Baptist College because the name had already been taken. Politically the present name, The Baptist College of Florida was offensive to Stetson supporters because they considered Stetson to be the college favored by Florida Baptists. The school adopted the somewhat cumbersome but fittingly descriptive name, Florida Baptist Theological College. *Florida* located it geographically, *Baptist* identified its denominational affiliation, *Theological* preserved its central focus, and *College* communicated its academic level.

The school has always lived on the financial edge, but those years were especially tough. A fluctuating stock market and skyrocketing interest rates strained budgets to the breaking point. Falling student enrollment was a tragic counterpoint to the increased cost of maintaining a viable institution. Nevertheless, the administration launched a campaign to raise money to expand the library and erect other needed buildings such as student dormitories and a pre-school teaching-training center.

The academic program came under scrutiny resulting in positive changes. Money was obtained for a computer lab in 1986, a forerunner and precursor of the technological changes necessary for the school to compete in a rapidly changing society. The old image of a school to train county preachers gradually died out as the newly reconstituted admissions office impacted both recruitment and the production of materials, giving a more relevant image of the school. Many of these changes came about as the result of information gained during the reaffirmation of accreditation studies.

As the school assumed a stance facing the future, a new vibrancy was breathed into the formal structure with the arrival of Thomas Alexander Kinchen, Sr., as president in 1990. His enthusiasm and vision were soon felt throughout the city and county. We forgo the realignment of positions and duties of the staff because these have been changed to engage with the challenges of the times.



Thomas A. Kinchen

Some of the changes deeply impacting the school under his administration can be seen by the most casual observer. New parking lots, courtesy of Columbia Anderson Company, now grace the former lawn in front of the main buildings. Institute Place no longer bisects the campus. A beautiful park now joins the halves into a whole, while at the same time eliminating a traffic hazard. On the north side of Sanders Avenue are Heritage Village, comprised of old church buildings, cabins, and a sugar cane mill, reminders of our rural heritage. Adjacent to the Village are Shepherd's Cottages, donated buildings available to retired ministers. This enterprise was begun in 2001. Across the street is the new radio facility, WFBU. It is a low wattage station for the time being.

In the area of geography, Dr. Kinchen has been able to purchase an additional 100 acres, enlarging the total to 250 acres. He has plans to buy enough land to make a new road out to State Road 77, depending on the availability of the land for the proposed right-of-way.

Other major changes on the main campus merit attention. The new addition and refurbishing of the library was completed in 1992, followed by construction of the assembly center in 1998. Ray Hall, the initial building to be constructed on the new campus in 1953, was razed in 2005. The material, wiring, and construction were too dated to merit additional financial investments.

Changes not obvious to the eye are profoundly impacting the school. The trustees approved changing the name to the Baptist College of Florida at their April 7, 2000, meeting. Since Stetson University had severed all formal connection with the Florida Baptist State Convention, the way was cleared for a more easily defined relationship of the school with the state convention. The enthusiastic support by Dr. John Sullivan, Executive Director-Treasurer of the Florida Baptist Convention, has brought about a new spirit of cooperation. For example, in former years the school had to fund the cost of new buildings, plus the amount of money to run and maintain them. Further, the enrollment was closely monitored. When for example, the enrollment approached 300, the school had to petition for an increase to 400. Those days happily are gone.

In the earlier days, the call to ministry was understood primarily as a call to preach. Today, Christians see God's call in broader terms. The administration has adjusted well to their plea for training and has implemented courses of study reflecting the broader concept of God's call. The teacher education program was approved by the trustees in 1997 and the actual curriculum in 1998. The trustees additionally approved a revised curriculum in January of 2004 which incorporated theological and general education foundations. Nevertheless all graduates must take core courses in biblical studies.

We can close this study by calling attention to the student body. Those of us who have taught here for several decades can vouch for the pronounced change in the variety of students now attracted to the school. In former days, most of the students were married, with the corresponding limitation in finances. Mr. George Morrow used to call the students "wool hat boys." By that he meant they were so poor they had but one hat to wear and wore it year around. Not uncommonly, local merchants called the president about some student who was slow

to pay a bill. For most students the quality of their English matched the penury of their pocketbooks.

Further, we had a clear understanding of what the graduate would look like. He was qualified to fulfill the role of pastor, possessing aplomb and a bit of swagger, contrasting sharply with his first appearance on campus. To use an expression from here in the wiregrass, they cleaned up well.

Observe the present student body. They come from all walks of life, representing all nationalities. Large numbers are single, at least when they arrive. We try to foster in them a Christian worldview with the goal of producing visionary leaders. Yet, we seem not to have a clear-cut understanding of what the graduate ought to look like. Just maybe we should polish their image a bit, teaching them social graces. After all, there is no substitute for good manners, no matter what the calling. Before we retire the image of the country preacher, let's be careful to install a worthy successor in his place. We are on the right track.

¹W. Wiley Richards, *Telling the Story of Jesus: The Golden Anniversary of Florida Baptist Theological College*. (Hargrove Press, 1992). p. 7.

²*Ibid.* pp. 5-6.

³*Ibid.* p. 7.

⁴*Ibid.* p. 10.

⁵See James S. Day, Jr., statements, p. 40.

⁶*Ibid.* p. 50.

⁷*Ibid.* p. 53.

⁸*Ibid.* p. 67.

⁹*Ibid.* p. 73.



STATE BOARD OF MISSIONS— Casting the missions vision in Florida

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It had been 26 years since the Florida Baptist State Convention was organized on November 20, 1854 in Madison, Florida. Yet, according to John Rosser, who later wrote reflecting on the progress made by the young statewide organization, “It must be admitted that the Florida Baptist Convention, judged by high standards of concrete, tangible statistics, had not thus far made an impressive showing.”¹

This lethargy by Baptists appeared to be caused by a variety of issues, not the least of which were a provincial mind set and a lack of missionary vision. “The interest of some Baptists did not range beyond the local churches and of others not beyond the district association,” Rosser claimed. “Many people who accepted a missionary creed were anti-missionary in practice.”²

During the first two and one-half decades of the State Convention’s existence, the so-called day-to-day responsibilities for promoting missions’ awareness and directing missionary activities had been assigned to a six-member executive committee. Initially appointed in 1854, the group represented Florida Baptist’s best of leadership. These included: H. Z. Ardis, Samuel C. Craft, William B. Cooper, B. S. Fuller, W. H. Goldwire, and William J. Blewett.

Unfortunately the group had no significant financial resources with which to underwrite any mission and ministry activities. Much of this

lack of funding can be attributed to what John Rosser characterized as Florida Baptists' provincial mind set.

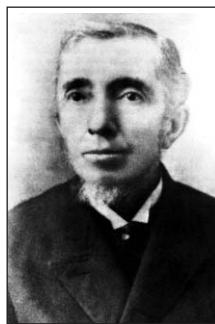
However, no real effort had been made to promote the cause of statewide missions. All of these members of the executive committee were caught up in not only the responsibilities of itinerant preaching circuits, but they had to earn a living as farmers and tradesman. In those days, only rarely was there such thing as a paid clergy.

The nearly 200 Baptist churches and the approximately 8,900 members which existed in 1880 were greatly separated and isolated from each other. Without an exclusive Florida-oriented denominational newspaper, the "Baptist news" that was reported came from the mouths of the itinerant preachers, the few missionaries who had been commissioned by then 13 associations, and the Georgia Baptist news journal *The Christian Index*.

Against that backdrop, the State Convention held its four-day 1880 annual meeting at the Baptist Church in Madison. A report on missions was presented which cited facts which made the case for the need of a greater missionary commitment by Florida Baptists. "To oppose missions, whether as individuals or as churches," the committee noted, "produces blight and spiritual decay." The committee requested the State Convention to appoint a Board of Missions "whose business it shall be to furnish the preached word to every destitute section in our territory."³

The Convention messengers agreed to create the Board and approved a motion to designate William N. Chaudoin of Jacksonville as secretary of the yet to be named board. Earlier, on the opening day of the State Convention Chaudoin was elected as convention president.

Before the State Convention adjourned it approved a four-part recommendation that: designated that the Board would be located in Madison; be comprised of fourteen members (including the previously approved W. N. Chaudoin, as Board corresponding secretary); specified that



William Chaudoin

five members constituted a quorum to transact business; and designated the Board as “the Executive Committee of the Convention.” The first Board of Missions members elected were: the pastor of Madison Church (a permanent designation that meant whoever was church pastor was automatically a member of the Board); S. B. Thomas, Sr.; John W. Beggs; B. F. Wardlaw; C. W. Stevens; J. F. B. Mays; W. M. Davis; Walter Gwynn; A. C. McCants; Paul Willis; G. W. Hall; C. V. Waugh; and T. E. Langley.⁴

A New Era Begins: 1880-1901

The new board still had no financial resources with which to carry out its assignment, save for a paltry few dollars in the treasury. Chaudoin proposed that in order for him to work on behalf of the interests of the State Board, he would request the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board (now known as the North American Mission Board) to continue his appointment as a missionary to Florida.⁵

Chaudoin, at age 51, had been serving the then-called Domestic and Indian Board since 1871 as a district secretary for Georgia, Alabama and Florida. The assignment actively engaged him in preaching and church starting. Chaudoin’s employment proposal was quickly agreed to by the Domestic Board and represented an investment of \$600 per year.

The first official meeting of the State Board was held in Madison on March 28, 1881. The group did two things of note. They elected Board leadership and employed two missionaries. In organizing the Board leadership, they elected C. C. Green, president of the Board, and C. W. Stevens as recording secretary. Although the historical record is unclear regarding how C. C. Green came to serve on the Board⁶, the very fact that Green was elected as board president reflected the members’ high regard for the man.

In keeping with its assigned mandate, the Board appointed its very first missionaries. They were N. A. Bailey of Micanopy and A. H. Robinson of Lake Como, who were commissioned for a nine month period and were to be paid \$25 per quarter.⁷ Basically, the Board’s missionaries continued to serve as pastor of their respective churches,

but were expected to be itinerant preachers during the week and even on alternate Sundays. They led mid-week prayer meetings and baptized persons whom they had led to become believers in Jesus Christ. And if they found a group of Baptists in an area, they organized them into a church and provided at least a monthly preaching service.⁸

Establishing a pattern to meet quarterly, the Board reconvened three months later and heard reports from its corresponding secretary and two missionaries and authorized the quarterly salary disbursements to Bailey and Robinson. Chaudoin reported that the Board on behalf of the State Convention had received \$104.11 and paid out \$103.60 during 1881. This left the Board a grand total of fifty-one cents in cash on hand for mission expenditures.⁹

Although a humble beginning, the Board began to realize the missions' vision which W. N. Chaudoin and others had set before them. In his March 28, 1882 report to the Board, Chaudoin expressed his enthusiasm by the response of Florida Baptists. "A year ago, with not quite two hundred dollars in pledges and no money, we ventured to commission two missionaries. We have now nine men at work or commissioned and their salaries have been paid . . .," Chaudoin noted.¹⁰

In the 1882 treasurer's report to the State Convention, Chaudoin reported receipts from churches and associations for the past year totaling \$887.91, plus an additional \$165.37 from Home Mission Board funds, and \$63.93 carried forward from the prior year, which yielded a total income of \$1117.21. During the same year salaries, travel and administrative expenses amounted to \$1107.75. This left a balance of \$9.46 for use in 1883.¹¹ For comparison purposes, that \$9.46 would be equal to \$190.11 in today's economy.¹²

The significance of the secretary-treasurer's report reflected the growing awareness of and commitment to state missions by Florida Baptists. The reported income represented gifts and fulfilled pledge commitments from churches, associations and many individuals. And it was evident that the itinerant efforts of Chaudoin and the growing corps of missionary personnel were paying dividends. The Board was attempting to prioritize the assignment of personnel across the state in the most spiritually destitute areas "uninfluenced by personal

preferences and sectional feelings,” Chaudoin reported to the State Convention in 1882.¹³

During an 1882 meeting, Isaac T. Tichenor, corresponding secretary of the Home Mission Board, proposed to the State Board to provide an annual subsidy of \$2,000 for mission work in Florida. [This was in addition to the \$600 salary supplement for Chaudoin.] The only requirement was that the Florida Board of Missions was to provide copies of their field missionaries’ quarterly reports to the Home Mission Board. Otherwise, the Florida Board was free to determine where the money would be used and to hire whatever missionary personnel they needed.¹⁴ Approval of the agreement strengthened the growing relationship between the two entities and affirmed the role of Florida as an important domestic mission field for Southern Baptists.

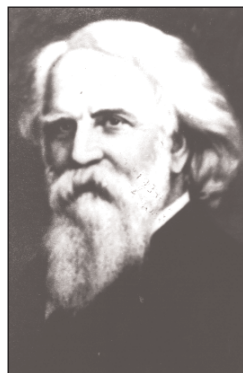
Within a few years with increased income, the number of missionary personnel increased. And in practically every instance these missionaries were assigned to associations to assist in the starting of new churches and to provide pulpit supply for the many churches that were without pastoral leadership. Other missionaries (designated as mission pastors) were assigned to assist specific churches. This placement of missionary personnel accomplished two things. It helped local Baptists realize what could be done in their “Jerusalem.” Equally important it provided a real live state missionary that local Baptists could relate to and who served as rationale for financially supporting the State Convention which was sending missionary resources into their local area.

A second major undertaking by the Board in its early years was to provide financial assistance to help construct church buildings. The need for a visible and viable church presence was most pronounced in the growing towns and cities across the state. The Board took steps to establish a loan fund and a gift fund with the proceeds to be used to assist churches. Initially, to secure funds for these endeavors, the Board authorized Chaudoin to travel to Georgia and solicit contributions. The first year of the solicitation effort netted \$240.56. Immediately, these funds were meagerly distributed (\$25 to \$50) to assist church building projects across the state.¹⁵

During the 1882 State Convention meeting Chaudoin told of the Board's plan to borrow money from individuals and banks, which in turn would be loaned to churches. In somewhat of a prophetic observation regarding the church building assistance, Chaudoin told the State Convention, "For years to come, in the very nature of things in our state, this will be a very important part of our State mission work."¹⁶ Towards the end of the Nineteenth Century the Board was annually appropriating nearly twenty percent of its income for church building purposes. This assistance program has been modified and continues to the present day.

A third undertaking assumed by the Board in the early 1880s was providing scholarship funds for ministerial students. The State Convention had long recognized the need for growing up a trained ministerial leadership who could serve Florida's many churches that were without pastors. Up until this point an offering collected at the annual meeting provided scholarships to men attending The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and Mercer University. After its formation, the Board assumed the scholarship responsibility and required its missionaries to take quarterly ministerial education offerings. By the end of the Nineteenth Century nearly ten percent of the Board's income was annually spent on ministerial scholarships.¹⁷ A variation of this scholarship program continues to the present day.

Parallel to the desire for an indigenous trained clergy was the growing interest to establish a uniquely Florida Baptist institution of higher learning. During the 1884 State Convention messengers received a report from it school study committee. The Board was "instructed and authorized to elect a board of nine trustees" once a Convention-appointed location committee had identified a site for the proposed institution.¹⁸ Subsequently, Northern industrialist Henry A. Deland, who had founded DeLand Academy in November 1883, proposed to the location study committee that his academy could address the



Henry A. Deland

needs of the State Convention. Deland offered the use of a building, proposed to match the \$10,000 Convention endowment pledge, and offered an additional \$15,000 in combined cash and land.¹⁹

Upon hearing the report of the State Convention's location study committee, the Board agreed to accept the Deland offer. To affirm its commitment, the Board authorized a solicitation effort to fulfill the \$10,000 endowment pledge. The Board also set into motion steps to incorporate thereby placing it in a legal posture to own property (i.e. a college) and borrow money.²⁰ (Although the Board had incorporated as the "Florida Baptist Convention" in 1899, it was not until the July 15, 1903 session of the Florida Legislature that a Board charter complying with state statutes was submitted and approved.) Two years of solicitation efforts failed to raise the promised endowment. Henry Deland demanded the fulfillment of the Convention's commitment or his offer would be withdrawn. In response, 13 Board members personally signed a \$10,000 promissory note to Deland guaranteeing payment.²¹

The efforts to start and maintain a uniquely Florida oriented denominational news journal are chronicled in a separate narrative. However, it should be noted that the Board had an on-going vested interest to ensure there was a medium for telling the "missions" story to Florida Baptists. And to that end the Board made repeated financial commitments to ensure the *Florida Baptist Witness* survived.²²

Additionally, in time, the Board became responsible for assessing the financial and practical viability for the State Convention to establish various agencies and institutions. These proposals included: an orphanage; colleges; hospitals; an educational foundation; Bible Institute; retirement center; and assembly grounds. Some of these ministries were embraced as agencies and are reported in separate articles.

As if the missions challenges in Florida were not sufficiently daunting during its first twenty years the Board of Missions took seriously the mandate "to furnish the preached word to every destitute section in our territory." In addition to what it already funded, the Board before the end of the Nineteenth Century responded to provide funds to underwrite: missionary efforts in Cuba as well as to the growing influx

of Cuban workers within Florida; evangelism of the displaced Seminole Indians; and educational resources for African-American pastors.

With the growing number of churches and several dozen field missionaries scattered across the state, the task of serving as corresponding secretary and traveling personnel supervisor of the Board took its toll on Chaudoin. As a result, in 1889, the Board authorized Chaudoin to employ an assistant. Initially, Chaudoin employed N. A. Bailey, who was a member of the Board, and paid him \$600 annually which was the identical salary Chaudoin received. Within a few years, another Board member L. D. Geiger was employed to replace Bailey.

A New Century Begins: 1901-1909

Geiger, a native of Marion County, and long-time Florida pastor in 1890 began a decade of voluntary service on the Board of Missions. These included several years as its recording secretary and as president for five consecutive years.²³ As a consequence it only seemed natural for the Board to turn to Geiger to fill the leadership void created in 1901 with the departure of corresponding secretary W. N. Chaudoin, who resigned because of ill health.

One of the first tasks he confronted was finding the means to pay off the Board-created \$10,000 debt owed to Henry Deland which was to benefit the renamed Stetson University. Geiger realistically noted in 1902 that people “generally give with greater reluctance for the paying off of this note than for almost anything else.”²⁴ Eventually the debt was paid.



L. D. Geiger

The indebtedness only compounded the two most significant challenges Geiger and the Board faced often during the first two decades of the Twentieth Century. Those were the lack of financial resources and the shortage of pastors. Both of these problems often impinged on each other. The Board found it impossible to employ and to pay for the much needed field missionaries.²⁵ Some churches found it impossible to hold worship services without someone to fill the pulpit

preaching responsibilities. The Board reported to the 1901 State Convention that several county seat towns—Milton, DeFuniak Springs, Bronson, Inverness, among others—some with good houses of worship, had been unable to hold regular preaching services during the past year.²⁶

Not only were ministers in short supply in Florida, but the prospects of producing Baptist leadership for the future looked slim. In 1904, only two ministerial students were enrolled at Stetson.²⁷ The lack of requests for financial assistance from ministerial students did not dampen the State Board's continued directives to its field missionaries to collect offerings for ministerial financial aid which resulted in the Board earmarking over \$1,000 annually for scholarship funds.²⁸ The Board's serious concern that scholarship applicants would benefit Florida Baptist churches, resulted in a 1902 policy requiring recipients to refund all the funds with interest if they failed to subsequently serve in the Baptist ministry for ten years.²⁹

Meanwhile, the institution for which Florida Baptists had great hopes for resolving the ministerial leadership vacuum found itself in a tug of war conflict between the leaders of Stetson University and the Board of Missions. This resulted in a trial separation in the relationship that lasted from 1907 to 1919.

The main source of conflict was the university charter which had been approved by the Florida Legislature. In brief, the university charter called for a self-perpetuating board of trustees, three-fourths of whose members would be Baptists. But the charter did not specify Baptist ownership and control. By 1907, the Board leaders' dissatisfaction with the charter was not only revived, but the emotional tenor became so intense that the State Convention voted to go to court to get the charter changed.³⁰ Board member and former Florida Governor William B. Jennings determined the best course of action would be for the Board to go directly to the Legislature and have the university charter revised. Subsequently the Senate's Judiciary Committee voted to postpone indefinitely taking any action of the charter revision request, which effectively left the Stetson charter as it was.³¹

The Board's failure to "take control" of Stetson University, caused Baptist leadership to begin reconsidering the ways and means for

establishing a school that would be Baptist in commitment and control. That opportunity soon arose when Lake City found itself without a college after the Legislature moved Florida Agricultural College to Gainesville in 1905. The city was given the property and the abandoned buildings.³² On June 18, 1907, the State Board's Executive Committee, along with members of the State Convention's Education Committee, went before the Lake City Council to propose to establish a Baptist college if the city would deed the property and provide \$15,000 to the State Convention.³³ The City Council's affirmative reaction resulted in a special session of the State Convention being held in Lake City, July 24, 1907. The large contingent of Baptists who assembled in Lake City enthusiastically endorsed the proposal to establish a college in which the convention would "be the unquestionable owners of the property and have a voice in its control."³⁴

During the early years of the new century, Florida's agricultural-based economy was still reeling from the effects of the great freeze of 1895 and the ravages of the boll weevil. Despite the economic conditions, the Board continued to employ general missionaries, evangelists and church builders (mission pastors) to assist the existing churches as well as start new churches in the growing cities. Additionally the Board defined the duties of its missionaries more specifically than ever before in an attempt to make the best possible use of their efforts. The Board required each field missionary to pledge to do five basic things: (1) perform colportage work, which was the selling and circulating of books among pastors; (2) "give special attention to Christian work among the colored people;" (3) conduct frequent evangelistic meetings for children; (4) subscribe to, read and promote the state Baptist newspaper; and (5) take an offering for missions in each church they were serving at least once each quarter.³⁵

In an effort to make the Board more efficient, Jacksonville pastor W. A. Hobson proposed that the Board organize itself into committees. This delegation of tasks was designed to ensure the various and different issues would be first studied by a committee before being considered by the entire Board. A committee, it was believed, could more thoroughly study an issue and secure a consensus on a

recommended action by the Board. The first such committees named were: evangelism, education, building, and Sunday school.³⁶ This committee process was refined and expanded during the first two decades of the century to include designations for: church extension; association apportionment; ministerial (pastoral salary) aid; loans and gifts; student aid; as well as the long-term committees on evangelism and church building. This organizational structure continues to the present day.

Securing Financial Stability: 1909-1926

L. D. Geiger's service was cut short when he died suddenly on April 20, 1909. Within weeks of Geiger's death, Stuart Beggs Rogers, pastor of the Gainesville Baptist Church, was unanimously appointed corresponding secretary by the Board. The native of Macon, Georgia, had served Florida churches for the previous ten years and during six of those years he served as State Convention president.³⁷

As his initial task, Rogers led the Board to recommend and the State Convention to approve four goals to achieve financial stability to under gird mission work within the state. These included the adoption of a more systematic plan of giving by the churches and the adoption of a percentage basis for all causes supported and fostered by the Board. Churches also were encouraged to make a 20 percent increase in their gifts for state missions during 1910.³⁸ Up until this time, the average churches' financial contributions to the Board were received as designated gifts, which were limited to contributor-specified uses. This resulted in some mission needs receiving plenty of financial support while others were sadly neglected. The Rogers' proposals were designed to provide for a more equitable distribution of funds according to need.

To implement these plans further, the Board suggested that the churches adopt budgets with stated dollar amounts to be contributed to state missions and to other mission causes.³⁹ To raise more funds, church



S. B. Rogers

leaders began to learn about the Southern Baptist Convention's emphasis encouraging all Baptists to embrace the Biblical practice of tithing and systematic giving. Prior to the Twentieth Century, Southern Baptists—as individuals and as a group—did not generally practice and did not widely promote systematic giving.

Following the lead of the Southern Baptist Convention,⁴⁰ the Board became so impressed with the south wide emphasis on financial stewardship “efficiency” (as it was called) that it implemented a variety of changes. The first change was the creation of a Board budget committee to improve planning and allocation of financial resources. The Board also agreed to employ a person assigned the dual tasks of Sunday school promotion and the promotion of stewardship “efficiency” in the churches. Despite some misgivings, the “efficiency” staff person resulted in not only a better understanding of stewardship education, but the increased income soon convinced many Florida Baptist church leaders of the worth of “efficiency.”⁴¹ One outcome initially implemented by some churches was the “every member canvas,” a financial pledging campaign which brought more money into many churches than they had dreamed possible. The “canvas” was the forerunner to various tither enlistment campaigns and the Cooperative Program developed by Southern Baptists.⁴²

Several factors contributed to the need for and gave credence to Florida's stewardship efficiency plan. One was a \$50,000 debt the Board assumed with the closing of Columbia College in 1918. Other factors were the decision to construct the first ever Baptist building in downtown Jacksonville and the growing need for financial assistance to churches.

Earlier in 1909, the Board agreed to employ the first non-missionary employee—a combination Sunday School and Baptist Young People's Union Secretary—assigned to assist churches in developing religious education programs.⁴³ In the ensuing decades the Board approved the creation of various programs of work and hired personnel who provided resources and personal consultation to local church leaders. These program resources typically fell into one of three general categories: educational ministries (i.e. Sunday school, Training

Union/Discipleship, church music); missions support (i.e. church extension/starting; Brotherhood/Baptist Men; Woman's Missionary Union; church/community ministries; language ministries); and support resources (i.e. stewardship, evangelism; African American ministries; leadership development, theological education).

Economic Restraints: 1926-1941

In 1926 Rogers resigned his position because of ill health which had plagued him through much of his tenure. The Board turned to Charles M. Brittain who had served as assistant secretary to Rogers for six years.

Brittain's tenure was affected by economic restraints caused by the hurricanes of 1926 and 1928, the Great Depression and the beginning of World War II. These multiple outside influences created a spiritual inertia among many churches which had a negative impact upon missions giving. This inertia began with a devastating hurricane in 1926 which heavily damaged or destroyed many churches in the Miami area and created economic disaster in many other communities.⁴⁴

No sooner had economic recovery begun than a 1928 hurricane struck in the West Palm Beach area. The two calamities had a devastating effect upon giving through the Cooperative Program.⁴⁵

Unfortunately, while the Board was struggling financially to address the needs with which it was being confronted, the greatest blow of all came: the stock market crash of 1929. The Board had been borrowing money to meet obligations when it was forced to reduce its work further.⁴⁶ In 1930 the budget was reduced to \$61,736, the smallest in many years.⁴⁷ Yet, the Board's continuing efforts to rein in operating expenses, resulted in a proposed \$100,000 budget for 1933 being reduced drastically to \$53,249.⁴⁸

Despite the difficult economic times, the Board voted to promote and encourage churches to participate in a simultaneous evangelistic campaign to be held in April, 1933.⁴⁹ Additionally, during the decade of



C. M. Brittain

the Thirties, the Board continued to provide financial assistance to over 550 churches.

An action taken by the Board in 1939 continues to benefit churches and ministers to the present day. The Board recommended and the State Convention agree to participate in the newly developed Southern Baptist Convention Ministers' Retirement Plan. The State Convention initially agreed to contribute two percent in matching funds to a minister's retirement plan. In that first year, 211 Florida pastors and 233 churches signed on to participate.⁵⁰

The Board began 1940 with a deficit of \$6,393 which grew to over \$12,500 by May. The Board's executive committee tentatively agreed to cut employee salaries by ten percent and to reduce to 55 percent from 65 percent the Cooperative Program allocation to SBC causes. Several Board members resigned over the planned action. But by the end of the year receipts had increased and the salary cuts were restored.⁵¹ However, the Cooperative percentage allocation to the Southern Baptist Convention was permanently lowered to 40 percent by 1942 to accommodate the growing mission and institutional needs within Florida.

As a result of failing health, Charles M. Brittain resigned in 1941.

A Progressive Missions Program: 1941-1944

Again turning to its own members the Board selected Charles H. Bolton who subsequently served a three-year tenure as executive secretary-treasurer. Bolton oversaw the liquidation of debt created in 1926 by the construction of the Baptist Building.⁵² He also led the Board to establish a financial reserve fund for emergencies and contingencies that grew to \$99,990 having four years of steady contributions.⁵³ The Board approved a plan that Bolton designed to provide a more progressive approach to rural and city mission work. In cooperation with the Home Mission Board, the plan provided for superintendent of missions positions being established in four major



C. H. Bolton

cities (Jacksonville, Tampa, Pensacola and Miami) which were jointly funded by the State Board and the Home Board.⁵⁴ Also set into motion was a shift away from the Board financially supporting individual mission pastors to an emphasis upon underwriting area missionaries in the state's mostly rural associations. These area missionaries were to guide and encourage local churches to support the start of a mission congregation and its pastor.

Bolton resigned in July 1, 1944 to return to the pastorate. Unable to draft a permanent leader from among its ranks, the Board appointed its chairman Homer G. Lindsay, Sr., and pastor, First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, to serve as interim executive secretary.

An Era of Expansion: 1945-1967

Alabama pastor John Henry Maguire became the first executive secretary-treasurer that the Board employed as a result of the recommendation of a Board-appointed search committee. Up until this time, the Board had typically looked within its own ranks and selected someone within a matter of days or weeks.

After assessing the Board missions' strategy and personnel, Maguire recommended the creation of eight mission districts and negotiated a revised agreement with the Home Mission Board to fund one-half the salary expense of the regional missionaries.⁵⁵ Subsequently, the State Board agreed to assume the travel expense of the area missionaries and reaffirmed the Board's expectation that its missionary personnel were to promote all aspects of the denominational program.⁵⁶



John Maguire

In its continuing commitment to Stetson University, the Board in 1946 entered into its fourth of what became six agreements (1911, 1919, 1926, 1946, 1957, and 1990) with the university trustees that reaffirmed the State Convention's commitment to the institution. And within two

years, when several fund solicitation efforts faltered in achieving the goals, the Board recommended a four percent increase to 18 percent in the annual budget allocation to Stetson University.⁵⁷ Initially, the Board refused to consider providing financial assistance to Baptist Bible Institute an educational enterprise supported by the South Florida Association.⁵⁸ But in 1957 the school was embraced as a State Convention institution. At various times, the Board refused to support continuing efforts by some Baptists to establish a Baptist college in West Florida and later in West Palm Beach. So emphatic was the Board's position, that they approved a policy restricting financial support to only one educational institution (and by implication it was Stetson).⁵⁹

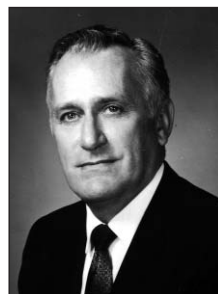
In one of its most visionary actions up to that time, the Board embraced a Maguire proposal for a ten-year plan. The plan sought to establish baptisms goals, the starting of new churches, an increase in total church membership, and a variety of numeric enrolment goals for the convention's programs. The plan also proposed a capital fund program that would designate money received above and beyond the regular Cooperative Program budget to initially assist the State Convention's agencies and institutions.⁶⁰ An outgrowth of the plan was the Board's 1958 decision to sell the Rogers Building in downtown Jacksonville and construct a new Baptist Building on the Southside of the city.⁶¹

As the Board moved into the decade of the 1960s, Maguire led the Board and the State Convention to assume ownership and expansion of the Baptist Bible Institute in Graceville; established the Florida Baptist Retirement Center in Vero Beach; and supported the expansion of the Florida Baptist Children's Homes to a statewide ministry. He led in the establishment of the *Florida Baptist Witness* Commission and the Florida Baptist Foundation. Maguire also pushed for the development of the Lake Yale Baptist Assembly and an assembly in West Florida. During his tenure, the Woman's Missionary Union transitioned from an auxiliary of the State Convention to a Convention program department.⁶²

Completing 22 years of service, John Maguire retired in December 31, 1967.

A Priority on Church Starting: 1967-1978

As the eighth executive secretary, former Texas Baptist missions' leader Harold Bennett led the Board to focus on the priority of starting 400 new churches and missions within ten years. These efforts were complemented by the establishment of a State Convention Church Site Committee to locate property sites and a Bond Plan to assist churches in building needed facilities.⁶³ The Board developed a new cooperative agreement with the Home Mission Board, which resulted in increased financial support and effectiveness of Florida's total mission program. The Board recommended that Florida Baptist participate in a major evangelistic missions' effort in Korea.⁶⁴



Harold Bennett

Bennett implemented restructuring of convention staff to enhance their job performance and accountability. And he led the Board to purchase property for the construction of the Blue Springs Assembly and additional property for the Lake Yale Assembly.⁶⁵

Accepting the position of executive secretary-treasurer for the Southern Baptist Convention's Executive Committee, Bennett resigned the Florida post in February 1979.

A 50-50 Funding Plan: 1979-1989



Dan Stringer

Recognizing its need for an executive director with experience in both state convention leadership and multi-cultural ministries, the Board elected Dan Stringer, who previously led the state conventions of Arizona and the Northwest.

During his tenure, Stringer led churches to more than double their gifts through the Cooperative Program. By the mid-1980s, Stringer developed a Board-approved plan to eventually budget Cooperative Program receipts on a 50-50 percentage

basis distribution between the State Convention and the Southern Baptist Convention. Although achieved, sluggish growth in Cooperative Program income and the demands of Florida mission needs required the 50-50 plan to be abandoned.⁶⁶

Stringer helped the Board to broaden their priority of evangelizing and ministering to Florida's growing ethnic populations. In response the Board approved two new program departments—language missions and ethnic education—to assist local churches in responding to these mission opportunities. A new work assistance program was developed to provide a comprehensive strategy for starting new churches among African-Americans, ethnic groups, suburban and inner city communities. And to further address the strategy for helping churches reach people for Christ, the Board annually approved goals to complement the national Bold Mission Thrust emphases.⁶⁷

To increase the opportunities for missions involvement by Florida Baptists, the Board authorized several foreign mission evangelism partnerships in West Africa and the Caribbean, as well as state-to-state partnerships with Baptist conventions in Pennsylvania-South Jersey, and the Northern Plains (Montana, and North and South Dakota).⁶⁸

Setting Three Priorities: 1989 to present

Following the early retirement of Dan Stringer, the Board again selected a non Floridian and Louisiana pastor T. G. “John” Sullivan as executive director-treasurer on January, 1989.

Within the first year of coming to the Florida, Sullivan defined three priorities embraced by the Board that dictated the personnel, budgetary and calendar commitments: evangelism, intentional church starting, and developing stronger existing churches. This ultimately evolved into a strategic planning process that established annual objectives, goals and action plans.⁶⁹



John Sullivan

Growing out of the priorities was the creation of two program divisions targeted at two major segments of the Florida population: African-Americans and language and ethnic groups.⁷⁰

Reviving a Nineteenth Century Board priority to provide trained pastors and leaders for Florida churches, Sullivan led the Board to authorize a program of theological education and distance learning. The program, developed in cooperation with the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and The Baptist College of Florida, permits church staff to continue in their church ministry while enrolled in theology, doctrine and church growth studies.⁷¹

The Board's love hate relationship with Stetson University finally came to a conclusion when in 1995 the Board recommended and the State Convention agreed to sever all relationships with the University. The proverbial "straw that broke the camel's back" was the University trustees' refusal to rescind a policy to permit the drinking of alcoholic beverages on campus.⁷²

Although the Board had approved disaster relief policy and action plans in the 1970s, this ministry did not get fully tested until the early 1990s when a series of catastrophic hurricanes began to strike the state. Sullivan on numerous occasions led in the mobilization of convention staff to provide aid and comfort to victims, as well as secured the Board's commitment of significant financial resources to assist churches and people in need.⁷³

One of the most significant inquiries the Board undertook in its history was to determine what constituted cooperation between local churches and the State Convention. The result was a proposal that was adopted as Bylaw Two in the State Convention's Bylaws which defined cooperating churches in terms of financial support, doctrinal integrity and information sharing.⁷⁴

Continuing a commitment to provide hands-on missions' experiences for Florida Baptists the Board approved the establishment of foreign partnerships with the countries of in the Caribbean, Cuba, Haiti, Belgium and Brazil.⁷⁵ Similar state-to-state partnerships were expanded to include Indiana, West Virginia and Nevada.⁷⁶ These partnerships committed budget and personnel.

These emphases upon evangelism and missions likely contributed to Florida Baptists' giving generosity of \$420 million made through the Cooperative Program from 1989 to 2004. The giving alone reflected a major shift in perspective and commitment by Florida Baptists since W. N. Chaudoin first collected \$104.11 in 1881.

In 2005 the State Board of Missions completes 125 years of service to Florida Baptists in casting the missions' vision and implementing the resources which have sought to fulfill its original mandate to "furnish the preached word to every destitute section in our territory."

¹John L. Rosser, *A History of Florida Baptists*, (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1949), pg. 56.

²*Ibid.* pp. 57-58.

³Florida Baptist Convention, *Minutes*, 1880, p. 10.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁵E. H. Reynolds, Sr., "William Newell Chaudoin," *Florida Baptist Witness*, January 27, 1904, p. 9. For an extensive biographical narrative on Chaudoin, see an article by Joel R. Breidenbaugh, "W. N. Chaudoin: Pioneer, Preacher, and President of Florida Baptist Work," *The Journal of Florida Baptist Heritage*, Fall, 2004, pp. 6-20.

⁶To the casual reader, a question may arise regarding C. C. Green whose name did not appear in the original group appointed to the Board of Missions by the State Convention. Contributing to the mystery is the fact that the Board's initial meeting held March 28, 1881 was not recorded in the Board's official meeting *Minutes* book. The *Minutes*' first page begins with the second meeting dated June 27. John Rosser's compendium reported on the March 28 meeting with neither citations nor clarification of who is C. C. Green or how he came to be placed on the Board. It could be assumed that Green was pastor of the Madison Church. However, Edwin Browning's *First Baptist Church, Madison, Florida: A Historical Sketch 1835-1956* (n.p., 1956) makes the following assertion: "On the new board were from our church: our pastor, Reverend J. O. Harris; S. B. Thomas, Sr., John W. Beggs; B. F. Wardlaw; and J. F. B. Mays." The absence of a printed version of the 1881 *Minutes*, Florida Baptist State Convention, makes it difficult to clarify the circumstances of C. C. Green's ascension to the State Board.

⁷Rosser, p. 64.

⁸State Board of Missions, *Minutes*, June 27, 1881.

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰*Ibid.*, March 28, 1882.

¹¹Florida Baptist Convention, *Minutes*, 1882, p. 15.

¹²Calculation of comparative dollar values between 1880 and 2005 derived from “Consumer Price Index: 1800-2005,” prepared by the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis and posted on <http://www.minneapolisfed.org/research/data/us/calc/hist1800.cfm>.

¹³Florida Baptist Convention, *Minutes*, 1882, p. 6.

¹⁴State Board of Missions, *Minutes*, December 10, 1882.

¹⁵Rosser, p. 66.

¹⁶Florida Baptist Convention, *Minutes*, 1882, p. 6.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 1889, p. 40.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 1884, pp. 30-31.

¹⁹Gilbert L. Lycan, *Stetson University: The First 100 Years*, (Deland: Stetson University Press, 1983), p. 7.

²⁰State Board of Missions, *Minutes*, February 19, 1885.

²¹*Ibid.*, March 2, 1887.

²²Rosser, pp. 151-158.

²³*Florida Baptist Witness*, April 29, 1909, pp. 2-3.

²⁴John E. Shaffett, “L. D. Geiger: Executive Secretary of the Florida Baptist Convention 1902-1909,” *The Journal of Florida Baptist Heritage*, Fall, 2004, p. 25.

²⁵Editorial by L. D. Geiger, *Florida Baptist Witness*, June 27, 1905.

²⁶Florida Baptist State Convention, *Annual*, 1901, p. 29. (It was about 1935 before we had as many Baptist preachers as we did churches. ed.)

²⁷Editorial, “Ministerial Education,” *Florida Baptist Witness*, March 10, 1904.

²⁸State Board of Missions, *Minutes*, January 8, 1897, p. 10; and January 8, 1898, p.110.

²⁹*Ibid.*, July 8, 1902.

³⁰Florida Baptist State Convention, *Annual*, 1907, pp. 49-51.

³¹Harry C. Garwood, *Stetson University and Florida Baptists*, (Deland: Florida Baptist Historical Society, 1962), pp. 124-126. Also see Tallahassee *Morning Sun*, April 25, 1907.

³²Lycan, p. 187.

³³State Board of Missions, *Minutes*, June 18, 1907.

³⁴Florida Baptist State Convention, *Annual*, 1907, p. 21.

³⁵State Board of Missions, *Minutes*, August 1, 1906.

³⁶*Ibid.*, April 11, 1907.

³⁷Jerry M. Windsor, "Stuart Beggs Rogers, The Quiet Before the Storm," *The Journal of Florida Baptist Heritage*, Fall, 2004, pp. 32-43.

³⁸Florida Baptist State Convention, *Annual*, 1910, pp. 17-18.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 1914, p. 18.

⁴⁰W. W. Barnes, *The Southern Baptist Convention 1845-1953*, (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1954), p. 177.

⁴¹S. B. Rogers, "Efficiency in the Country," *Florida Baptist Witness*, April 29, 1915.

⁴²Howard Foshee, "The Tithe," *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists*, Vol. II, (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1958), pp. 1418-1420.

⁴³State Board of Missions, *Minutes*, July 8, 1909; April 12, 1911.

⁴⁴Florida Baptist State Convention, *Annual*, 1926, pp. 44-45.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 1927-1928, pp. 13-14.

⁴⁶State Board of Missions, *Minutes*, May 27, 1929.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, February 3, 1931.

⁴⁸State Board of Missions *Minutes*, January 10-11, 1933.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*

⁵⁰Florida Baptist State Convention, *Annual*, 1939, pp. 28-31.

⁵¹State Board of Missions, *Minutes*, September 3, 1940 and December 3, 1940.

⁵²Florida Baptist State Convention, *Annual*, 1944, p. 14.

⁵³*Ibid.*, 1945, p. 61.

⁵⁴*Florida Baptist Witness*, February 22, 1945.

⁵⁵State Board of Missions, *Minutes*, December 5, 1944.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, May 26, 1953.

⁵⁷Garwood, p. 204.

⁵⁸State Board of Missions, *Minutes*, December 9, 1947.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, September 4-5, 1952; also Florida Baptist State Convention, *Annual*, 1952, p. 41.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, September 4, 1952; and November 11, 1952.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, May 8, 1958; November 17, 1958; and December 9, 1958;

⁶²*Ibid.*, August 31, 1961 through September 1, 1967.

⁶³*Ibid.*, April 23, 1968 through January 11, 1973.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, May 15-16, 1972 through November 12, 1975.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, January 23, 1976 through November 15, 1978.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, September 11, 1987; and January 19, 1990.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, January 23, 1981; March 15, 1983; May 20, 1983; and September

14, 1984.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, May, 1978; January 24, 1986; May 22, 1987; and September 11, 1987.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, January 29, 1999.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, November 9, 1992; and May 20, 1993.

⁷¹*Ibid.*, May 17, 1991 and September 13, 1991.

⁷²*Ibid.*, September 8, 1995.

⁷³*Ibid.*, September 11, 1992; January 22, 1993; and November 16, 1998.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, September 8, 1995; January 26, 1996; May 17, 1996; and September 13, 1996.

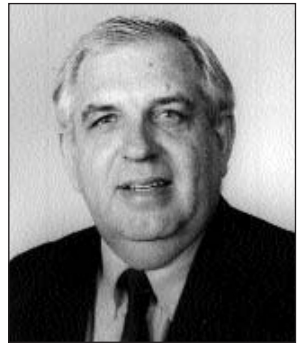
⁷⁵*Ibid.*, September 10, 1993; May 19, 1995; September 13, 1996; November 11, 1996; May 23, 1997; and November 8, 2004.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, May 19, 2000; November 12, 2001; and May 21, 2004.

A SKETCH OF THE FLORIDA BAPTIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Jerry M. Windsor

*Secretary-Treasurer
Florida Baptist Historical Society*



According to the 1954 *Florida Baptist Convention Annual*, H. C. Garwood was elected the Curator-Treasurer of the Florida Baptist Historical Society. He served for seven years in this capacity (1954-1960) until his death after a tragic stroke. Dr. Garwood was presented to the 1954 gathering of the Florida Baptist Convention by W. Hal Hunter, pastor of First Baptist Church Crestview and the President of the historical society. Hunter noted that “Dr. Garwood is the best informed man on Florida Baptist history ever to serve as Curator.” This high praise proved true in the work that Garwood did. However there is an interesting footnote to the Garwood credentials and service. At his death his historical society work was not even mentioned in his obituary in the *Florida Baptist Witness*. His pastoral service and academic work at Stetson was highlighted, but his historical stint was hardly noteworthy. In a microcosm, that has been the work of the Florida Baptist Historical Society. Quietly and professionally going about its work. Unobtrusive yet diligently faithful to the collection, recording, and interpreting of Florida Baptist history.¹

1894–State Historical Society

As early as the 1894 Florida Baptist Convention meeting in Plant City there was a call for “compiling the history of our denomination in this state.”² This request came from three men who had a rich background of

historical perspective and reading. All three were pastors from the Alachua Association.

D. B. Farmer was a native of Maine and worked for 25 years in Florida before his death in Massachusetts in 1905. Farmer was known for his doctrinal preaching and had one of the finest ministry libraries in the state. N. A. Bailey (1833-1897) received his A.B. degree from Union University in Murfreesboro, Tennessee in 1857, and his pastor was the renowned Dr. J. M. Pendleton. Bailey had moved to Florida in 1860 due to bronchial problems and became pastor at Monticello. 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.³ 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 convention in its 40th year of existence⁴ 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.

1895-1912—The Historical Secretary

In 1895 the Florida Baptist Convention met at Leesburg—W. N. Chaudoin presided as president and R. H. Whitehead served as vice-president. E. H. Rennolds, Sr., reported as the Historical Secretary.⁵ The commitment, enthusiasm, and hard work of Rennolds are detailed in this first historical report to the convention.

Rennolds knew what he wanted and he knew where he needed to go to get it. Rennolds stated, “I have in my work endeavoured to secure files of the minutes of the associations and state conventions first.” He reported that he had collected a total of 227 minutes. He had a full collection of associational minutes from Graves, Indian River, LaFayette, Manatee River, Marion, Pasco, and Pensacola Bay

associations. In addition, Rennolds said he had a full synopsis of all the minutes of Alachua Association except for 1868, 1870-1872. Rennolds also observed that J. M. Hayman (1822-1902) had a full set of the South Florida minutes.⁶

Rennolds also noted that he had collected 28 biographical sketches of deceased ministers and 12 sketches of living ones. In that this is still a very important goal even in 2005, it is interesting to note what Rennolds said about this biographical quest.

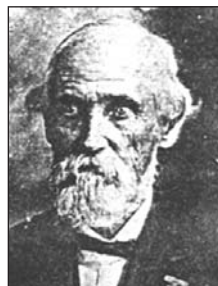
He said we have forty biographical sketches in all. "Some of these are not as full as they should be, but they can be supplemented from time to time. I have deemed it best to push forward the collection of sketches of deceased ministers, leaving the living ministry to be written up later on."⁷

It is also of interest to note that Rennolds "found the brethren and sisters everywhere easily interested in the work and ready to promise help." In 1894-1895 Rennolds visited the Florida, South Florida, Pensacola Bay Associations, and the New River Union. All of this was in pursuit of materials "so that the early history of our older associations may not be wanting."

The excursion that offers the most interesting historical perspective is the trip Rennolds made to visit Samuel Colgate at Orange, New Jersey. In the 1896 *Convention Annual*, Rennolds stated, "I have not been idle." He visited Colgate by the courtesies of the Florida Central and Peninsular and Southern railroads. Rennolds found 66 Florida Baptist Convention and Florida Baptist Association minutes that he had not seen before. He also added 34 biographical sketches to the historical collection.

The trip to visit Colgate must have been a dream come true for Rennolds. He knew that there were some very important documents out there and now to get to see them, extract some, and purchase others must have been a very satisfying experience. Meeting and talking to Colgate had to bring a new vision to Rennolds.

Samuel Colgate (1822-1897) was a Baptist industrialist and bibliophile. He was the son of William Colgate (1783-1857) the founder



E. H. Rennolds, Sr.

of the Colgate Palmolive Peet Soap Company, and a very active Baptist leader in New York. He was the leading contributor to the Triennial Missionary Convention, and from 1829 to 1852 was a member of the organization that would become the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society.

William Colgate had two sons who were as interested in Baptist causes as he was. Samuel and his brother James endowed Colgate Baptist University and the University of Rochester.

Rennolds could not have found Samuel Colgate at a better time. In 1887 Colgate was asked to give a speech on the rise of women's missions and could not locate sufficient data. He began to purchase and collect Baptist books, pamphlets, and reports and in 1892 over a quarter of a million items were donated to Colgate University from this special Baptist collection.⁸ This donation was providential for in February 1896, the valuable files of the Historical Society at Philadelphia were lost when their building burned. Rennolds noted in his 1896 report, "I congratulate the convention on having secured abstracts from this collection while it was yet possible."

It is my belief that the best sources we have are the personal primary sources of ministers. This information comes to us in the form of diaries, letters, books, sermons, and published materials. Yet a great need always exists for the personal data on each minister. This helps us understand his background, thinking, training, and theological conclusions. For some reason, ministers are slow to share this information. Getting a birth date, ordination date, service date, or educational verification is not as simple as it may seem. All historical secretaries faced this dilemma. It seems that Rennolds spoke for all of us when he announced over one hundred years ago that, "I feel assured that I have grounds of complaint against the brethren who have neglected to comply with the urgent but reasonable request to aid me in this work by supplying such data as they could easily have given, and thus save the future biographers the laborious task of getting it by piecemeal from their relatives and friends when they have ceased from their ministry here."⁹

In 1900 Rennolds reported that he had visited all the associations in the state except LaFayette and Middle Florida. He made a heart cry

commitment to Florida Baptists stating that a history of the convention needed to be recorded and he was “willing to spend the remainder of his life working to that end.”¹⁰ In 1905 Rennolds had a budget of \$27.70 for the year. Railroad fare was \$15.86, postage was \$2.00, and his salary was \$9.84 for the year.

Rennolds began to see himself as a “gleaner” of information. In 1903 he realized that there was an “ebb” in convention interest in historical research. He called for the compilation of the collected biographical sketches and research material in a book form.¹¹ He was somewhat discouraged and suggested the suspension of data collection until some kind of printing could be done. He felt that data processing without publication was an unwise research delay.

In the 1903 Florida Baptist Convention meeting in January in Lake City there was a report from a Special Committee on History. This committee was composed of T. J. Sparkman (died in 1916 in Palmetto), L. D. Geiger (1854-1909), C. S. Farris, and J. F. Forbes (1853-1926). Geiger served as the state convention executive director (1901-1907) and Forbes was president of Stetson from 1885 to 1903. Either of them could have seen the history project through but Geiger was busy with convention business and Forbes left the state to enter private business in Rochester, New York. However, this 1903 committee of four showed wise judgment in setting the parameters for the needed historical publication. They had major concerns. They wanted the history of the Florida Baptist Convention to be accurate, well done, interesting, written and printed. They requested that a “capable person” be asked to gather the material and then print the book in an attractive manner. Furthermore they felt no “mission money” should be used for this project as they recommended that a Florida Baptist Historical Society be organized to raise funds for the cost of the book.¹² The idea was wonderful but the lack of funding and loss of Forbes delayed the project for over 50 years.

Edwin Hansford Rennolds, Sr., was the steady guiding light for Florida Baptist data collection but life was not always fair to him. Born on October 30, 1830, in Louisa County, Virginia, Rennolds moved with his family to Henry County, Tennessee as a child.¹³ He served throughout

the Civil War without serious injury but maintained a fear of death without repentance. It was in 1868 that he was clearly converted, and in 1869 he was licensed to preach upon his feeling that “there was something for me to do in the Masters Kingdom.” This was followed by ordination in 1870 but Rennolds seemed to feel uncomfortable in the pulpit. He was a person of ability and humility but life dealt him very harsh reality in economic struggles and disadvantaged illnesses. Rennolds and his wife, Margaret C. Cox Rennolds, moved to Sumter County, Florida, in November 1882. In November 1883, he and his wife joined Equity Baptist Church and in 1884 they joined a church start at Whitney Station on the S.A.L. Railroad where he became a deacon, Sunday School teacher, and church clerk. This triggered some service interest in Rennolds because he stated in his autobiography that he felt that he had “found the work intended for me to do.” A historical interest was pursued as Rennolds was elected clerk of the Alachua Association in October 1884, and he received encouragement from such pastors as L. D. Geiger, B. M. Bean, and A. E. Cloud.



E. H. Rennolds
Civil War

Rennolds became interested in the history of the Alachua Association but realized “that it would be better that a history of all the associations in the state be written in one volume.”¹⁴ He somehow felt much more at home with pen and ink than he did in the pulpit. In December 1901, he became pastor of Bethany in Nassau County. This pastorate lasted only ten months and Rennolds was shocked to find that he had been replaced.¹⁵ He then became pastor at Macedonia where he stated, “My experience here was about the same as at Bethany. . . .” He spent a total of only about two years of his life in the pastoral ministry but these church experiences quickened a historical interest in the early work of Baptists in Florida.¹⁶

Rennolds loved history and historical research. His mother had primed this interest and his Civil War experiences documented it. For

four terms Rennolds served as chaplain of the Florida State Senate, and for ten years he was Secretary of the Florida Baptist State Convention. He said of his convention work that, “I have felt fitted especially for this position and have done some of the hardest work of my life to fill it satisfactorily.”¹⁷

The 1894 Alachua Association request to “compile the history of our denomination in this State” was signed off on by N. A. Bailey, D. B. Farmer, and Rennolds. For Edwin Hansford Rennolds, Sr., this was a calculated request that was issued with earnestness and sincerity.

Baptist Historical Society–1921

A Baptist Historical Society was appointed at the Florida Baptist Convention meeting at Miami in 1921.¹⁸ This action came from an external impetus. The Southern Baptist Convention meeting in its previous session had recommended that each state create a Baptist Historical Society for the gathering and preservation of historical records and activities of the denomination.

Adoniram Judson Holt (1847-1933) of Florida was elected chair of the Southern Baptist Convention committee. Holt was a native of Somerset, Kentucky, and attended Baylor and The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He was well known in the Southern Baptist Convention in that he served as pastor in Texas, Kentucky, Oklahoma, Louisiana, Tennessee, and Florida. He served as editor of the *Florida Baptist Witness* from 1914-1918, and had a helpful overview of Southern Baptist work and ministry. He served as pastor at Lake City, Kissimmee, Boca Grande, Arcadia, and Punta Gorda (1922-1927). He saw the need for Baptist history to be recorded at the state convention level and felt local church clerks were a very important part of seeing this work completed.¹⁹

Holt would get rather frustrated from time to time with those who were not ready to step forward and publish their historical work. In his 1923 report to the Florida State Convention, Holt noted, “We have been making history this year as usual; and as usual, we have not been making a record of it.” However Holt was pleased to point out one

single exception. He reported, "Only one Florida Baptist church has had its history written and published." That church was First Baptist Church Arcadia. Holt wanted to make sure that church was recognized and emulated.

Committee on Florida Baptist History (1931-1938)

In 1931 the Florida Baptist Convention appointed a Committee on Baptist History. The committee reported in 1932 that they had been given the task to report on the preservation and publication of Florida Baptist history. Floyd T. Wilson and W. A. Hobson composed this committee. Their main contribution was the recommendation that all of the Baptist history now collected be filed in the library of Stetson University under the direction of Stetson President Lincoln Hulley and the Committee on Baptist History.

The committee also made a magnificent find in the person of Gordon C. Reeves. During the depression the Works Progress Administration (WPA) made great effort to find work for unemployed artists, writers, and scholars. Reeves was born in Bellevue, Kentucky, in 1910. His family moved to St. Petersburg in 1925, and he graduated from St. Petersburg Junior College in 1931. He graduated from Stetson in 1936, and served as research assistant to Dr. H. C. Garwood while he was working on his masters degree. Reeves became the church historian of the Florida Historical Survey of the Works Progress Administration. His Stetson thesis was *A History of Florida Baptists*, and the 1938 project was 225 pages of well documented Baptist history.

It was Reeves who made the motion at the 1938 Florida Baptist Convention at Jacksonville that a state historical society be formed for Baptists "with the understanding that such organization shall have no authority to make the Convention liable for any expenditure of funds." The motion carried. Gordon C. Reeves should be listed in that early pantheon of leaders that would include Edwin Hansford Rennolds, Sr., Adoniram Judson Holt, and the first official Florida Baptist historian, John Leonidas Rosser.

Florida Baptist Historical Society (1939-1996)

In 1939 William Dudley Nowlin (1864-1950) brought the Florida Baptist History Committee report to the convention that met at West Palm Beach. Nowlin was licensed to preach before he was called. As happened with George W. Truett, the local church saw the giftedness of the man and he surrendered and attended The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. Nowlin served as pastor at Lexington, Kentucky, and Knoxville, Tennessee, before moving to Florida in 1911. Nowlin was a natural to give impetus to Florida Baptist historical research and writing. His contributions include the fact that he served as editor of the Kentucky *Western Recorder* and the *Florida Baptist Witness*. He served as president of the Kentucky Baptist Convention and the Florida Baptist Convention (1930-1931). At the request of Kentucky Baptists he also wrote a history of the Kentucky Baptist Convention.

Nowlin read the Baptist History report at the 1939 Convention and it was spoken to by C. M. Brittain and Gordon Reeves. It was just understood that Dr. Charles Mercer Brittain (1873-1943) would be the one to write the long expected history of Florida Baptists. He was well educated, well qualified, and had the important Florida experience. He served as executive director of the Florida Baptist Convention from 1926-1941, and saw the convention through its most difficult days since Chaudoin.

The 1942 convention that met in Panama City actually voted for Dr. Brittain to “prepare and publish our Florida Baptist History.” But providence intervened.²⁰ Due to illness and the soon death of Dr. Brittain, the Florida Baptist History Committee suggested that Gordon Reeves complete the work. A glitch of some kind occurred and within months the committee was back before the Executive Committee of the State Mission Board to “clear up any obscurity or uncertainty on the matter” of producing a history of Florida Baptists.²¹

Out of a September 12, 1944 joint meeting, J. L. Rosser was asked to prepare and publish the manuscript of Florida Baptist history. This was finally completed in 1949 when the 351 page *A History of*

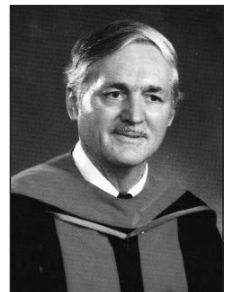
Florida Baptists was authored by Rosser and published by Broadman Press of Nashville.²²

This was a coup for Florida Baptists. Stuart Beggs Rogers (1866-1926) had written a 25 page booklet “A Brief History of Florida Baptists 1825-1925” but its conclusions were suspect. Gordon Reeves had written his Stetson thesis on “A History of Florida Baptists” in 1938, but it was the Rosser book that was authenticated by convention action and finances. The 1949 publication of the Rosser book brought legitimacy to the Florida Baptist Historical Society that was greatly needed.

The actual organizational date of the Florida Baptist Historical Society was November 15, 1951 at Winter Haven, Florida. The previous year at the Florida Baptist Convention, J. Ivey Edwards, chairman of the Florida Baptist History Committee, recommended that Dr. Pope Duncan, Professor of Church History at John B. Stetson University, be elected as the first Secretary-Treasurer of the Florida Baptist Historical Society, and that the organization be organized with the approval of the Florida Baptist Convention and be responsible to it.²³

In 1951 Dr. Thomas Hansen (1897-1964), pastor of the First Baptist Church of Fort Lauderdale, brought the Committee on Florida Baptist History report. He noted that a constitution was being recommended for the new organization and Dr. Duncan was now Secretary-Treasurer of the organization and the newly appointed Curator of the Florida Baptist Collection in the Sampson Library at Stetson University. The newly formed Florida Baptist Historical Society had 37 charter members and annual dues were one dollar per year.

Pope A. Duncan (1920-) was a logical choice for Secretary-Treasurer. He was a Kentucky native and a graduate of The University of Georgia (B.A., M.S.) and The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (M.Div., Th.D.). He was an ordained Baptist pastor and taught at Stetson (1946-1948; 1949-1953), and actually became president of three different schools (South Georgia College; Georgia Southern College, and Stetson University). Duncan was greatly respected as scholar, preacher, author,



Pope Duncan

and administrator. He gave the Florida Baptist Historical Society the type of gifted leadership that was essential for the early years and he served as Secretary-Treasurer of the organization from 1950 to 1952.

In 1952 Dr. Pope Duncan resigned as President of the Florida Baptist Historical Society when he accepted the position of Associate Professor of Church History at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. Upon his resignation in Florida, Hugh McKinley, who succeeded Dr. Duncan at Stetson, also succeeded him as Secretary-Treasurer-Curator of the Florida Baptist Historical Society.

W. Hal Hunter served as President of the Board of Directors of the Historical Society and reported in the 1954 Florida Baptist Convention that Professor Hugh McKinley had to resign his work at the historical society “because of the pressure of studies toward his doctorate.” Hunter went on to announce that Harry Crawford Garwood had been elected as Secretary-Treasurer-Curator. Hunter was pastor of First Baptist Church Crestview at this time, and went on to assure the convention that Dr. Garwood was “the best informed man on Florida Baptist history ever to serve as curator.”²⁴

Dr. Garwood served until his death in April 1960. He served faithfully on the Stetson campus for 39 years and was greatly beloved among Florida Baptists.

The Garwood years included two very important endeavors. There was another conscious effort toward the collection of association minutes. This is an on going project and fresh ideas and means are always needed. Dr. Garwood also saw the importance of microfilm technology. He saw to the purchase of all Southern Baptist minutes (1845-1952) and Florida Baptist Convention minutes up until that time (1854-1952). These very exact microfilm sources are used constantly in the work of the Florida Baptist Historical Society today.

In 1958 the Baptist Historical Collection was moved from the library at Stetson to Allen Hall next to the office of Dr. Garwood. By this time there were 400 volumes in the Baptist Historical Collection. Finances were always a major consideration and Dr. Garwood felt that



Harry Garwood

many needed sources had been missed simply because the money was not available to buy them. In 1959 the society reported receipts of \$419.77 and expenditures of \$442 for a negative balance of \$22.23.²⁵

The death of Dr. Garwood brought a short stint for Edward A. Holmes, Jr., as Secretary-Treasurer-Curator of the Florida Baptist Historical Society. During the 1960 Holmes service the Florida Baptist Convention raised its traditional funding level from \$300 to \$560.50. This increase in gifts from the convention assisted greatly in purchasing some available books and microfilm.

Dr. Holmes reported an increase in library volumes for 1960 but a loss of “card carrying membership” as there were only 22 members in the historical society. The pending completion of the Stetson library meant that the Baptist Collection could be moved back there from Allen Hall. This was finally done in 1969. The historical society also authorized the publication of *Stetson University and Florida Baptists* in 1962. A *Historical Atlas of Florida Baptists* was planned but no publication was released.²⁶

In the 1962 Florida Baptist annual report, Edward A. Holmes presented Mrs. H. C. Garwood to the convention. It was stated at that time that Dr. Garwood was the first “curator” of the society. This was an honest mistake, but a mistake non-the-less. Pope A. Duncan was the first Secretary-Treasurer-Curator back in 1950.²⁷ Holmes also presented his resignation as Curator and Secretary-Treasurer. He recommended that Professor Rollin Armour be elected in his place. Armour was elected and served in that capacity from 1962 to 1972.

In 1964 as part of the Baptist Jubilee Year, the Florida Baptist Historical Society sponsored a conference on Baptist history. There were over 50 people in attendance and Dr. Davis C. Woolley, executive secretary of the Southern Baptist Historical Commission, was the featured speaker.²⁸

The year 1969 was a very eventful year for the historical society. Dr. Earl Joiner was commissioned by the State Board of Missions to write a new history of Florida Baptists. In that secretary Rollin Armour was on academic leave, Joiner was also asked to serve as acting curator. This came at the time when the Baptist holdings were moved from

Allen Hall to the DuPoint-Ball Library. The Baptist Collection was dedicated to the memory of Harry C. Garwood.

A Florida Baptist contingent was also involved in the research for the *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists*. Volumes one and two (1958) sold over 14,500 copies. Volumes three (1971) and four (1982) were helpful extensions of the original work, and Floridians were prominent in the production of this excellent research tool. William Guy Stracener was the original Florida representative, and he was later joined by Pope Duncan, Rollin Armour, T. M. Johns, Gus Johnson, Earl Joiner, Gordon Reeves, James A. Sawyer, H. C. Garwood, John H. Mitchell, G. A. Leichliter, Jack P. Dalton, and Arthur W. Mathis.²⁹

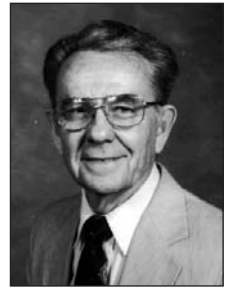
The controlling document of the Florida Baptist Historical Society for over twenty years was the basic 500 word 1950 constitution.³⁰ Then there was the constitution of 1975 and the agreement documents of 1996. These well prepared statements have been a guiding star for the organization ever since its official organizational date in 1950. Rennolds always had to be guided by Chaudoin and the convention directly. These official documents have given the historical society a written beacon for staying on course.

Yet something more important than documentation has been involved in the historical work of the convention since 1894. There has been trust, hard work, and commitment on the part of the secretaries of the society. Rennolds poured his life into it. A. J. Holt and Pope Duncan committed to the proper organization of the work. H. C. Garwood and Rollin Armour took document collection very seriously and built up the corpus of the holdings. This laid a solid foundation for what we know today. In 1973 the Florida Baptist Historical Society started a new day with the coming of Edward Earl Joiner (1924-1996) as the Secretary-Treasurer-Curator.

Joiner started out his work by writing his own job description.³¹ He wanted to be efficient and he was goal oriented. In 1973 he began the acquisition of the minutes of the National Baptist Convention and showed interest in other Baptist entities and related subjects.³²

In the 1975 convention an unexpected motion caused a stir relating to the work of the historical society. Messenger Carl L. Bailey, pastor of

Jasmine Lakes Baptist Church of New Port Richey, made a motion that the depository of the Historical Society be moved from Stetson to either Lake Yale or Blue Springs Baptist Assembly and consideration be given to constructing a building for that purpose. After surprise and discussion the motion actually passed by a required standing vote.³³ Obviously this was not done but it shows once again the need for a well worded governing document for the historical society and level headed leadership.



Earl Joiner

Out of the “assembly vote” there did come a helpful compromise. The convention and the historical society decided to have historical displays of Baptist work at Lake Yale and Blue Springs. The convention agreed to fund the project and the historical society agreed to provide the display.³⁴ All of these understandings came about by a gentlemen’s agreement. In 1975 there were ten members in the Florida Baptist Historical Society and in 2005 the membership is 83 members which include 30 lifetime memberships. The Florida Baptist Convention trusts the historical society and the historical society trusts the Florida Baptist Convention. The 1975 constitution is a wonderful document and it was written by people who trusted one another.

The innovative spirit and hard working ethic of Earl Joiner brought some very important changes to the Florida Baptist Historical Society. He chaired the first annual seminar of the Historical Society on May 22, 1976. He oversaw the indexing of the state annual and the *Florida Baptist Witness*. He planted the seeds for the annual Heritage Award and gave us our most important Florida Baptist history with the publication of *A History of Florida Baptists* in 1972. Earl was a hard worker and he loved people. His work as Curator and Secretary-Treasurer of the Florida Baptist Historical Society was a labor of love from 1973 to 1996.³⁵

Dr. Joiner presented his last report to the convention at the 1996 meeting. In 1995 the Florida Baptist Historical Society as a joint agency of the Florida Baptist Convention was dissolved and in the May 4-5,

1996, society meeting directors of the organization authorized Dr. Joiner, Dr. R. C. Hammack, and Dr. David Gasperson to work with Dr. John Sullivan and Don Hepburn to recommend to the State Board an appropriate form for the new society to take.

On April 16, 1997, the Florida Baptist Historical Society Board of Directors met with Dr. John Sullivan, Dr. Thomas Kinchen, and Don Hepburn at the Florida Baptist Theological College for the purpose of reviewing an agreement between the Florida Baptist Convention and the Florida Baptist Theological College relating to society work. It was agreed that the college would become the “home base” of the society and it had already been determined that the Florida Baptist Theological College library would serve as the depository and collection point of Florida Baptist historical documents. It was at this meeting that Dr. Mark Rathel was invited to become the Secretary-Treasurer of the Florida Baptist Historical Society under the new agreement drawn up with the college and the Florida Baptist Convention.

Dr. Mark Rathel (1957-) served for six years (1997-2002) as Secretary-Treasurer of the society and had three very notable accomplishments. He was very wise and careful in his document acquisition and also began the work of the annual journal of Florida Baptist history. The professional work of Dr. Rathel built a firm foundation for the newly reorganized society that was not a convention agency but now was a true partner in convention work.



Mark Rathel

Dr. Rathel also oversaw the beginning Heritage Award presentation. This program gives the Florida Baptist Historical Society a way to honor annually a person or entity that has contributed to Baptist history publication and presentation in a special way. Through this award some very deserving people have been recognized for their special service in promoting Florida Baptist research and writing.

On April 16, 2002, Jerry M. Windsor (1940-) became the Secretary-Treasurer of the historical society. Dr. Rathel and Dr. Windsor teach at The Baptist College of Florida, and their work at the society was a responsibility that both of them took gladly when the opportunity arose.

Conclusion

It seems unfair to close out a historical sketch of an organization and not mention some of the good things that have providentially happened that would not likely be noticed.

The new 1996 agreement would not have been hammered out had it not been for Dr. Earl Joiner,, Dr. John Sullivan, Dr. Tom Kinchen, Dr. R. C. Hammack, and Don Hepburn. Dr. Joiner was already ill at the actual time of the new plan but he was as helpful and kind about the process as one could be. Dr. Sullivan and Dr. Kinchen were determined to see that we had a historical society (both are lifetime members) and Dr. Hammack and Don Hepburn were just as determined to work out the details.

The Florida Baptist Historical Society Board of Directors has been a special group of people from day one. Each one asked to serve was picked for a reason. They have taken their work seriously and history records the results. We have had some kind of board or committee for over 100 years and everyone who has served has been a faithful Christian and Baptist.

A special word of appreciation needs to be also extended to a group of volunteer writers and researchers who have presented programs, published papers, and done the basic work of Baptist writing. We would not be able to function today without these volunteers.³⁶

No job would be fulfilling without getting to know so many delightful people along the way. Special friends have been Elouise Green, Elizabeth Mays Cook, Dr. Franklin Fowler, Parkhill Mays, Gene Stokes, Judge E. B. Browning, Jr., Sidney Lanier, Max and Sue Laseter, Fran Carlton, Frances Shaw, Vanita Baldwin, and Dr. Bill Sumners. These friends have made special efforts to help the society in many ways.

There are some current needs that will eventually have to be addressed if we are to be the custodian, guardian, and interpreter of Florida Baptist events that we need to be. We will soon be nervously experimenting with our first electronic web page. Securing annual association minutes has been a sad failure of the past ten years. Digitizing photographs and sources is a modern possibility that must be

studied. Ownership of association minutes and other artifacts must be worked out. As more and more churches celebrate their centennial anniversaries, additional travel time and allowance must be considered for staff and board members to meet legitimate local church requests for society presence. Indexing and subject files need to be electronically available for church historians in their research. More funds are needed to purchase rare Florida Baptist documents while they exist. Programming needs to be extended to assist local churches in the research, writing, and publishing of their own church histories. Each of these concerns will need to be added to the agenda of society discussions.

A tree cannot be best measured until it is laid down. It may be time to measure our progress since 1894 and consider where we want to go and how we want to get there. May the next 111 years be as exciting and fruitful as the last has been.

Table 1

Historical Society Directors

1894-1912	Edwin H. Rennolds, Sr.	Historical Secretary
1950-1952	Pope A. Duncan	Secretary-Treasurer and Curator
1953	Hugh McKinley	Secretary-Treasurer and Curator
1954-1960	H. C. Garwood	Curator-Treasurer
1961-1962	Edward A. Holmes	Curator
1962-1972	Rollin S. Armour	Secretary-Treasurer
1973-1996	E. Earl Joiner	Secretary-Treasurer
1997-2002	Mark A. Rathel	Secretary-Treasurer
2002-	Jerry M. Windsor	Secretary-Treasurer

Table 2

Heritage Award Recipients

1997	E. Earl Joiner
1998	Adolph Bedsole
1999	Joe Bamberg
2000	Ruth Bagwell
2001	John Hillhouse
2002	Martha Trotter
2003	Wiley Richards
2004	E. B. Browning, Sr.
2005	E. H. Rennolds, Sr.

¹*Florida Baptist Annual*, 1954, pp. 33-34. It was easy to go unnoticed when the membership level remained less than 20. In 1950 there were 37 charter members in the newly organized Florida Baptist Historical Society. In 1958, Dr. Garwood reported there were 13 members and the balance in the treasury was \$39.77.

²This request came to the convention from the Alachua Baptist Association which had been organized in 1847. The request came from a committee composed of Napoleon Alexander Bailey (1833-1897), Edwin Hansford Rennolds, Sr. (1839-1912), and D. B. Farmer.

³Rennolds and the Tennessee 5th Regiment were in most of the major battles of the war. In 1861 there were 1300 men in the regiment and on April 24, 1865, there were only 30 men left of the original 1300.

⁴"The Baptist Convention of the State of Florida" was organized on November 20, 1854 near Madison, Florida, in the home of Richard Johnson Mays.

⁵We are fortunate in having a copy of this report (1895 *Minutes of the Florida Baptist Convention*, pp. 21-23). One of the very important incidentals in this report is that John Albert Broadus spoke to the report. This is the same John A. Broadus who was a founding father of The Southern Baptist

Theological Seminary, and one of the persons for whom our “Broadman Press” was named. Broadus, Boyce, Manly, and Graves were very interested in the work of the Florida Baptist Convention.

⁶This Jeremiah H. Hayman (1822-1902) comment is of special interest. All of the “Alachua Three” had some academic interests and pursuits of some kind. Hayman had none. Hayman came to Florida with his parents in 1837, and they settled in Madison County. Hayman had very little education but learned to read and studied his Bible faithfully. He was very influential in early Baptist work in DeSoto, Hernando, Hillsborough, Manatee, Polk, and Pasco counties. He established churches in Bartow (1854), Tampa (1860), and Plant City (1866). Hayman served as a pastor for 51 years and his total salary in all those years did not exceed \$2,500.

⁷We now have 1437 biographical sketches on file at the Florida Baptist Historical Society. Many are “brief” but we gladly start with any information we can get. By the time this article is printed these sketches should be on our FBHS website and our goal is to add one sketch a day until we have as many biographical sketches as we do Florida Baptist churches (currently 2796). These sketches are immensely valuable for churches as they write their church histories and seek information on former pastors.

⁸For an excellent view of these matters consult Bill J. Leonard’s *Dictionary of Baptists in America*, and consult Director Betsy Dunbar at the American Baptist-Samuel Colgate Historical Library in Rochester, New York (585-473-1740). This library is believed to hold the largest collection of Baptist related research materials in the world. There are 80,000 volumes, and over 400 manuscript collections. Many of these volumes are the only ones known to be in existence.

⁹*Florida Baptist Convention Annual Minutes*, 1879, p. 26.

¹⁰*Florida Baptist Convention Annual Minutes*, 1900, p. 52.

¹¹*Ibid*, p. 19.

¹²*Ibid*, pp. 56-57.

¹³Rennolds left us two major writings. He wrote *A History of the Henry County Command* which served in the Confederate States Army, including rosters of the various companies enlisted in Henry County, Tennessee. This is an everlasting contribution to eye witness battles in the Civil War. For our purposes, *An Autobiography* begun by Rennolds on October 31, 1896 is indispensable. He was 58 years of age when he started this work and he was living in Orange Home, Florida. He last wrote on September 20, 1912, and died on Sunday morning, November 17, 1912, at his home as the first hymns

of the morning were being sung at the Main Street Baptist Church in Jacksonville.

¹⁴Rennolds autobiography, p. 56.

¹⁵Rennolds autobiography, p. 57. Rennolds did not have much self confidence in his preaching and felt he was not “reaching them.” He invited Daniel Sikes (1855-1922) to come preach a revival at the church. The revival was a success so the church dismissed Rennolds and called Sikes as pastor.

¹⁶Rennolds autobiography, p. 57. Rennolds stated, “Though I do not doubt my call to preach, I at the same time, think it was not intended that I should be engaged in regular pastoral work. I have always preferred praying to preaching. I had rather talk to God than to people.”

¹⁷Rennolds autobiography, p. 58.

¹⁸Southern Baptists were slow about giving official recognition to any historical organization. The American Baptist Historical Society was formed in 1853 but the Civil War and Reconstruction era interrupted any real historical collaboration. In 1916 the Sunday School Board was made responsible for preparing a “history of the Baptists of the South”. A writer was secured, a manuscript submitted, and a project dissolved. The manuscript submitted in 1919, deemed unsuitable, was never published. The Southern Baptist committee on the preservation of Baptist history was chaired by Floridian A. J. Holt (1847-1933).

¹⁹In his 1922 report to the Florida State Convention meeting at Gainesville, Holt gave the “Florida Baptist Historic Society” report and gave church clerks some good advice. He said a church clerk “should carry with him a tablet and a pencil.” (p. 74).

²⁰*Florida Baptist Convention Annual*, 1942, p. 82.

²¹*Florida Baptist Convention Annual*, 1944, p. 90.

²²There is not an author alive that can’t relate to Rosser in his publication deadline circumstances. The Florida Baptist annuals report that in 1944 Rosser said, “I’m late in getting a start” (p. 90). In 1945 he informed the convention the story had been “brought up to the beginning of the present century” (p. 105). In 1946 Rosser said again “it is our hope” (p. 65). In the 1947 convention report Rosser said “the volume is substantially complete” (p. 113). In 1948 Rosser said “it is now in the hands of the printers” (p. 86). The next report said the forthcoming history of Florida Baptists will “soon be in your hands” (p. 87).

The 1949 Baptist History report claimed victory with the appearance of the Rosser book, but alas, Dr. Rosser had left the state and the report had to be given by E. D. Solomon, and spoken to by Pope Duncan.

²³*Florida Baptist Convention Annual*, 1950, p. 107.

²⁴*Florida Baptist Convention Annual*, 1954, p. 33.

²⁵See convention annuals and the reports of the historical society for the Garwood years (1954-1960).

²⁶*Florida Baptist Convention Annual*, 1962, p. 110.

²⁷*Florida Baptist Convention Annual*, 1950, p. 101. This misinformation comes up again and again. In the 1969 *Annual* (p. 131) Dr. Earl Joiner states again that Dr. Garwood was the first curator. He was mistaken. It was Pope Duncan.

²⁸This celebration motif has much to offer in spreading the message of Baptist work. The Biblical Jubilee was a 50 year celebration and this was a trinity of such years for Baptist organized work in America.

²⁹This is the same Jack P. Dalton who wrote his dissertation at the University of Florida in 1952 on the history of Florida Baptists. Dr. Dalton died in 1970 in Texas where he was head of the history and political science department of Mary Hardin-Baylor College.

³⁰The *Florida Baptist Convention Annual*, 1951, (pp. 101-102) has a copy of this simple document.

³¹*Florida Baptist Convention Annual*, 1974, p. 138.

³²Earl Joiner became an authority on Baptists and the Holocaust. His own World War II military experience no doubt fed this research desire.

³³The word “consider” was a vital part of that motion. The State Board of Missions had only to “consider” the idea to be done with it. There would have been very few leaders of the Florida Baptist Convention who would have been in favor of moving the Baptist Collection to Blue Springs or Lake Yale.

³⁴In 2005 there are still display items at Lake Yale and historical documents made available at Blue Springs. There are no display cases at Blue Springs but exhibit space is always made available as needed.

³⁵For an extensive view of the work of John L. Rosser and Earl Joiner, see *The Journal of Florida Baptist Heritage*, Volume 5, Fall 2003.

³⁶Such people as E. B. Browning, Sr., E. H. Rennolds, Sr., Don Hepburn, Mark Rathel, Judith Jolly, Martha Trotter, and Earl Joiner will always be held in the highest regard by Florida Baptist researchers. Gordon Reeves, Jack Dalton, Pope Duncan, Joe David Elder, H. C. Garwood, Wiley Richards, John Rosser, Doak Campbell, and James Semple have made tremendous contributions to our body of work. Secretaries like Pat Nordman and Jan Cunningham have given hundreds of hours to research and publication for the society.



FLORIDA BAPTIST CHILDREN'S HOMES: A dream encompassing 100 years and 43,000 changed lives

Barbara Denman

*Director, Communications Department
Florida Baptist State Convention*

During its 100th year of serving the children of Florida, the Florida Baptist Children's Homes administration estimated that if all 23,000 children the Homes had ministered to since its beginning were lined up, the line would stretch more than 14 miles or 64 circles around a typical football field.

Fourteen miles of changed lives. Quite a challenge and quite an accomplishment for the people of God in Florida.

Yet bringing the fledgling agency to a multi-faceted benevolent organization was not an easy mission for the Homes' leaders.

The Homes' first superintendents and matrons faced an almost insurmountable task of raising funds to keep the home functioning, while developing children into healthy, well-adjusted adults. And as the culture and society needs changed over the years the Homes' administrators and trustees have been challenged to expand the ministry to meet needs in that constantly evolving world.

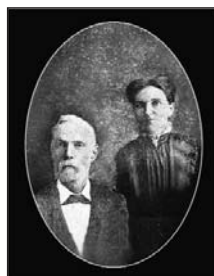
The Dream for an Orphanage—1880-1899

From almost the time of the organization of the Florida Baptist State Convention, Florida Baptists began communicating a need to provide a home for the state's homeless children. The perceived need came both from a Biblical mandate and a practical societal need. The dream came

a step closer to reality at the 1899 State Convention, when C. S. Farris, a Stetson University professor, read a resolution calling for a committee to be appointed to consider the establishment of a Baptist orphanage.¹ The subsequent committee reported in the 1900 State Convention, recommending organizational procedures for establishing the home for orphaned children.² Trustees were named, and at the 1901 State Convention, their decision to locate the orphanage in Arcadia was announced. Land and \$5,450 in funds, had been given by the citizens of Arcadia and DeSoto County for the orphanage. Enthusiasm for the venture was great, and while the opening of an orphanage was not yet possible, it was soon to become a reality.

1900-1920

The Florida Baptist Orphanage, long in the planning stage between 1880 and 1900, became a reality in 1904. By 1901, trustees had been elected and the town of Arcadia had been chosen as the location.³ The trustees acted to legally incorporate the proposed orphanage by stating its purpose was to “maintain, support and educate indigent white orphans of the state of Florida regardless of creed or nationality; to locate them in Christian families until their majority or secure their adoption.”⁴ As its name implied, the orphanage of the early Twentieth Century primarily was designed to care for children who had no parents. And a child typically would remain in the facility until they were adopted (which rarely happened) or had attained the legal age of 21 to venture into the world on his or her own. In 1904, the first building was erected on a 80-acre tract of land donated by DeSoto County pioneer John L. Jones.⁵ On February 1, 1904 the Orphanage received its first child, a little Cuban girl named Juanita Martinez.⁶ B. M. Bean, a pastor at Live Oak who had been actively involved in the effort to establish the ministry, was elected by the Orphanage trustee board to serve as superintendent. Bean’s wife served as orphanage matron, which made her responsible



“Father and
Mother Bean”

for daily food preparation, the teaching of an educational curriculum and the moral training of the children. Within a brief time, the facility was caring for several dozen children.

Following the three-day 1906 State Convention annual meeting held in Bartow, over 300 messengers boarded the train to travel to Arcadia to visit the orphanage for a dedication service. The *Fort Myers Press* newspaper reported on the event noting, "The children furnished the music, and few eyes were dry as the little orphans sang 'Count Your Blessings.'" At the close of the service, the Baptists present were invited to make a financial pledge to the orphanage ministry. The newspaper account observed, "Then occurred a sight seldom seen anywhere," as people lined up to sign financial pledges, which finally totaled \$1,130.⁷

Much of the acreage owned by the Orphanage was used as farm land to provide food for the Orphanage residents. The boys were taught to work on the farm, in the garden and in the grove. Each year more land was cleared and put into food production. While the boys worked outside, the girls shared the indoor tasks of clothes washing, ironing and house cleaning. The children's chores not only made the orphanage self-sufficient, but it helped to instill into the children a sense of responsibility, personal achievement, and being a part of a family.⁸ During



Children on the porch-Arcadia

the ensuing years, the need for an orphanage was affirmed by the influx of children, between the ages of 3 and 10. By 1908 the orphanage housed 53 children and a two-story second building was constructed. A year later construction was begun on a third building.⁹ When Superintendent Bean died in 1912, the orphanage was in good condition and 75 children were receiving care.¹⁰

In 1912, J. E. Trice became superintendent, bringing to the position seven years experience working in a Baptist orphanage in St. Charles, Louisiana. The coming of Trice marked a transition in educational

philosophy. The former emphasis upon basic education, character development, and spiritual training—which were dominant with the Beans—was revamped to place more stress on vocational training. It is not that Trice neglected the basics. Rather, Trice believed the children’s education needed to be supplemented with more practical training. The number of children receiving care continued to increase which outstripped available financial resources, and caused a reported deficit of \$962.57 by 1914.¹¹ The failure of contributions to keep pace with the expanding needs of the Orphanage, was due in part to the economic adversity in Florida. Not the least of which was the impact of widespread crop failures upon the state’s agriculture-based economy. However, two other factors may have affected the economic status of the orphanage. For one thing, Trice was sometimes accused of being a poor manager because he did not operate the orphanage on a strictly “cash-basis.” He often purchased needed things for the orphanage when there were no funds immediately available. Often Trice would have to solicit individuals or churches to provide the money for materials and supplies already purchased. But most times he depended on the financial credit he could secure from local merchants. And it may have been the slow repayment of these accounts that affected some of the Baptist public’s perception of Trice.



Mr. & Mrs. J. E. Trice

However, what may have been more damaging to the Orphanage’s financial stability was the scandal that developed after anonymous letters questioning Trice’s character were received by notable Florida Baptist leaders.¹² For example, an anonymous letter from St. Charles, Louisiana, to the trustee chairman made three unsubstantiated charges against the superintendent. The letter contended Trice would steal money, alleged that he hated boys and had been tried in court for beating an orphan. The letter also suggested that Trice was guilty of improper behavior with girls and women.¹³ Although the letter was not

widely disseminated, it fueled rumors that almost certainly affected the confidence many Baptists had in the administration of the Orphanage and hurt its financial support. An investigation by the trustees, found no merit to the accusations, and later the State Convention approved a resolution affirming Trice and his work.¹⁴ Unfortunately the negative rumors continued to spread and may have been responsible for at least one life-threatening event. On January 3, 1916, an attempt was made on Trice's life when a shotgun blast was fired through a window of the Orphanage. Trice, who has been standing at the window, turned just in time to escape death, although he did suffer five buckshot to the head and neck. The attempt on Trice's life remains a mystery to this day.¹⁵

In light of all that had occurred, it probably should not have been a surprise to anyone that Superintendent Trice's report described 1916 as a year of problems. Yet the report didn't dwell on his personal situation, rather it cited several almost uncontrollable factors. These included a decline in donations, increase in operating costs and crop failures. Of course, other State Convention agencies and institutions encountered similar financial difficulties. It is no wonder that at the end of the year a debt of \$1,378.48 was reported. The following January 1917, the State Board authorized a special fund solicitation campaign to help the orphanage regain its financial footing.¹⁶ Despite its continuing operating debt for the next several years, Trice had the unique ability to raise designated funds for any variety of new facilities and furnishings that he felt were immediately needed. To promote the orphanage and its needs, Trice published a newsletter, *The Orphan's Home*, regularly wrote a column for the *Witness*, and traveled to churches to tell the story of children's lives being changed by the orphanage ministry. Trice never let Florida Baptists forget the enormous cost of running the orphanage, and he continually found new ways to dramatize the problems he constantly faced. As an example, in one *Witness* article Trice reported that a typical dinner for 100 children required four bushels of green beans, one bushel of Irish potatoes, 14 fried chickens, four gallons of blackberries, one four-dollar roast, 42 loaves of bread, eight gallons of soup, and 36 cans of beans.¹⁷

1921-1940

Following the suggestion of the Orphanage Workers Conference, meeting at the time of the Southern Baptist Convention in May 1921, the Florida Baptist State Convention changed the name of its institution for homeless children from Florida Baptist Orphanage to Florida Baptist Children's Home. A basic reason for the change was that many children who needed and received care were not orphans, but children from homes broken by separation, divorce, or other tragedies.¹⁸ In 1922, a bequest of \$3,836 made possible the construction of a new building which provided a steam laundry and dormitory space for fifteen girls. The Home, still located in Arcadia, made progress in many ways, caring for 111 children. Unfortunately, it also was in debt, and the size of the debt increased steadily. The successful completion of Florida's part in the Seventy-five Million Campaign in 1924 eased the situation somewhat, reducing the indebtedness to \$8,754 from \$19,000. The money raised in the Seventy-five Million Campaign was divided between State and Southern Baptist mission causes, and the Children's Home received 10 percent of the funds allocated to Florida. The campaign was a forerunner to the Cooperative Program, which when begun in 1925, allocated a portion of its funds to the Home. Special appeals brought in many special gifts. In 1926 a boys' dormitory was built to care for the growing number of children, almost 200 in 1927. However, the contributions never brought in enough cash to reduce the indebtedness.¹⁹ The Home's economic distress was complicated further by the rumors that continued to spread about the character of superintendent J.E. Trice.²⁰ The rumors persisted and probably affected contributions. The State Board of Missions investigated the rumors in 1927, found no basis for them, and reaffirmed confidence in Superintendent Trice.²¹ In any case the debt increased, and the Home's situation was the subject of extensive discussion and debate at the 1928 State Convention.²² By the end of 1929 the debt had increased to \$16,875.²³ During the same year the DeSoto County School Board took over the responsibility of operating the school for the Home, making possible a saving of \$25,000 per year. Other costs, however, continued to increase the deficit.

In 1931, Trice resigned and the situation appeared hopeless, but the Home's Board of Trustees and the State Board of Missions, not willing to give up, asked Dr. J. Harrison Griffin to take a three-months leave of absence from his pastorate in Winter Haven and direct a campaign to raise money and pay off the debts. The campaign was given front page publicity in the *Witness*, and Griffin declared his intention to visit every section of the state. The debt then stood at \$45,000.²⁴ Traveling over the state, Griffin soon raised over \$30,000. Because of the Depression, Griffin persuaded many of the creditors to settle for half of what was owed them. Consequently, the Home was saved from what appeared to be certain disaster.²⁵

T. M. Johns was elected as superintendent in 1932, and the future looked very bright. He and Mrs. Johns were teachers and well qualified for the work. In 1938, the Home's Trustees employed the first case worker, Miss Lora Baldwin, whose assistance in investigating applications made possible more efficient work.²⁶



T. M. Johns and girls

Johns assumed leadership of a Florida Baptist Children's Home still reeling from the economic disasters of the Great Depression. Feeding, clothing and educating 120-plus children was not an easy task when more than 15 million Americans—one-quarter of the nation's workforce—were unemployed. Added to that, Johns found that the Children's Home's credit from local businesses in Arcadia had been withdrawn due to lack of payment. Johns refused to borrow money. He reversed the financial problems by using creative conservative practices and only borrowed money when he knew there were funds to cover the expenses. When the local businesses learned to trust the Johns family, they saw the value of allowing the Home to reopen an account.²⁷

Income from wills, bequests, individual gifts and support from the Florida Baptist Convention began accelerating—including 10 percent of the Cooperative Program gifts in 1932²⁸—during the early years of the Johns era, and contributed to the on-going strength of the Children's Home.

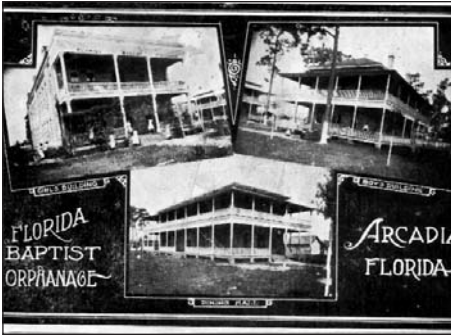
Another achievement during the first five years of the Johns administration was the transferring of Home children to public schools instead of the Home school where they were taught by the matron and teachers. As former public school teachers, T.M. and Susie Johns believed the Home's children would benefit from attending public schools. The school superintendent opposed Susie Johns' request, explaining that the children would not be accepted in the public schools. But Susie Johns, a formidable opponent, disagreed and informed the superintendent that the children would be there on Monday morning and she would be with them. On that day, the children were admitted to the classrooms.²⁹ The youngsters seemed to thrive in the new school environment.

During the years between 1942 and 1948, consideration was given to relocating the Children's Home from Arcadia to Lakeland. The reasons for the move are not altogether clear, but the transition was difficult for the townspeople of Arcadia who had supported the institution in good and lean times. The Home pumped thousands of dollars each year into the town's economy. Thus, the town and the Home were emotionally and economically bound.³⁰ At the Convention's January 1944 session, Ed Solomon, editor of the *Florida Baptist Witness* moved that a committee of 15 be appointed to study the Children's Home and make recommendation for the future.³¹

The citizens of Arcadia, distressed that the Home might leave its town, made an all-out effort to keep the home there. They sought to persuade the committee and sent a telegram with 100 signatures expressing opposition to the move. When that failed, the Arcadia group, composed of members of First Baptist Church, filed an injunction suit in circuit court. The efforts to stop the move and sale of the property failed.³²

During this time, an incident occurred at the home that may have strained relations with the town. Apparently an audit reported \$1,000

unaccounted for in the Children's Clothing Fund, which had been administered by assistant superintendent Susie Johns. In response to the report, the trustee's executive committee made a preliminary



Orphanage at Arcadia 1912

investigation and temporarily relieved her of duties and forbade her from coming on campus.³³ T. M. Johns offered to resign over the conflict, but the board absolved him of any guilt. After two months and further investigation, Mrs. Johns was reinstated.

When learning of her reinstatement, some of the employees announced that they

planned to go on strike in protest, signing a petition. After Mrs. Johns returned to the Home, all of the employees were relieved of their duties.³⁴ In later years, John E. Johns, son of T. M. and Susie Johns who later served as president of Stetson and Furman Universities, offered an explanation of the shortfall, suggesting that it was actually a bookkeeping error and poor record keeping on Susie Johns' part.³⁵

Several Florida communities vied for the Children's Home, including DeLand, Jacksonville, Lakeland, Ocala, Orlando and Zellwood. But Lakeland's offer of 53 acres of land on Lake Hunter and a residence valued at \$25,000 in addition to \$40,000 in cash could not be refused.³⁶

In January 1948, construction of the new campus was completed and 100 children, intermediate and senior boys and girls were moved into the new buildings. Early 1949, the nursery building was constructed and the move completed.³⁷ Moving to Lakeland, the Children's Home was now more centrally located—and visible—to Florida Baptists. The move also represented a shift from a rural environment to a more metropolitan location with its proximity to Tampa.

In the early 1950s, trustees of the Children's Home considered the possibility of opening a branch home in Miami, at the request of Miami Baptists. In 1955, five acres of land five miles south of downtown in

Kendall were offered by the Allapatah Baptist Church. Construction of cottages began in 1956 and was completed in 1957.³⁸

During this same time frame, the nature of child care began to change, brought on by vast social changes, including the rising divorce rate. In the early history of the Home, the administration took only full orphans; then later they took children with one parent living, but no children from homes broken by divorce. Beginning in this decade the children received from homes broken by separation, desertion or divorce made up the majority of enrollment. This shift in the childcare also required the Children's Home staff to be better trained to work with these troubled children and to prepare their families for the children's eventual return to their homes. Johns placed more emphasis on hiring trained social workers with graduate degrees and training non-professional staff.³⁹

Johns was among the pioneers in children's home work to make the transition from dormitory-style living arrangements to small family-style cottages, and from separating sexes in the buildings to coeducational cottages with house parents. Concerned with criticism that would come from placing boys and girls together in a communal living, the Johns approached the transition slowly and quietly. They discovered that in this new environment, the children had better relationships with others and acted more like a normal family. By 1969, this custom became standard procedure and other children's homes were following their example.⁴⁰

In 1969, the Convention approved a change in the Children's Home policy to accept children regardless of race. The change was a long time in coming. Although the first child admitted to the Home was a Cuban girl, no black child had ever been admitted. Earlier in the Johns administration, the board had instructed the superintendent to look into the possibility of establishing a home for Black children. But evidently nothing was done.⁴¹ And when the Supreme Court decision on desegregation was handed down in 1954 to integrate public schools, the board and Johns did not view it as applicable to the Home. In subsequent years, the Home began receiving government funds for the care of veterans' children and referrals of children from the state of

Florida. That led to the 1969 policy shift. Even under state pressure, it was the end of 1973 before the first black child was admitted and doors were opened to all, regardless of race.⁴²

On June 30, 1969 after 37 years, T. M. and Susie Johns retired, having invested in the future of hundreds of children in crisis, caring for their physical and spiritual needs and emulating Christ's love.

1970-1990

After the retirement of T. M. and Susie Johns, in 1969 Roger Dorsett, who had served the Miami's Children's Home, first as a case worker and then as manager, was named superintendent of the Florida Baptist Children's Home and moved to Lakeland. The Mississippi native also had been employed as a worker at the Lakeland Home from 1961 to 1964 before serving in Miami. While there, he received a certificate in social work from Florida State University. The newly elected superintendent continued many of the same practices as T. M. Johns—providing quality training for the Homes' employees and creating a normal and happy life as possible for the children.⁴³ However, there were hints of financial problems when he was brought on board, some believed to have stemmed from the Johns' administration. By 1970, 40 percent of the Home's support came from Cooperative Program gifts, thereby making the Home responsible for raising the remaining 60 percent from individual gifts, churches, groups, bequests and investments.⁴⁴ T. M. and Susie Johns had been a public relations asset, popular with Florida Baptist churches and organizations. T. M. Johns had served as president of the Florida Baptist State Convention in 1965. Dorsett was not as well known and therefore had more difficulty raising funds.⁴⁵

Help came with the start of the annual Mother's Day Offering benefiting the home. Throughout the Home's history, Florida Baptists had received several special offerings to benefit its ministry. In 1970, the State Board of Missions authorized the Home to promote and receive a special offering annually on Mother's Day.⁴⁶ Known as the Mother's Day Offering, the annual ingathering would become a

financial lifeline for the Home, raising as much as a million dollars annually before the turn of the Century.

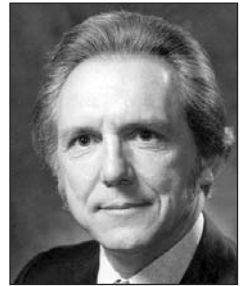
While in Miami, Dorsett proposed the creation of a halfway house to help children make the transition between life at the Home and life in society. He continued this idea when he moved to Lakeland, designating a cottage to serve as an emergency shelter for dependent or neglected children and an intake cottage for those newly admitted children. Unfortunately, the cottage was closed almost immediately after it was opened due to the building not meeting fire regulations. But Dorsett's idea would continue to be a need in the Home's ministry.⁴⁷

First Baptist Church of Tallahassee expressed an interest in 1970 in having a branch campus of the Children's Home in Tallahassee and offered to help acquire land for the facility. Working out details of the purchase of the land took three years. But by August 1, 1973, the branch home was open with a resident director, seven children and potential space for 14 children. With this, the Home was located in three sites across the state and Tallahassee became the focal point for service to children in the West Florida area.⁴⁸

During Dorsett's tenure two long-range planning studies were conducted at the request of the trustees of the Children's Home. One study considered moving the Lakeland campus to another location to capitalize on the escalating costs of property near the current Children's Home site. The second dealt with the effectiveness of the child care and public perception of the Children's Home. Consideration of the plans' recommendations began creating tension between the trustees, administration and staff.⁴⁹ As a result, several strained board meetings were held in 1973. Dorsett resigned in February 1974 to become a pastor in Alabama.⁵⁰

When Dorsett resigned, the trustees turned to Walter Delamarter, who had served as director of Christian Social Work at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, for 11 years.⁵¹ Within the first year, Delamarter addressed many issues, including declining income; inadequate public relations; needed renovations in Lakeland and Miami campuses; unresolved questions over moving the Lakeland campus and the need to reopen the emergency shelter.⁵² Trustees and the

administration affirmed their commitment to keep the Home in its Lakeland location and approved renovation of outdated buildings. Delamarter employed a person to assess the Home's business and financial picture and Richard Phillips as the director of promotion, responsible for public relations and fundraising campaigns. The emergency shelter was reopened with a capacity for eight children who were allowed to stay there for up to 30 days.⁵³



Walter Delamarter

Progress continued through Delamarter's second year which saw an increase in the Mother's Day Offering from \$31,935 to \$46,805 over the previous year. The Home established an area office in Pensacola to serve children in the West Florida area. The long range plan, proposed by Dorsett in 1973, was modified and further developed.⁵⁴ Subsequent years under Delamarter's supervision showed growth, both in financial gifts through public relations campaigns and the number of children being served at all the homes combined.

The Home noted its 75th anniversary with a year-long celebration in 1978 and 1979 that concluded with a banquet in Lakeland for Baptist and community leaders. The number of children being cared for by the homes also increased to 150 in residence, 42 in foster homes, 154 served in the emergency shelter and 65 in aftercare.⁵⁵

That year, the home entered into an agreement with the Florida Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services (HRS) to assist the state in its child care program by caring for children referred by that agency. HRS agreed to pay a stated amount per child per day. The result of that agreement provided the Home with a new mission opportunity to minister to non-Baptist children and improved the financial picture considerably.⁵⁶

To more accurately reflect its practice of serving children in facilities across the state, the Trustees in 1979 changed the home's name from Florida Baptist Children's Home to Florida Baptist Children's Homes.⁵⁷

1980-2000

In 1981, Delamarter's declining health became an issue and remained so until he retired in 1984. Richard Phillips was named as associate executive director to handle business during Delamarter's illness⁵⁸ and succeeded him as executive director. Richard Phillips began his work as executive director in 1984 with a decade of experience in various capacities at the Children's Homes. He was familiar with the administration, operations and constituency of the home. Phillips immediately developed a five-year plan and recommended to the trustees a statement of the basic mission of the Homes which would provide a basis for this plan.⁵⁹ The statement adopted by the Board read:

"In its Christian consciousness, the Florida Baptist Children's Homes see the purpose of ministry as the redemption of the child and family. This ministry included the expression of love and wisdom in evangelism, missions and education with a constructive attitude toward problems and the intellectual and spiritual growth of children and youth toward manhood and womanhood."⁶⁰



Richard Phillips

Phillips' plan had numerous features and demonstrated how far the ministry had expanded for Florida's needy children: continuing existing programs, expanding foster care network; adding group homes in Fort Myers and two other locations to be determined; creating of foster homes for pregnant, unwed mothers; developing four area social work offices in conjunction with new group homes; and expanding family services through more counseling, referrals and preventative ministries.⁶¹ An indication of how the Homes' ministry had evolved since its beginnings can be seen in its 1985 statistics. The Homes ministered to 425 children, 234 families and additional 120 families through family counseling. Forms of service included residential child care in Lakeland, Miami and Tallahassee; emergency shelter care in Lakeland and Tallahassee; foster homes across the state; a group home near

Okeechobee; and continuing education and other after care services; adoptions, family counseling and referrals.⁶² The ministry further expanded in 1987 when a residential treatment program for emotionally disturbed children was opened on the Lakeland campus and a group home in Fort Myers was opened in partnership with the Royal Palm Baptist Association.⁶³

The trustees began considering merging of the Florida Baptist Retirement Center at Vero Beach with the Children's Homes in 1987 at the suggestion of the State Board of Missions. Negotiations were completed in 1988 and a joint recommendation was presented during the Florida Baptist State Convention in November. Messengers approved the merger beginning in Jan. 1 1989 and changed the name of the Children's Homes to Florida Baptist Family Ministries, Inc., demonstrating that the institution would minister to families in difficulty through every stage of the life cycle.⁶⁴ The merger was actually short lived. In 1996, Family Ministries turned over the responsibility of the Retirement Center to the Florida Baptist Financial Services. Prior to dissolving the merger, however, a \$1.7 million expansion was completed at the retirement home to double the capacity for residents.⁶⁵

After serving the Family Ministries for ten years as president, Richard Phillips was forced to resign by the trustees February 7, 1994. The resignation came after the conclusion of a day long "executive session" where several staff members of the agency were interviewed. The statement from the trustees said the resignation was prompted by a difference in "philosophies concerning growth, maintenance of the programs, financial management and management techniques."⁶⁶

The agency's current financial woes had become public when trustees announced a second round of budget cuts, totaling \$865,000, which forced the termination of 20 employees, displaced several children and temporarily closed residences. In September 1993, trustees learned of an expected \$227,000 budget shortfall and agreed to suspend services to residents in the Northwest Florida Children's Home. That information coupled with a confrontation between Phillips and a staff member led to the called meeting of the trustees that resulted in Phillips' forced termination.⁶⁷

With Phillips's departure, the trustees again promoted from within, electing Charles Hodges to lead the Florida Baptist Family Ministries (as it was known during this time frame) in November, 1994. Hodges had served the agency since 1984 and after Phillips' exit was named as acting director. Prior to his service in Florida, Hodges had worked for the Baptist Children's Homes of North Carolina and served as pastor of two North Carolina churches.⁶⁸ During the trustees meeting where he was elected, Hodges announced that the Mothers' Day Offering for the Children's Homes stood at \$662,000, just shy of the \$675,000 goal, which at the time represented a tenth of the home's income.⁶⁹



Charles Hodges

Working to overcome its budget shortfall, the agency under Hodges' leadership borrowed \$300,000 and was given \$100,000 by the State Board of Missions to help pay off the loan. That year, the finances finished the year in the black. And in 1995, the \$300,000 loan was paid off. In the three years that followed, each of the cottages that had been closed was reopened.⁷⁰

The agency reclaimed its former name, "Florida Baptist Children's Homes," in 1999 in response to the transfer of the Retirement Center three years earlier. The Mother's Day Offering hit the \$1 million mark that year, a cause for celebration.⁷¹

That year, a merger between the Children's Homes and The Baptist Home for Children in Jacksonville was completed. The merger was proposed by the Jacksonville-based home which had operated for 72 years under the direction of the Jacksonville, Northeast Florida and Black Creek Baptist associations. While mergers had been discussed before, negotiations were never completed in earlier years. In 1999, 50 children were being served by the Jacksonville home.⁷² Provisions of the merger agreement stipulated that the Florida Baptist Children's Homes would assume all responsibilities for all the Jacksonville home's assets and liabilities. Known assets of the Jacksonville Home included 50-plus prime acres in the city of Jacksonville, five residence halls, a full-size gymnasium and a swimming pool. The campus and facilities were

valued at \$8 to 10 million. Also a \$2 million endowment was earmarked for the ministry. The only known liabilities consisted of a lease agreement with the gym.⁷³

2000-2005

At the turn of the 21st Century, the Florida Baptist Children's Homes continued to grow and reassess needs of children in crisis. A partnership with First Baptist Church of Niceville, community leaders and the Florida Department of Children and Families resulted in opening a group home in Niceville to provide emergency shelter for infants and preschoolers.⁷⁴ In April 2001, a new 20-acre campus was opened in Pensacola. A portion of the Miami campus, measuring 1.3 acres, was sold to neighboring Wayside Church for \$250,000 that year. After receiving a \$350,000 grant from the Convention, the Homes used \$600,000 to renovate their campuses.

After serving for eight years, Hodges retired May 1, 2002. When he was named as president, the financial picture of the Children's Homes was bleak—three residences had been closed; staff positions had been cut; and a \$300,000 debt had been incurred. Hodges was given high marks for pulling the Children's Homes out of its financial crisis. At the time of Hodges' retirement, John Sullivan, executive director-treasurer of the Florida Baptist Convention, noted that Hodges had become president during a time of unrest and instability at the Children's Homes. "Because of his leadership and integrity, neither condition any longer exists. The Children's Homes are sound theologically and financially as a result of Mr. Hodges' fine management."⁷⁵

Improvements during his tenure included: reopening of closed residences; purchase of property for a Northwest campus with its first residence built and paid for; reaching 800 children and families with its services; and increasing its annual income from \$5 million to nearly \$10 million. Also, foster care services were added in Northeast Florida and Broward County; two additional houses were purchased for the Lakeland campus; and the Mother's Day Offering once again surpassed the \$1 million in 2001.

When finding a new president, this time the trustees went outside the Home's current staff and elected Jimmy McAdams as the eighth president of the Florida Baptist Children's Homes on March 25, 2002. A native of Harrelson County, Georgia, McAdams had served as president of Connie Maxwell Children's Home in Greenwood, South Carolina, from 1993 to 2002 and on the Georgia Children's Home staff from 1985-1993. An ordained pastor, he is the author of *Baptist Children's Homes in America: A First Hand Look*.⁷⁷ In his first address to the Florida Baptist State Convention on Nov. 12, 2002, McAdams reported that the three most asked questions about the ministry are: "How are the children doing?" "How are you doing financially?" "What do you need?" He answered the first question by reporting that 813 children and 70 developmentally disabled adults currently received nurturing by the agency. Secondly, he told messengers that the agency was operating on a pay-as-you go approach; On the third, he summed up, "Your prayers."⁷⁸



Jimmy McAdams

In 2004, the Children's Homes celebrated its Centennial anniversary, having served the people and children of Florida for 100 years. The agency had grown from 23 children being served in a two-story facility in Arcadia in 1904 to caring for 770 children on six campuses throughout the state.⁷⁹

In addition to its residential facilities, the agency provided a statewide network of Christian foster homes for the care of infants, preschoolers, sibling groups and children with unique needs. The Homes also ministered to pregnant teenagers and developmentally delayed adults. In addition, the agency had committed support for the Florida Baptist State Convention's emphasis on Sanctity of Human Life, providing a staff specialist to work with pastors, churches and pregnancy care centers to prevent abortions.⁸⁰ The staff of the Children's Homes estimated that in its 100 years, the agency had ministered to 23,000 children-and if they were lined up, the line would stretch more than 14 miles or 64 circles around a typical football field.⁸¹

In celebration of the Centennial, Florida Governor Jeb Bush signed a proclamation honoring the agency and the Florida Legislature adopted a resolution commending it “for its outstanding support of and contributions to the lives of Florida’s children on this its 100th anniversary.”⁸² That summer, 279 Children’s Homes’ residents, staff, trustees and special guests came together June 20-23 for a historic retreat at Lake Yale Baptist Conference Center. The 139 children represented campuses in Miami, Fort Myers, Lakeland, Jacksonville, Tallahassee and Pensacola. It was the first time the entire statewide ministry assembled in one location since the homes opened its second campus in 1958.⁸³

The dream of an orphanage that was begun in the late 19th Century had become a reality in the past 100 years. And shaped by needs of children in an ever-changing culture, the Florida Baptist Children’s Home had become an entity that only God could have planned.

¹*Florida Baptist State Convention Minutes*, 1899, p. 20.

²John L. Rosser, *A History of Florida Baptists*, (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1949), p. 248.

³*Florida Baptist State Convention Annual*, 1901, p. 56

⁴E. Earl Joiner, *Florida Baptist Children’s Homes: A History of Caring*, (Lakeland, FL.: Florida Baptist Children’s Homes, 1995), p. 19.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 18

⁶*Florida Baptist Convention Annual*, 1904, pp. 28-29; also see Joiner, p. 21.

⁷G. T. Raymond, *The Fort Myers Press*, January 26, 1906, p.4.

⁸Joiner, p. 25.

⁹*Florida Baptist Convention Annual*, 1905, p. 65; also see Joiner, pp. 26-27.

¹⁰*Florida Baptist Convention Annual*, 1912, p. 60.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 1914, p. 49.

¹²W.A. Hobson, “The Trice Trouble,” *Florida Baptist Witness*, Dec. 16, 1915.

¹³Joiner, p. 37.

¹⁴*Florida Baptist Convention Annual*, 1915-16, pp. 34-35.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 32.

¹⁶State Board of Missions *Minutes*, Jan. 11, 1917.

¹⁷*Florida Baptist Witness*, July 4, 1918.

¹⁸Rosser, op. cit., p. 258.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 262-267.

²⁰*Florida Baptist State Convention Annual*, 1915-16, pp. 34-35.

²¹State Board of Missions *Minutes*, Jan. 4, 1927.

²²*Florida Baptist Convention Annual*, 1928, p. 87; cf. J. E. Trice, "Baptist Children's Home in Arcadia in Great Need of Funds," *Florida Baptist Witness*, July 5, 1928.

²³Rosser, p. 264.

²⁴*Florida Baptist Witness*, Dec. 31, 1931

²⁵Interview with J. Harrison Griffin, June, 1969.

²⁶Rosser, p. 273.

²⁷Joiner, p. 100.

²⁸*Florida Baptist State Convention Annual*, 1936, pp. 88ff.

²⁹*Florida Baptist State Convention Annual*, 1935, p. 23ff

³⁰Joiner, p. 113

³¹*Florida Baptist State Convention Annual*, 1944, pp. 24ff

³²"Baptist Children's Home Being Moved From Arcadia to New Site at Lakeland," *The Arcadian*, July 15, 1948.

³³"Nine Employees at Orphanage Go On Strike," *The Arcadian*, October 28, 1943.

³⁴*Ibid.*

³⁵Joiner, p. 117.

³⁶Trustees, September 2, 1945.

³⁷Trustees, May 15, 1949; also Joiner, p. 125.

³⁸*Florida Baptist State Convention Annual*, 1956, pp. 91ff.

³⁹*Florida Baptist State Convention Annual*, 1953, pp. 87-89.

⁴⁰*Florida Baptist State Convention Annual*, 1961, pp. 115-118; also Joiner, p. 146

⁴¹Joiner, p. 153-155

⁴²Trustees, December 14, 1973; see also Joiner, p. 193.

⁴³Joiner, p. 180.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, p. 182.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, p. 183.

⁴⁶State Board of Missions, *Minutes*, May 5-6, 1970; *Florida Baptist State Convention Annual*, 1970, pp. 44, 79.

⁴⁷Joiner, p. 185-186.

⁴⁸*Florida Baptist State Convention Annual*, 1974, p. 130.

⁴⁹Joiner, pg. 194.

⁵⁰*Florida Baptist Convention Annual*, 1974, p. 129.

⁵¹*Ibid.*

⁵²Joiner, pg. 200.

⁵³*Florida Baptist State Convention Annual*, 1974, p. 129

⁵⁴Joiner, pg. 205.

⁵⁵*Florida Baptist State Convention Annual*, 1974, p. 129.

⁵⁶*Florida Baptist State Convention Annual*, 1979, pg. 30.

⁵⁷Trustees, September, 14, 1979; also Joiner, p. 216.

⁵⁸Trustees, June 18, 1981; also Joiner, p. 219

⁵⁹Joiner, pg. 228.

⁶⁰*Florida Baptist State Convention Annual*, 1985, p. 149.

⁶¹Joiner, pg. 228.

⁶²*Florida Baptist State Convention Annual*, 1985, p. 149.

⁶³Joiner, pg., 229.

⁶⁴State Board of Missions, *Minutes*, September 9, 1988.

⁶⁵Epilogue, *Florida Baptist Children's Homes: A History of Caring*, Centennial Edition, (Lakeland, FL.: Florida Baptist Children's Homes, 1995), p. 247.

⁶⁶"Family Ministries Trustees Fire President," *Florida Baptist Witness*, February 10, 1994.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*

⁶⁸"Hodges Elected to Lead Family Ministries" *Florida Baptist Witness*, November 10, 1994.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*

⁷⁰Epilogue, p. 249.

⁷¹*Ibid.*, p. 250.

⁷²Barbara Denman and Michael Chute, State Board Approves Ministry Expansions, *Florida Baptist Witness*, September 17, 1998.

⁷³*Ibid.*

⁷⁴*Ibid.*

⁷⁵Janice Backer, "Hodges Announces Retirement from Children's Homes," *Florida Baptist Witness*, August 2, 2001.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*

⁷⁷Janice Backer, “Jimmy McAdams, Head of S.C. Children’s Home to lead FBCH,” *Florida Baptist Witness*, March 28, 2002, page 7.

⁷⁸“Children’s Homes President Reports 883 ‘receive nurturing,’” *Florida Baptist Witness*, November 21, 2002.

⁷⁹Carolyn Nichols, “Children’s Homes Celebrate Centennial,” *Florida Baptist Witness*, May 6, 2004.

⁸⁰*Ibid.*

⁸¹Jimmy McAdams, “768-plus Reasons to Reach Goal,” *Florida Baptist Witness*, May 6, 2004.

⁸²Nichols, “Children’s Homes Celebrate Centennial.” Op. cit.

⁸³Gary Kimler, “Children’s Homes Marks Centennial with Historic Retreat.” *Florida Baptist Witness*, May 6, 2004.



FLORIDA BAPTIST WITNESS: From humble beginnings to Convention ownership

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Legendary missionary advocate Luther Rice began the first Baptist news journal, *The Columbian Star*, the forerunner of the Georgia Baptist *The Christian Index*, in 1822.¹ The first issue contained a delineation of the purposes of the editors in establishing the paper. First, the editors designed the *Star* to be “an authentick [sic] repository of Missionary and other religious intelligence.” Second, the editors desired to inculcate “sound theological doctrines and pure moral precepts.” Third, they purposed to present “a compendious summary of the passing tidings of the times,” in other words, to present the news in light of a Christian worldview.² Since the inception of Baptist news journals in Florida, these same principles functioned as the guidelines for Florida Baptist journalism.

As in other areas of denominational development, such as education and missions, Florida Baptist languished behind their neighboring state conventions in establishing a state Baptist news journal.

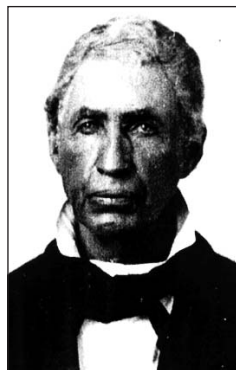
Forerunners of *The Florida Baptist Witness*

The American Home Missions Society commissioned James McDonald, a former spy against England, Irish terrorist, and candidate for Catholic priesthood, as a missionary to Florida in 1843. McDonald successfully planted churches in north Florida, including the church now known as First Baptist Church of Jacksonville. McDonald experienced less success as a Baptist journalist.

For several years beginning in 1848, he published the *Baptist Telegraph and Florida Emigrant*. The paper succumbed to financial pressure arising from the small number of Baptists in Florida at the time.

During a period in which Baptist life languished the Committee of Publication of the Santa Fe Baptist Association recommended in 1872 the establishment of a Baptist news journal in Florida based on the condition the paper included an agricultural department.³ The association chose H. B. McCallum, pastor in Lake City, as editor of *The Florida Baptist*. In addition to serving as pastor in Lake City, McCallum operated a small secular press. McCallum studied at East Tennessee University, Union University, the hotbed of the Landmark movement, and the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Greenville, South Carolina. During the Civil War, he served as a chaplain and participated in the revival of the army of North Virginia. Bronchial problems led his doctor to recommend relocation to Florida; he arrived in Florida in 1867.⁴

The Florida Baptist Convention approved the establishment of a privately-owned paper in the November 1872 session with the suggestion that the paper employ two regional associate editors. McCallum agreed to print the paper on his printing press and edit the work for free.⁵ After two years the paper ceased publication because of financial pressure. During a recuperative visit to Tennessee in 1874, McCallum's attempt to develop interest in the Florida Baptist led to the development of the *Tennessee Baptist Reflector*.⁶



James McDonald

Organized Southern Baptist life in Florida progressed with the advent of the State Board of Missions and the ministry of W. N. Chaudoin as corresponding secretary beginning in 1880. Samuel Boykin claimed that Chaudoin “is not by any means a man of learning or of extraordinary parts.”⁷ Chaudoin contributed regularly to *The Christian Index* as an agent of the Domestic Mission Board serving in south Georgia. Lacking a state Baptist news organ, from 1880 to 1883 Chaudoin promoted the work of Florida Baptists through a one-page section entitled “The Florida Index” in *The Christian Index* of Georgia Baptists.

The Birth of the Florida Baptist Witness

Florida Baptists leaders realized the shortcomings of promoting Baptist work in Florida by means of the Georgia Baptist newspaper. The impetus for the birth of the *Witness* developed as a result of the Florida Baptist State Convention election of a committee of twelve to promote an educational institution for ladies. One of the twelve, B. F. Moodie, a former president of a female college in Kentucky, realized that the state convention needed a newspaper to promote the educational cause.



W. N. Chaudoin

Moodie committed himself financially to the establishment of the paper. Further, through his influence the State Board of Missions pledged support for his paper located in Lake City. Corresponding Secretary W. N. Chaudoin named the paper *The Florida Baptist Witness*.⁸ B. F. Moodie lacked journalistic experience and he enlisted the help of A. P. Ashurst of Columbia, Alabama, the owner of a secular press.⁹ Together Moodie and Ashurst began the publication of the *Witness* in January 1884. The first printed *Witness*, although

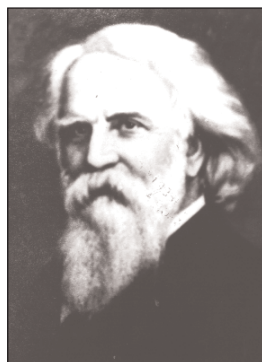
privately published, proclaimed itself in large letters as “The Organ of the Florida Baptist.” Further, the paper notified readers of the intent of the paper to be an outspoken exponent of the Old Baptist Faith.¹⁰ The editors hoped to promote “Intelligence, Virtue and Religion” in the

readers. The editors developed nine departments, including weekly sermons and a regular department containing reports of general agriculture and fruit-growing. The editors promised to provide able writers to review current news in the light of prophecy."¹¹

Private Ownership: Years of Financial Struggle

The subsequent history of the *Florida Baptist Witness* is one of financial struggle and short editorships until the Florida Baptist Convention took over leadership.

The offices of the *Witness* moved to DeLand in 1885 when Henry DeLand promised \$1,000 in advertising.¹² Rev. Moodie donated his interest to the paper and Ashurst enlisted the assistance of S. M. Provence, pastor of a Baptist church of Columbus, Georgia, as editor. One month after Provence assumed half-interest in the paper, Ashurst wrote an explanation to readers concerning "an unforeseen financial difficulty has arisen which may make it necessary for Provence to revise his plans."¹³ By December 1885, Ashurst resigned and J. H. Griffith, pastor of DeLand Baptist Church and President of DeLand Academy assumed the ownership.¹⁴ Griffith, unfortunately, became sick and left the state.



Henry DeLand

After a brief editorship by N. A. Bailey, secretary of the Florida Baptist Convention, Rev. L. B. Plummer took over as the editor and manager of the *Witness* from October 1887 to March 1888. Plummer made aggressive stylistic changes in the format of the paper. Turnley characterized Plummer's editorship as a "short and weak administration." He further noted that the brethren did not appreciate Plummer's format.¹⁵ As an example of unpopular change, Plummer dropped the word "Baptist" from the title of the publication. The editor explained that economics mandated a reduction in size and the paper cost less without the word Baptist. The ever gracious Chaudoin characterized

Plummer as “a young, inexperienced, and unmarried man.”¹⁶ Plummer sold his interest in the paper to W. D. Turnley and Plummer accepted the position of pastor of the First Baptist Church of Jacksonville.

In 1888, W. D. Turnley, an Ocala lawyer, relocated the paper to his home city. A Baptist layman now owned the paper. He named his pastor Rev. C. H. Nash as editor-in-chief to avoid questions regarding the orthodoxy of the editorial positions. He employed J. C. Porter, state evangelist with the State Board of Missions, as field editor. A yellow fever epidemic and the concomitant quarantine regulations cut off the paper supply and necessitated the suspension of the paper for several months.¹⁷

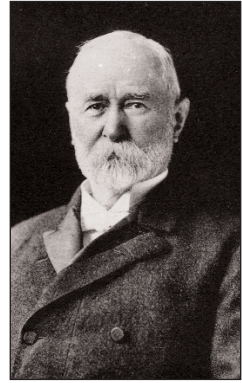
Around 1890, J. C. Porter purchased the paper and twice served as editor from 1890-1893 and 1895 to his death in 1904. Porter graduated from Bethel College in Russellville, Kentucky, and attended The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville. He ardently supported President William Whitsett in the Landmark attack against the Southern Seminary president. In addition to editing the *Witness*, Porter received remuneration from his service as Sunday School agent of the American Baptist Publication Society as well as a fund-raising agent of Stetson University. Porter employed as his assistant editor Dr. Charles Farris, vice-President of DeLand University, later Stetson University. In a later oral interview, Farris recounted that he did not always receive monetary remuneration from the paper; however, he did receive a free pass on the railroads in Florida.¹⁸

The Influence of John B. Stetson: From Rivalry to Convention Ownership

John B. Stetson nearly caused the demise of the *Florida Baptist Witness*; however, his actions resulted in the paper having a more stable financial situation and led to convention adoption of the paper. The Stetson-Forbes controversy became the precipitating factor in Stetson's involvement in the *Witness*.

In 1885, the DeLand Academy became DeLand College. The trustees asked John Forbes, professor of Latin and Greek at the State

Normal School in Rockport, New York, to become president of the new college. During Forbes' presidency, money from wealthy Northerners flowed into DeLand College, including some of the best known businessmen of the era: railroad magnate Henry Flagler, Andrew Carnegie, Massachusetts shoe manufacturer C. T. Sampson, and J. B. Conrad. The most generous benefactor, however, was John B. Stetson. In addition to scholarships and buildings, for twenty years Stetson covered the annual deficit in the operating expenses.¹⁹ Stetson gave a large cash gift to endow a chair in honor of President Forbes.



John B. Stetson

Beginning in 1901, vicious rumors began circulating about the improper relationship of President Forbes and faculty member Mrs. L. B. Mathis. John Forbes fired his accuser for embezzlement of University funds. John Stetson, as president of the Board of Trustees, hired agents and attorneys to investigate the charges. Although an investigation by the full board of trustees cleared President Forbes of charges or suspicions, Stetson apparently believed the evidence amassed against Forbes by his agents.²⁰

While serving as an agent of Stetson University under Forbes' administration, *Witness* editor J. C. Porter supported Forbes. Porter claimed that close associates or employees of Stetson comprised the minority of trustees which sought to remove Forbes from office.²¹ Porter claimed that Stetson "manifested an unchristian spirit and showed very clearly his intention to withdraw all his support from the institution."²² He further added that Stetson's action was "the saddest thing we have ever known."²³

Porter's editorial comments displeased Stetson. Stetson consequently funded a rival state paper called *The Southern Baptist* in 1903. Rev. J. B. Holley, newly arrived to Florida from his native Kentucky and pastor of the First Baptist Church, Gainesville, Florida, edited the rival paper. Holley began the paper at Gainesville in 1903 but moved the offices of the new paper to Jacksonville in early 1904. The

support of the Northern philanthropist allowed the *The Southern Baptist* to sell subscriptions fifty cents per annum cheaper than the *Florida Baptist Witness*. Ironically, Rev. Holley, a Stetson ally, received an appointment in 1904 from the Florida Baptist Convention to work with John Forbes and others to raise money the Convention promised Stetson University.

When J. C. Porter died in 1904, Dr. W. A. Hobson, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Jacksonville, and D. H. McMillian, a member of Hobson's church, purchased *The Florida Baptist Witness*. Hobson graduated from Howard College (now Samford University) and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Howard College awarded him an honorary doctorate degree. Hobson organized the annual Pastor's Conference at First Baptist Church.

The new owners moved the *Witness* from Ocala to Jacksonville. Thus, in 1904, two rival Florida Baptist publications were located in Jacksonville and both contracted with the press of *The Florida Times Union* for printing. Gordon Reeves recounted the following incident illustrative of the folly of this situation. "An amusing incident occurred in May 18, 1904, when the editorial written by Dr. Hobson and intended for his paper, *The Florida Baptist Witness*, found its way into the columns of the rival paper *The Southern Baptist*."²⁴ A printer at the *Times Union* mistakenly placed Hobson's editorial in the wrong Baptist paper.

The comedy of errors and the unlikely prospect of Florida Baptists financially supporting two rival papers led Dr. W. A. Hobson to press John Stetson for discontinuance of the *The Southern Baptist*. Stetson concurred and the two papers merged under the masthead *The Florida Baptist Witness*. W. A. Hobson served as editor and J. B. Holley served as business manager. "The policy of the consolidated paper was (1) to work for all denominational interests, (2) to uphold Stetson University and the Orphanage, and (3) to unify the Baptist people in all denominational enterprises."²⁵

The editorial policy of Hobson and Holley to unify Baptists failed to materialize in their personal relationship. After abruptly resigning from the pastorate of First Baptist Church of Gainesville in January

1904, Holley joined the First Baptist Church of Jacksonville. First Baptist Jacksonville later expelled Holley from membership for unbecoming behavior. He had a personal vendetta against the pastor. After experiencing discipline by First Baptist of Jacksonville, Holley attempted to reunite his membership with First Baptist of Gainesville. A presbytery of sixteen North Florida Baptist preachers met for six days in an attempt to arbitrate the issue. Following the advice of the presbytery, First Baptist of Gainesville requested the Jacksonville church to reconsider the expulsion. When the Jacksonville church refused to reconsider, the Gainesville church received Holley back into membership after he wrote a profuse, written apology.²⁶

Convention President George Leitner and Corresponding Secretary L. D. Geiger approached the owners of the *Witness* about convention acquisition. Half-owner John Stetson purchased Mr. McMillian's half-ownership and conveyed the *Florida Baptist Witness* to the convention trustees. Stetson, further, donated money to the Convention for the next two years to assist the *Witness* finances. Stetson's gift of the *Witness* was not without conditions. He required that the paper relocate to the Orlando area to secure lower printing costs. The Convention appointed a three member publication board to have charge of the convention paper. When the size of the paper changed to the unusual format of 10.5 by 15 inches, the printer at Orlando was unable to print the new format. The contract for the printing of the convention-owned paper shifted to the E. O. Painter Printing Company of DeLand in 1905. E. O. Painter served as a member of the convention publication board.

J. H. Tharp, publication board member, became the editor in 1906. Tharp continued his service as pastor of the First Baptist Church of Lakeland during the time of his editorship. Tharp had the courage to refuse medical advertisements which often contained objectionable content and guaranteed miraculous cures. Tharp's actions exacerbated the financial condition of the paper and he resigned as editor in 1909.

C. M. Brittain, pastor of First Baptist Church of Lake City, and Frank Edwards, pastor of Starke Baptist Church became co-editors following Tharp's resignation. Brittain graduated from Mercer University and attended The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for

one year. He later received an honorary doctorate for his service as business manager and Bible teacher at Columbia College in Lake City. On the day of his college graduation, he received an invitation from the Y.M.C.A. to minister to the army in the Spanish-American War. Interestingly, Brittain recalled that Col. Teddy Roosevelt refused to allow the soldiers to gather for religious services. Brittain later became the Executive Secretary of the Florida Baptist Convention. Edwards continued to serve as pastor at Starke during his editorship; Brittain, on the other hand, served without pay for his editorial services. Brittain recalled that “We managed to live by holding meetings and supplying pulpits.”²⁸

The new convention paper experienced rapid name change over the next several years. The consolidated paper carried the name *The Southern Baptist Witness*. After relocating to Orlando in accordance with Stetson’s desire, the paper undertook the name *The Florida Baptist* in February 1905. One month later, the paper carried the name *The Southern Witness*. In 1908, the Florida Baptist Convention ordered the name changed to the original *The Florida Baptist Witness*.

Private Ownership Part Two

Under the control of the Publication Board of the Florida Baptist Convention, the *Florida Baptist Witness* continued to operate at a deficit. Messengers to the 1912 Florida Baptist Convention agreed to assume the *Witness* debt of approximately \$1,600 until the disposition of the paper. W. D. Nowlin purchased the *Witness* from the Convention for \$2,000 later that year. W. D. Nowlin came to the position of editor as an experienced journalist. Nowlin graduated from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. While serving as pastor of the large First Baptist Church of Owensboro, he authored the *History of Kentucky Baptists*. He served as editor of the



W. D. Nowlin

Western Recorder of Kentucky. After two years, Nowlin sold the paper to a group of interested individuals from Arcadia.

The new owners hired Adoniram Judson Holt as editor in 1914. Holt was the most qualified of the early journalists. The colorful Holt remained as editor until 1918 when the Florida Baptist Convention once again purchased the *Witness*. Holt graduated from McKenzie College in Clarkesville, Texas, he earned a master's degree from Baylor University, and graduated from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Greenville, South Carolina. J. R. Graves influenced Holt to go to seminary. Holt served in the Civil War as a soldier from Louisiana. His ministerial career involved service as a missionary to the Seminole Indians in Oklahoma, state executive of Baptist work in Texas and Tennessee, and editor of the Oklahoma and Tennessee Baptist papers prior to his service as editor of the *Witness*.



A. J. Holt

Conclusion

The history of the *Florida Baptist Witness* from the beginning to Florida Baptist Convention ownership evidences several themes common to Florida Baptist history in general. First, the editorial stance of the *Witness* shifted from strong Landmarkism to more mainstream Baptist life. Second, mirroring the progress of Florida Baptists, in general, from less educated ministry to professionalism, the *Witness* editors, as the paper moved toward a convention relationship, exhibited more professionalism. Third, Florida Baptists owe a debt of gratitude to those devoted pioneers who served as trailblazers in proclaiming the gospel to a unique Southern state.

¹Leon McBeth

²*The Columbian Star*, Feb. 2, 1822.

³John Rosser, 144.

⁴Biographical information about McCallum was derived from Samuel Boykin, *History of the Baptist Denomination in Georgia with Biographical Compendium and Portrait Gallery of Baptist Ministers and Georgia Baptists*, Vol. 2. (Atlanta, GA: James P. Harrison Printers, 1881), 369-372.

⁵W. N. Chaudoin, "Origin of the Witness," *Florida Baptist Witness*, (Jan. 9, 1895), 2.

⁶*Ibid.*, 372.

⁷Boykin, 120

⁸W. D. Turnley, "History of the Florida Baptist Witness," *The Florida Baptist Witness*, Feb. 18, 1904.

⁹Ashurst later served as the founding pastor of the First Baptist Church of Quincy, Florida, after his retirement.

¹⁰I interpret the phrase "Old Baptist Faith" as a reference to Landmark Principles. The Landmark movement heavily influenced Florida Baptists in the early years. Prior to his arrival in Florida, Corresponding Secretary W. N. Chaudoin served as pastor of the Second Baptist Church in Nashville, a church also previously pastored by Graves. Chaudoin further served as an agent of the Bible Board of the Southern Baptist Convention between 1856-1857 at a time when A. C. Dayton, one of the Landmark movements Great Triumvirate, headed the board. Chaudoin served as assistant editor of the *Witness* from 1884-1885. Assistant Editor N. A. Bailey graduated from Union University where Graves endowed the third member of the Landmark triumvirate, J. M. Pendelton, as the theology professor. Pendelton preached the ordination sermon at Bailey's ordination.

¹¹*The Florida Baptist Witness*, January 17, 1884. The first paper included advertisements for the Family Medicines of Dr. Josiah Ashurst of Lake City for liver pills, cough syrup, dropsy and syphilis medications.

¹²Turnley.

¹³A. P. Ashurst, *Florida Baptist Witness*, Aug. 20, 1885, p. 2.

¹⁴DeLand Academy was a forerunner of the John B. Stetson University.

¹⁵Turnley.

¹⁶Chaudoin.

¹⁷Turnley.

¹⁸Gordon C. Reeves, "A History of Florida Baptists," (M. A. thesis, Stetson University, 1938), 170.

¹⁹Harry C. Garwood, *Stetson University and Florida Baptists*, ed. By Edward A. Holmes (DeLand, FL: Florida Baptist Historical Society, 1962), 59

²⁰H. C. Garwood, professor at Stetson, recounted that at the time of the Stetson-Forbes controversy, some individuals thought that Stetson first turned against Forbes because the president received funds from Henry Flagler for the building of the science department, thus, Forbes allowed intruders into Stetson's private project.

²¹J. C. Porter, "An Appeal to Manliness," *Florida Baptist Witness*, March 11, 1903.

²²J. C. Porter, "Stetson University," *Florida Baptist Witness*, Feb. 25, 1903.

²³Ibid.

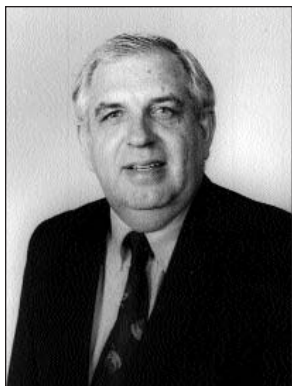
²⁴Reeves, 173.

²⁵Edward Earl Joiner, *A History of Florida Baptists* (Jacksonville, FL: Convention Press, 1972), 125.

²⁷C. Douglas Weaver, *Every Town Needs a Downtown Church: A History of First Baptist Church Gainesville, Florida* (Brentwood, TN: Southern Baptist Historical Society, 2000), 37-38.

²⁸C. M. Brittain, *Recollections*, memographed.

²⁹Rosser, 153.



FLORIDA BAPTIST WITNESS

1918-2005

“An imperative necessity”

Jerry M. Windsor

Secretary-Treasurer

Florida Baptist Historical Society

Dr. Mark Rathel in his article “*Florida Baptist Witness*: from humble beginnings to Convention ownership,” covers the history of the *Florida Baptist Witness* from 1884 to 1918. It is my intention now to tell the *Florida Baptist Witness* story from 1918 to 2005. My main vehicle of communication will be the tenures of the ten editors who served in that 87 year period.

The *Florida Baptist Witness* was born in a briar patch. On January 19, 1882, W. N. Chaudoin “and others” told how bitter that briar patch existence had become. Writing in *The Christian Index* and *South-Western Baptist*, Chaudoin and friends said, “Brethren, we have been conquered again. The Northern army beat down our flag, the “carpet-baggers” quartered on us till we were left skin and bone. Next came foreign capital and laid hold on vast tracts of our domain, etc., etc., and what Goliath comes last to bid us wear his yoke? It is the *Christian Index* of Georgia. That paper has assumed such an attitude toward us as to force us to become its patrons.”¹

Relief was on the way. According to the 1883 Minutes of the Florida Baptist Convention, “arrangements have been made to begin the publication, in Lake City, on the 1st of January 1884, of the *Florida Baptist Witness*. The books are now open, and subscriptions are being received.”² The paper was to be issued weekly and the subscription price was \$2 per year.

A total of 23 editors served the paper from 1884 to 1918. Some served for only a few months (There were four editors in 1888) and others served for years (F. C. Edwards and A. J. Holt served the longest). The paper was held together by prayer, courage, and raw will power. But the paper did survive. A. J. Holt (1847-1933) served as editor from 1914 to 1918 and later wrote, "Speed the *Witness* on its way; it is here and here to stay!"³

A Checkered Past (1918-1931)

J. W. Mitchell (1856-1933) worked with the *Witness* from 1918-1928, and in the 1920 report to the convention it was stated, "The history of the Baptist paper in Florida is a checkered one."⁴

J. W. Mitchell served as editor and manager of the *Florida Baptist Witness*. Mitchell was born in Virginia and educated at Richmond College and Crozier Theological Seminary. When the paper was purchased by the convention in 1918 it was moved to Jacksonville and it was noted in the 1920 report, "There have been vexatious delays and unavoidable errors, but there has been no friction or ill nature anywhere."⁵

Subscriptions have always been a sensitive issue at the *Witness*. The economy, politics, personalities, and board leadership affected the subscription list as much as the work of the editor. There were 2,000 subscriptions in 1920 and 7,000 in 1926. In 1924 a church "Budget Method" was begun and 20 churches in the convention sent the paper to all their members. This innovative plan has continued to this day in one form or another. The subscription rate and volume is nearly always tied to specific local church promotions.

In 1925 Florida was one of only four state conventions in the Southern Baptist Convention that published a 32 page state paper. This included sermons, news, promotions, and advertisements.

At this time the *Florida Baptist Witness* paper and "The Witness Press" were two separate entities. It was hoped that the "Press" could make enough money to support the *Witness* but the "Press" had problems of its own. Before 1927 the "Press" had been run as a union

shop and when it went to an “open shop” in 1927 “every man quit, save one.”⁶

P. L. Johnston (1884-1957) became editor in 1928. Pickney Leslie Johnston had served as church editor of the *Miami Herald* before coming to the *Witness* staff. The subscription list remained steady at 7,000, but the financial woes that took hold in America also affected the work of the *Witness*. Johnston noted in 1930 at the convention in Tampa that grief came from “the backwash of the boom, the fruit fly, bank failures and general business depression.”

Johnston left the *Witness* in 1930 to work on the advertising staff of the *Christian Index*. In leaving Florida he felt that there was an answer to the financial needs of the paper. “In retiring as editor-manager, may I say that I firmly believe a vigorous circulation campaign at \$2 per year. . . would easily pull the paper out of its present financial difficulty.”⁷

Charles Mercer Brittain (1873-1943) served as the editor of the *Florida Baptist Witness* from 1909-1911 and from 1930-1931. Brittain was the child of adversity. He became Executive-Secretary of the Florida Baptist State Board of Missions in 1926 one week after his mother died. He saw the depression, severe hurricanes in 1926 and 1927, the stock market crash of 1929, and the threat of Landmarkism in the convention. He became editor in 1930 without pay in a move to assist the paper. It was in 1931 that the paper was taken from the “overloaded shoulders” of Dr. Brittain and placed into the “competent hands of Dr. E. O. Solomon.”⁸

Covers the Entire State (1931-1970)

In the Florida Baptist Convention meeting at First Baptist Church in Jacksonville in January 1945, it was announced that the *Florida Baptist Witness* was unique in that, “It is the only paper published in Florida that covers the entire state.”⁹

The coming of Edward Davis Solomon (1875-1957) brought new life and new light to the work of the *Florida Baptist Witness*. Solomon was born in Coldwater, Mississippi, and graduated from Mississippi College in 1898. He attended The Southern Baptist Theological

Seminary (1898-1900) and was awarded the Doctorate of Divinity degree by Stetson University in 1943.

Solomon served as pastor in Mississippi and Louisiana before coming to Florida. He was corresponding secretary of the Louisiana Baptist Convention from 1924 to 1930. He was a committed Baptist, well known preacher, and well connected denominational servant.

Solomon was present for the birth of the Cooperative Program and traced the idea of the concept to M. E. Dodd. In 1923 Dodd and Solomon were on the committee that had the responsibility to fix the amounts that each board and institution was to receive from the Seventy-Five Million Campaign. Solomon said that he and Dodd were the ones who introduced the idea of percentages¹⁰

Dr. Solomon served as a chaplain in the Spanish American War and in World War I. His specific education and general background work served the *Witness* well. From his involvement in the Seventy-Five Million Campaign he saw the need for sound financial footing and planning. At the 1932 Florida Baptist Convention meeting in Daytona Beach it was announced by C. M. White that “The *Florida Baptist Witness* does not owe one dollar.” This depression era financial success came largely from the hand of editor Solomon.

The new editor from Louisiana entered his new work with experience, enthusiasm and energy. It was reported at the 1933 convention meeting at First Baptist Church Pensacola that Solomon was a “regular dynamo of cheer and optimism.” Solomon saw the need to increase the circulation of the *Witness* and in his tenure saw the increase of subscribers reach 23,600 before his retirement in 1949.

Solomon believed in putting forth new ideas for promoting the paper but he felt that a real key to more subscriptions were the pastors and the true hope of the *Witness* was Cooperative Program support.

In 1933 there were 739 Southern Baptist Churches in the state and a total of 915 preachers. Solomon bemoaned the fact that only 100 of the



E. D. Solomon

739 churches budgeted the *Witness* and only 238 of the 915 preachers were subscribers.¹¹ Attempting to pry the *Witness* free of outside pressure, businessman Solomon actually owned the press that printed the *Witness*. Dr. S. B. Rogers had bought the press for the convention in 1919 and paid \$8,000 for it. The convention saw the cost of press upkeep and labor problems and decided to sell the press to Mrs. Josephine Crawford Solomon for \$1,000 in 1938 plus a debt of \$2,142.83 that was owed on press maintenance. This agreement with the Solomons ran out on May 31, 1948 and at that time the Solomons had no interest in “renewing” the press contract.¹² It was actually the Witness Commission that brought this whole process to an end. In 1948 the Commission became responsible for the printing, publishing, and distributing of the paper. Dr. Solomon was then “employed” as the editor for a period of one year at a salary of \$4200 and a travel expense budget of \$500. After the one year contract expired a new editor was secured.¹³

The Solomon years saw the paper through the end of the depression and through the paper shortages and labor problems associated with World War II. Dr. Solomon knew that a stronger foundation for the program was needed and at the Florida Baptist Convention in 1947 at Orlando proposed that the “Arizona Plan” be adopted.

The Baptist Convention in Arizona actually placed their paper in the hands of the members of their churches and paid for the paper through the Baptist state convention budget. This made the paper a “house organ” officially but it also gave much needed information to new Christians and new arrivals in the Arizona Baptist Convention. Solomon felt it was time for Florida Baptists to consider such a plan.

In 1947 the population of Florida was 2,540,000. There were 224,884 Southern Baptist church members in Florida and they gave \$6,524,111 for the year. Solomon realized that these members needed to be informed and inspired on a state-wide basis. Although the Arizona Plan was not adopted, there is great merit in the argument for it.¹⁴

Nearly 30 years later the *Florida Baptist Witness* editor was fighting the same battle. Edgar Cooper responded to some of the questions from his critics when he reported: “Some say, ‘If they want it (the state

paper), let them pay for it.' 'Who are 'them'? 'Them' are those who pay the bills and make the mission offerings.'"¹⁵

Edward Davis Solomon was a man well versed in Biblical studies, business operations, and public relations. He had the longest tenure of any editor at the time of his retirement and he made a good mark in the Kingdom with his work in Florida.

W. G. Stracener succeeded E. D. Solomon as editor of the *Florida Baptist Witness*. Stracener was born December 8, 1905, and was a native of Louisiana. He attended Louisiana State University and came to Florida to serve as pastor of First Baptist Church, Madison (1934-1938). He then went as pastor of Riverside Baptist Church in Miami (1938-1944) and was pastor of East Hill Baptist Church in Pensacola (1944-1949) when he became editor of the *Witness*.

Stracener was ordained by First Baptist Church, Thomasville, Georgia, in 1932. He preached the annual sermon at the Florida Baptist Convention in 1943, and came to the *Witness* with the mind, heart and pen of a pastor. By any measurement Stracener was a successful editor at the *Witness*. When he began the work on August 15, 1949, the circulation was 23,600. When he marked his twentieth anniversary in 1969, the circulation was 66,485. No other editor saw such a large ratio increase.¹⁶

Stracener did some dramatic adding and subtracting in his first years on the job. In his first year he eliminated all medical advertisements, political announcements, and competition with Southern Baptist work and literature. He would not advertise any literature that was not favorable to Southern Baptists and their work. The removal of the medical and political advertisements brought popular approval and the elimination of any literature advertisements competing with Southern Baptists passed by without a public dissenting voice.¹⁷

Editor Stracener also saw the opportunity to add some important features to the expanding paper. In 1952 the *Baptist Press*, *Religious News Service* and Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist



W. G. Stracener

Convention were added as wire services.

Stracener added the religious drawings of Jack Hamm in 1952 and the "Counselor's Corner" by R. Loftin Hudson in 1953. In 1953 he added "In Small Churches" by Garland A. Hendricks which became a popular feature of the paper and an effort was made to include sermons as space allowed. A "Children's Feature" was begun in 1955 and that meant the *Witness* was now truly a family paper.¹⁸

Editor Stracener was "instructed" by the Baptist Witness Commission to attend the Jubilee Congress of the Baptist World Alliance in London in July 1955. In 1959 he was "instructed" to go to Rio de Janeiro for the Baptist World Alliance and a tour of South America mission fields. A series of articles followed both of these excursions and the Commission felt it was money well spent.¹⁹

Dr. Stracener was elected president of the Southern Baptist Press Association in 1959 and this brought honor to all Florida Baptists and also validated the twenty years of editorial work of Stracener at the *Witness*.

A Goal of 100,000 Subscribers (1970-1994)

Edgar R. Cooper became the editor-manager of the *Florida Baptist Witness* on January 1, 1971. His name appeared as "Editor-Elect" in the November 12, 1970 issue as he worked with W. G. Stracener for two months before Dr. Stracener's retirement. Cooper got into the spirit of the success of the paper as he called for a goal of 100,000 subscribers before 1980.²⁰

Dr. Cooper came to the *Witness* at a time of unprecedented enthusiasm and well being. Circulation was 65,000, a reserve fund of six months operation was set and 957 of the 1462 churches in Florida were in some kind of church club plan.

Cooper did not rest on the merits of his predecessor. He set to work to improve the paper and to enlarge its influence in the state. He started the historical facts section that highlighted events of 50, 25 and 10 years before. He started the "Hints for Hangups" to encourage teenagers to read the paper. He also inaugurated the letters to the editor section that

would eventually build to lightening rod proportions in the 1990s. Cooper also made a bold move that could not go unnoticed. He turned the house organ direction back toward an open news forum.

Stracener had done the nearly impossible by increasing circulation 300 percent. Stracener worked for the paper for 21 years and moved it to financial stability and record setting popularity. His wife Alleyne Stracener worked for the paper for 15 years as “circulation secretary” and the December 17, 1970 issue of the *Witness* was in tribute to all they had done. But in the meantime, Stracener had made the *Witness* a public relations tool of the convention. He did this purposefully and successfully. He needed to survive and he knew that the good will and approval of the convention staff was the road to financial security. This with his pastoral pen put him in good stead with the pastors and denominational workers. But this also meant that nothing controversial or innovative was permitted in the pages of the *Witness* until it had been filtered and denominationally sanitized.

Cooper sought to change that general direction. He was a denominational loyalist and a well educated and committed Baptist. But he realized the paper had to be more than a “church bulletin” if it were to stretch to new circulation and usefulness.

The “They Say” column was for letters to the editor. Cooper decided to permit controversial issues to be aired and on “The Editor’s Page” he wrote some of the most insightful editorials in the history of the *Witness*.

Dr. Cooper also eliminated the department headings for convention information flow to break what he called the “sterotyped” concept of information found in the *Witness*.²¹ This move permitted news releases from the various convention agencies to be screened, interpreted, and evaluated before being dropped under any specific convention goal or program.

In Cooper’s first editorial, he set forth four characteristics he wanted to possess as editor at all times. He said he wanted to have



Edgar R. Cooper

conscience, compassion, courage, and a cooperative spirit in all his dealings.²² This ethical barometer set the tone for the 13 years Cooper served as editor (1970-1983).

The mantra of Cooper became clear in his first report to the convention in 1971. Dr. Cooper pointed out that circulation must be increased but the cost of paper and postage were the “main expense” problems.²³ Postage in 1970 was \$9,000, in 1977 it was \$34,000. The cost of paper in 1970 was \$24,000 and in 1977 paper had reached \$40,000. Circulation was increasing but so was the cost.

Cooper saw unprecedented growth in circulation and church involvement in his 13 years at the *Witness*. In 1970 when he came on board the circulation was 65,000 and in 1983 when he retired the circulation was 94,100. In addition to that there were 1100 of the 1600 Florida Southern Baptist churches involved in some kind of church budget plan that helped to increase circulation and save money.

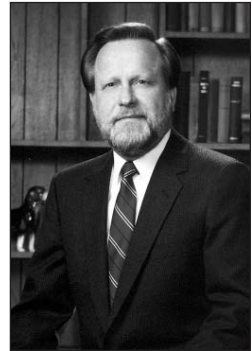
In his last report to the 1983 convention, Cooper noted: “The editorship for the past 13 years has been interesting, exciting, rewarding, and challenging. The responsibilities have been heavy, but certainly no heavier than those of any called servant of God who believes in being a “living sacrifice” for God’s kingdom.”²⁴

These humble and appreciative words were well received by the convention as they appreciated Cooper and honored him for his convention service.

Jack E. Brymer, Sr. became the editor-manager of the *Florida Baptist Witness* in 1984. Edgar Cooper retired December 31, 1983, and Brymer began his work with the full commendation of Cooper and the *Florida Baptist Witness* Commission.²⁵

Jack Brymer is the only editor of the *Florida Baptist Witness* that I have known personally on a friend to friend basis. For 17 years he was managing editor of the *Alabama Baptist* and we shared mentors in the person of Hudson Baggett. Dr. Baggett was executive editor of the *Alabama Baptist* and had taught preaching at Howard College (now Samford University) before going as editor of the state Baptist paper. Dr. Baggett was a dear friend to Jack and me and he served as a journalism mentor to Jack and a preaching mentor to me. Dr. Baggett

had graded for preaching professor V. L. Stanfield at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and I had graded for Dr. Stanfield in preaching at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. The Baggett connection made Jack and me soul partners in a way few people could understand. I have probably never had over 20 conversations in my life with Jack Brymer, yet through Baggett, Alabama Baptists, Samford University, and the *Florida Baptist Witness*, Jack and I saw one another on a regular basis.²⁶



Jack E. Brymer

Jack Brymer is a native of Alabama and an ordained minister. His tenure with Dr. Baggett taught him the fast pace of editorial decision making and copy management. Jack also brought a new perspective to the *Witness* in that he came primarily as a journalist. His concern for fairness, full disclosure, honesty, and integrity is in the tradition of our best kind of Christian journalism. Jack came prepared for the task but he also came with another perspective that he and the search committee might not have considered. Dr. Baggett ran the *Alabama Baptist* his way. He was in Birmingham and 100 miles north up Highway 31 from the Baptist Building in Montgomery. Dr. Baggett padded around the office in his bedroom shoes and loved preaching and Baptists as much as any man you could have ever met. He was a World War II veteran that had done battle. He loved God, family, and country and was not ashamed of his convictions. Jack had to get some of these feelings of conviction, independence, and passion whether he realized it or not. The Baggett influence with the journalistic desire for “responsible freedom” put Jack into a Florida melting pot that was unprecedented.

J. W. Mitchell had to worry about personnel. Stracener had to worry about public relations. Cooper had to worry about postage, and Jack Brymer had to worry about politics.

When Jack came on board at the *Witness* in 1984 the Southern Baptist Convention was in an uproar. Long term trusted leaders had retired from the scene on a convention-wide level and the Cooperative

Baptist Fellowship was trying to find its niche among Baptists. Ed Cooper spoke of Jack's "depth of character, talent and training" when Jack came to the *Witness* in 1984.²⁷ All of these resources and more would be needed by Jack in the next ten years.

Baptists will not long finance what they can't control. Jack saw the *Witness* as a ministry "to assist pastors, church leadership, and individual members in knowing what is taking place in the life of the denomination."²⁸ His passion for bringing all the "news to the pews" was in direct contradiction to the Stracener house organ and was a shift from the Cooper mantra of paper, postage, and circulation. Dr. Cooper would have tackled some of these same issues and tackled them head-on, but his retirement in 1983 protected him from the convention storms to come.

The coming of Greg Warner on October 1, 1984 as associate editor added more journalism experience to the staff. Not circulation experience (Mrs. Stracener), not church background (Cooper) but a hunger for knowing the facts that could easily be referred to in Baptist circles as "investigative journalism." Greg was formerly from Lake City and held degrees from Florida Southern College, Southwestern Seminary and North Texas State. He has a good heart, keen mind, and a trained ear for the bottom line.²⁹ The journalism experience of Jack and the "get to the bottom of the facts" attitude of Greg brought a new day to Baptist journalism in Florida.

Circulation plummeted. Not all at once, but it crashed from 94,000 in 1984 to 41,000 in 1994. Jack saw freedom, priesthood of the believer, and soul competency as his major focus. This was a long way from the days of Ed Solomon when the *Witness* was advertising Capudine for neuralgia, Gray's Ointment for boils, Resinol for pimples and Lydia Pinkham's tablets for hot flashes.³⁰ No snake oil for Jack and Greg. They viewed the work of the *Witness* as supplying an "adequate flow of accurate information" about all subjects and there was little room for derivation or accommodation. In 1988 there was still a goal of 100,000 subscribers but Jack reported to the convention that "Local church autonomy mandates that Baptists receive a full accounting of what is taking place, even if it is unpleasant."³¹

A “full accounting” caught the attention of many. The paper won many awards from the Baptist Public Relations Association but the circulation dipped in 1989 and the bottom fell out in 1990-1991. Aids, child abuse, the retooling of evangelism, and convention politics did not sell papers. Baptists prefer good news over bad and most preachers run from confrontation. Controversy was viewed as bad and change was viewed with suspicion. Jack had the pulse of the news when he reported, “In recent years, for example, the Southern Baptist Convention has been experiencing major changes. It has been a time characterized by opposing viewpoints. As Baptists, we must protect the right of every Baptist to have his point of view heard with impunity.”³²

After five years with the *Witness*, Greg Warner left for employment with the *Associated Baptist Press*. Rather than calming the criticism of vocal critics this only brought more pressure to bear. Some felt the *Witness* was “out of step with the conservative resurgence” in the Southern Baptist Convention and the use of *Associated Baptist Press* releases as bias toward the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. Guilt by association was not proved but pressure was brought upon the editor to reform or resign. Pressure was brought by letters to the editor, the downward trend of circulation, four different meetings with the governing board over the coverage of “controversial news” and use of the *Associated Baptist Press*.³³

On August 26, 1994, Jack Brymer resigned as editor of the *Florida Baptist Witness*. Jack stated there was “continued harassment” from the newspaper’s governing board. The nine member governing board was elected by the Florida Baptist Convention and there was a diversity of opinion and perception that could not seem to be reconciled. Jack stated “the cost for staying had become greater than the price for leaving.”³⁴ The board could not agree to disagree and the resignation was received.

A Witness (1995-2005)

When Michael Chute came aboard as the new editor of the *Florida Baptist Witness* his first two officially written words were: “A Witness.”³⁵

Assistant Editor Lindsay Bergstrom served as interim editor during the eight month search for a new editor. Chute had served for 13 years as a missionary with the Southern Baptist Convention Foreign Mission Board and came to Florida from the journalism faculty of Oklahoma Baptist University. Waters needed to be calmed, trust needed to be increased, and circulation needed to be restored.



Michael Chute

Chute spent many hours going from association to association building a base of familiarity and confidence. He usually called upon his foreign mission experience in making his appeals and he worked hard to increase circulation and advertisement revenue. He spoke often of witnessing, cooperation and information sharing. In his 1997 report to the convention meeting at Jacksonville he said the *Witness* "is a communications tool that binds churches and members in a cooperative spirit, providing a resource for living out the Christian faith."³⁶ He

spoke of the larger calling of Florida Baptists to pray, give, and go.

In September 1995 there began an upswing in circulation that reached 42,723 by the end of the year. Editor Chute led the *Witness* board to earmark \$25,000 from the *Witness* fund reserve to finance a market campaign to boost circulation.

Michael Chute completed five years of service with the *Witness* in February 2001. He had announced his resignation to accept a teaching and administrative position with William Carey College in Hattiesburg, Mississippi.

In January 2001 the Board elected James A. Smith Sr., as the new executive editor of the *Florida Baptist Witness*. Smith holds a B.S. degree from Dallas Baptist University and a Master of Divinity degree from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He served from 1989 to 1995 as the director of government relations for the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission in Washington, D.C. From 1995 to 1997 he was director of news and information for Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Missouri. Immediately before

coming to Florida he had served in the administration at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. He came as a denominational loyalist and experienced media representative.

In 2001 at the Florida Baptist Convention, Editor Smith promised four distinctives that would guide him in his work. He promised to know who we serve, be an effective tool for the churches, address critical theological issues, and cover ethical issues.³⁷ He also announced that a new feature of the paper would be the addition of Charles Colson, Director of Prison Fellowship, as a regular commentator.



James Smith

September 11, 2001 affected news coverage all over the world and Editor Smith and his staff produced an “extra edition” of the *Florida Baptist Witness* to give historical, theological, and spiritual insights to the attacks on our country. The *Witness* was the only Southern Baptist Convention state paper to provide an extra interpretation of events and this proved to be professional and timely. It brought comfort, hope, and evaluation in a time of crisis and confusion. This additional expense paid many dividends in good will and ministry.

The circulation hovered around 40,000 but a positive word was sent across the land that the *Florida Baptist Witness* desired to be relevant and innovative.

In 2002 a new mission statement for the paper was adopted. It read: “(The) *Florida Baptist Witness* publishes Good news about God’s work that edifies, educates, exhorts, and empowers Florida Baptists to glorify God and extend His Kingdom.”³⁸

In 2003 circulation increased to 46,000 and a Church Newsletter Service (CNS) was added. A local Baptist church could use their own church information as a wrap page for the weekly paper and combine news and costs. A full service website was added in 2003 that contained the print edition of the paper plus valuable web exclusives and archives. This moved the *Witness* to a committed partnership with churches and associations all across the convention.

Editor Smith emphasizes the “edify, educate, exhort, and empower” ministry of the *Witness*. He is determined to handle hot button ethical issues and has more theological coverage than any of his predecessors. News covers Iraq, hurricane relief, stem cell research, and political appointees. He is not afraid to take a stand on controversial issues and continues to invite reader response.

In 1883 Thomas E. Langley (1834-1890) gave the Periodicals Committee report at the Florida Baptist Convention meeting in Lake City. He stated that arrangements had been made for the beginning of the *Florida Baptist Witness* in Lake City on the 1st of January, 1884. Langley further stated: “Your committee would recommend that we here, at this convention, pledge ourselves to give this enterprise our most hearty cooperation, and remember often at a throne of grace those who are engaged in this responsible work.” He also said, “The books are now open, and subscriptions are being received.”³⁹ May that ever be true until the coming again of our blessed Lord Jesus.

¹A case may be made that this was tongue-in-cheek. In truth it sounds more like bitter grapes. Chaudoin and friends had hoped to start a Florida paper but the financial investment was too much to bear. The *Christian Index* was a temporary haven for Florida news until a home based paper could be established.

In 1884 Key West was the largest town in Florida and the population of Tampa was 720. Miami and St. Petersburg had not been established yet.

²Thomas E. Langley (1834-1890) was chairman of the committee on Periodicals and brought the report. Langley was born near Forsyth, Georgia, and was a Latin and Greek scholar. It was also Langley who made the motion for the establishment of Stetson University.

³1922 *Florida Baptist Convention Annual*, p. 63. (Hereafter referred to as *Annual*.) A variety of dates for the origin of the *Witness* may be found. P. L. Johnston wrote in the 1930 *Convention Annual* that the *Witness* was founded in 1873 (p. 68). A. J. Moncrief reported in the 1934 *Convention Annual* that the *Witness* was begun in 1887 (p. 73). 1884 is the correct date.

⁴1920 *Annual*, p. 67.

⁵Attributing quotes is always a problem with these early convention reports. S. B. Cole actually presented the report to the convention but one has to believe that Mitchell was party to all that was said. Attributing exact quotes in these early years will be a problem in this paper until we come to a time when there were signed articles and recording equipment at the convention.

⁶It is amazing what Baptists will attempt in substituting the tithe! The Rogers Building was built in 1924 to provide space for state convention offices and provide “rent” from the general public to assist “small” churches. It did not work and neither did “press” profits succeed.

⁷1930 *Annual*, p. 68.

⁸1931 *Annual*, p. 68.

⁹1944 *Annual*, p. 13. The 1944, 1945, and 1946 *Florida Baptist Convention Annuals* have incorrect and confusing dates. Earl Joiner is correct by listing two meetings of the Florida Baptist Convention in 1946. The Convention met January 23-24, 1946 in Jacksonville and November 19-21, 1946 at First Baptist Church in Tampa.

¹⁰Edward Earl Joiner, *A History of Florida Baptists*, pp. 143-144.

¹¹1933 *Annual*, p. 65. This is a good place to address the complex issue of “reported circulation.” Sometimes “paid” subscribers were seen as the circulation number. At other times “copies printed” were viewed as the circulation number. I have taken the numbers each year that were officially presented to the Florida Baptist Convention in the Florida Witness Commission report. The confusion over circulation was recorded in the 1934 *Witness* report when it was stated, “The present circulation of the paper is around 6,500. It has been as high as 8,000 and as low as 3,000. The circulation figures vary somewhat.” (p. 73).

¹²These kind of lease agreements were not uncommon. Evangelist E. J. Daniels (1908-1987) established Golden Rule Press and printed the *Alabama Baptist* for years. Dr. and Mrs. Daniels achieved extensive publishing interests and actually became millionaires in the process.

¹³1948 *Annual*, pp. 77-79.

¹⁴This recurring need for convention financial involvement came to a head in the tenure of editor Edgar R. Cooper. In 1974 the Commission had to dip into reserve funds to keep current. Cooper wrote in his 1974 report to the convention that, “It is the opinion of the editor. . . it will be imperative that the convention subsidize the paper through Cooperative Program Funds.” (p. 135).

¹⁵I feel that Solomon and Cooper were exactly right. Why put the freight of the *Baptist Witness* back onto the people who are already tithing and paying the bills?

I realize that not everyone would read the *Witness* if it were sent into their home, but I also believe there would be doctrinal, financial, and public relation dividends if we went to the Arizona Plan today. It could be done.

¹⁶Editor Edgar R. Cooper stated in his 1974 report to the Florida Baptist Convention that, "Happiness for an editor is reporting an increase in circulation." (1974 *Annual*, p. 135.)

¹⁷Editor Stracener fought for denominational control in his years of service (1949-1970) as much as editor Brymer fought for editorial freedom and independence in his tenure (1984-1994). The two men just saw the work of the *Witness* in two different perspectives. Stracener would boast that the *Witness* was a house organ and Brymer feared it.

¹⁸Editor Edgar R. Cooper added a teenage feature in 1971 entitled "Hints for Hangups." This feature dealt with teenage problems and letters from readers were received.

¹⁹1954 *Annual*, p. 88 and 1959 *Annual*, pp. 100-101.

²⁰1976 *Annual*, p. 142. Baptists are basically goal setters. This ambitious goal was possible but problems were already on the horizon. With all the wonderful stride Stracener had made the paper had actually lost circulation in his last year. This was certainly a preview of things to come. As ambitious as the 100,000 subscriber goal was it was in no comparison to the earlier goal Cooper had projected when he said we are to "keep circulation growing until the paper is sent into every Baptist home." (1974 *Annual*, p. 135.)

²¹1971 *Annual*, p. 151, If anyone questions the value of the letters to the editor section that Cooper originated let them read the heart wrenching letter on divorce in the May 26, 1977 issue. If that is not a Baptist cry for help there has never been one.

²²*Florida Baptist Witness*, January 7, 1971, p. 4.

²³Cooper had a point. Postage went up 38 percent in one year and a 350 percent increase in postage was projected over the next nine years. (1972 *Annual*, p. 125).

²⁴1983 *Annual*, p. 156.

²⁵*Florida Baptist Witness*, March 1, 1984.

²⁶I researched and wrote this article in 40 hours over a period of eight days. Editorial necessity and my severe travel limitations due to my teaching

requirements made it impossible for me to interview any of the editors.

²⁷*Florida Baptist Witness*, March 1, 1984, p. 4.

²⁸1985 *Annual*, p. 153.

²⁹All of us who were members of the Florida Baptist Convention State Board of Missions were wonderfully influenced by Greg's testimony to salvation when he came on board at the *Witness*. His simple born again experience is a basis for his life and work. His investigative reporting is tenacious and valid and it has a faith basis.

³⁰*Florida Baptist Witness*, April 6, 1944, p. 15.

³¹1988 *Annual*, p. 190.

³²1989 *Annual*, p. 185.

³³In 2005 Greg Warner is the executive editor of the Associated Baptist Press and Lindsay Bergstrom is the director of administration and production. Both are former employees of the *Witness* and both are still very much involved in Baptist investigative reporting. Their mission statement is that they will "serve Christ by providing credible and compelling information regarding matters of faith." They are not afraid of controversy. In their September 28, 2005 website they handle such topics as FEMA to Reimburse Churches, Belmont University not permitted to have non-Baptist trustees, Morris Chapman's salary package, and the *Baptist Message* of Louisiana coming under direct convention control. These topics are not for the squeamish.

³⁴May the record show that no charges were ever made of deceit, dishonesty or unfaithfulness to the cause of Christ. Jack and Greg had many detractors but they also had many friends. This is just a dark time in the history of the *Witness* that needs to be recorded but not defended or rehashed.

³⁵1995 *Annual*, p. 253.

³⁶1997 *Annual*, p. 116.

³⁷2001 *Annual*, p. 108.

³⁸2002 *Annual*, p. 114.

³⁹1883 *Annual*, p. 33.

Book Reviews

Mr. Moody and the Evangelical Tradition

Edited by Timothy George. New York: T & T Clark, 2004. 185 pp.

Some historians remember Dwight Lyman Moody as a great evangelist, a compassionate, simple preacher, a master organizer and businessman. Others recall a catalyst for revivalism and ecumenicism; a man devoid of any extensive formal education or detailed systematic theology. In his work, *Mr. Moody and the Evangelical Tradition*, Timothy George compiles a series of essays that deal with these and other images of D. L. Moody and his unprecedented nineteenth century ministry. The various articles are from the symposia presented in 1999, by Beeson Divinity School and London Bible College.

The contributing authors operate from the premise that modern evangelicals owe Moody a debt of gratitude. They argue that the revival “machines” of Sunday and Graham might not have been possible were it not for the unsuspecting “founder of contemporary interdenominational evangelicalism.” Stanley Gundry attempts to “demythologize” notions such as Moody’s espousal of a “second blessing” and that his methodology outweighed his message. The late Lewis Drummond’s article examines Mr. Moody in light of Iain H. Murray’s, *Revival and Revivalism*. Donald P. Hustad enlightens readers concerning Moody’s use of gospel music and its influence on twentieth-century Southern Baptists. Of particular interest is the personal tribute to Moody by Henry Drummond, long-time friend and confidant, as well as Don Sweeting’s treatment of the Chicago Fire as a turning point in the evangelist’s life.

One flaw in the work is its repetition. By the final chapter, certain anecdotes and key facts are reread several times over. This point is minor because it is not uncommon to an edited compilation. While those unfamiliar with Moody will find the repetition helpful, those more widely-read in the field may find it distracting. Also, noticeably absent

is any detailed discussion of the relationship between Moody and R. A. Torrey, who helped shape the Moody Bible College curriculum, was repeatedly referenced by the evangelist, and was editor of *The Fundamentals*. Other issues not fully discussed include Moody's stance on women in ministry and a thorough distinction between his understanding of the "filling" and "baptism" of the Holy Spirit.

Regardless of these issues, *Mr. Moody and the Evangelical Tradition*, is, overall, a success. The subject matter is intriguing and is judiciously presented by competent contributors. Further study and continued dialogue are encouraged by the inclusion of a recommended bibliography. The reader who seeks an exhaustive treatment of all debatable issues surrounding Moody's ministry may be disappointed. However, the reader who desires an interesting, broad overview of the *Guilded Age's Great Evangelist* will be pleased.

Reviewed by Alex Kinchen, Ph.D. Student, Southeastern Seminary
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Pastor, Masters Church, Lexington, Kentucky

A Genetic History of Baptist Thought

By William H. Brackney. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2004.
Pp. 592, \$40.00 paper.

William Brackney has long been one of North America's leading Baptist historians. With teaching experience in the north, south, and Canada, he is uniquely qualified to attempt the daunting task of writing an historical-theological treatment of the Baptist movement. *A Genetic History of Baptist Thought* is without doubt a groundbreaking work in Baptist history. Drawing upon the earlier work of New England historian Frank Hugh Foster and others, Brackney casts Baptist theology and distinctives in "genetic" terms. This moves the center of Baptist theology away from a fixed set of Baptist "distinctives," emphasizing instead a more fluid group of "genetic traits" that are common to most Baptist groups during a range of historical eras. By examining various confessions, hymns, sermons, systematic theologies, and treatises, Brackney identifies such traits as christocentrism, biblicism, religious experience, a "modified Reformed" soteriology, emphasis on ecclesiology, an evangelical nature, and a commitment to liberty or freedom as central to the Baptist vision of Christianity.

Brackney's book includes eleven chapters divided along chronological, geographic, and ethnic lines. Chapters one and two address the formal theology codified in confessions of faith and the informal theology confessed through Baptist hymnody. Chapters three and four focus on British Baptists, the first emphasizing mostly writing pastors and the latter focusing upon professional theologians in Baptist colleges and seminaries. Chapters five and six discuss American (northern) Baptists, with chapter five concentrating on pastors and editors while chapter six addresses professional theologians in the academy. Chapter seven discusses Southern Baptist theologians and pastors, while chapters eight and nine highlight the contributions of African American and Canadian Baptists, respectively. Chapter ten, which Brackney calls "Baptist Theologians in Diaspora," addresses

pastors and theologians in the latter-half of the twentieth century with little or no formal ties to Baptist institutions and/or denominations. The book concludes with a short summary chapter which ties all of the genetic traits together and seeks to create a Baptist theological synthesis from all the streams of Baptist thought.

Attempting to write a definitive treatment of Baptist theology is a formidable task, and Brackney is largely successful in his effort. There are several strengths to Brackney's work, one of which is his division of the book along thematic and geographical lines. Each chapter could stand alone as a worthy study in its own right. This leads to a second strength, which is the sheer scope of the research. Brackney is familiar with major and minor strands of Baptist thought stretching across two continents and spanning four hundred years. Brackney's treatment of confessions of faith is also helpful. It becomes clear that, historically, most Baptists have been confessional Christians. This is also true of the various sects Baptist historians debate as having the most influence upon early Baptists, including English Puritans and Separatists and continental Anabaptists.

Brackney's emphasis on Baptists as a predominantly grassroots Free Church movement is another strong point. This is stressed throughout the book, particularly in the discussions of hymnody and pastoral theology. Brackney correctly recognizes the confessional validity of hymns, especially among members of a non-creedal, Free Church tradition. He also avoids the mistake of emphasizing systematic theologies and professional theologians to the detriment of the innumerable local church pastors, evangelists, and tractarians who are always the most influential shapers of Baptist theology at the popular level. Perhaps the greatest strength to this book is Brackney's genetic approach to Baptist theology. Though this methodology seemed awkward when first introduced, Brackney shows that in a tradition that values freedom and eschews hierarchialism, the best way to understand Baptist theology is to look for common-though often evolving-traits in the various corners of Baptist life. This allowance for continual development in thought coupled with the use of "genetic" language instead of a catalogue of "distinctives" avoids reductionistic discussions

of “correct” Baptist theology and limits the use of historical theology as an apologetic tool for defining “true” Baptists.

Though this work is pioneering, it is not without its faults. One issue is the clear sympathy the author shows for progressive theology in Baptist life. Brackney has little use for some of the Baptist traditions in his genetic family. Baptist theology is explained as a continual progression away from local churchism, traditional Calvinism, biblical inerrancy, close communion, church discipline, and robust confessionalism. Praise abounds for those whom Brackney deems innovators (Andrew Fuller, Daniel Parker, A. H. Strong, E. Y. Mullins) and rejecters (Elhanan Winchester, William Newton Clarke, Harry Emerson Fosdick, Howard Thurman, Harvey Cox) of earlier theological positions, while those who function as theological conservers (John Gill, Charles Spurgeon, A. J. Gordon, Jerry Falwell, Albert Mohler) serve as the foils of Brackney’s story. What results is the impression that Baptists possess a conglomerate of evolving genetic traits wherein the evolution is more important than the traits themselves.

Concomitant with this sympathy for progression and change is Brackney’s over-commitment to a “patchwork” interpretation of Baptist history. Genetic traits aside, Brackney’s view of the Baptist life is less like an organic movement than a quilt; an assortment of (largely dissimilar) movements that happen to share some common characteristics. Because of freedom of conscience, self-identification is what makes one a Baptist, regardless of such theological aberrations as Unitarianism, pantheism, or an affinity for the “death of God” movement. In this respect, Brackney’s book is similar to Bill Leonard’s *Baptist Ways*, a recent textbook that similarly overemphasizes diversity as the great strength of Baptist thought.

Also questionable is the disproportionate amount of time Brackney devotes to northern Baptist institutions and thinkers and a general short-shrifting of theological conservatives. While every American Baptist school is assigned its own theological tradition, among the southern seminaries only Southern and Southwestern are even treated. Brackney erroneously contends that most of the leaders of the SBC conservatives in the 1980’s were educated at non-SBC related schools, but almost all

of these leaders earned at least one degree from an SBC seminary, most often Southwestern or New Orleans. Calvinism seems to be confused with hyper-Calvinism, the result being that evangelicalism and Calvinism are continually cast as competing theological traditions, with evangelicalism always serving as the corrective for Reformed thought. African-American Baptists of the less theologically liberal variety are virtually ignored, while conservative Canadian thinkers and institutions are considered more generically fundamentalist than Baptist because they emphasize inerrancy and premillennialism. A final unnecessary drawback to Brackney's work is the numerous typographical and spelling errors. For a work touted as definitive in its field, it deserved a better fate from the copy-editors.

A Genetic History of Baptist Thought is without doubt one of the most important monographs in Baptist studies to appear in decades. Brackney understands much about Baptist history, and this work will be a standard resource for anyone who wishes to understand the development of Baptist thought. Though the book is flawed in many of its assumptions, the overall approach to Baptist theology is worthy and the results are informative. For the discerning reader, Brackney's volume will be the first place to go to understand the theological idiosyncrasies of the people called Baptist.

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