

LEGACY, as the monthly newsletter of the Florida Baptist Historical Society, has as its mission to highlight the *legacy* forged by the people, churches and events in Florida Baptist history. During the next several months this newsletter will feature those churches and their leadership who between 1821 and 1849 contributed to the development of the Florida Baptist State Convention. Each monthly issue will feature at least one church established in the 1820s, 1830s and the 1840s respectively. **While dozens of Baptist churches were established during these decades, most have not survived time. The featured churches continue to function in 2020.**

Florida Territory Missionary Baptist Churches Established in the 1820s

Campbellton: First Baptist Church (formerly Bethlehem) – March 12, 1825

Itinerant Alabama preacher Jeremiah Kimbrell, two months after participating in the organization of Gadsden County's Hephzibah Church (no longer in existence), went to Jackson County to assist in the organization of the then third Baptist church in the Florida Territory.

Kimbrell assisted farmer-preacher Elijah Hosea Calloway. The two ministers served as a presbytery to screen the Christian credentials of a group of settlers who wanted to form a Baptist church in the west central end of the Florida Panhandle. Located near Marianna in Jackson County, three miles south of the Alabama line, the Bethlehem Baptist Church was chartered on March 12, 1825. In 1861, the name was changed to Campbellton Baptist Church. And sometime later changed its name to the First Baptist Church, Campbellton.

The church comprised of 19 charter members soon increased by three new members when it opened its doors for membership that March. E. H. Calloway was called as pastor. Calloway, who was born April 19, 1789, had migrated from Georgia in 1824 with his first wife Elizabeth and their six children. After settling in North Florida, Calloway purchased a quarter section of farmland which provided his livelihood for many years. During the next eleven years the Calloways had four more children. As was typical of the times, Calloway and his neighbors gathered for prayer and Bible preaching and at some point, decided to organize a church. The constituting group for the Bethlehem Church consisted of John and Sarah Beasley, Miller Brady, Sextus Camp, James and Lucy Chason, Ephriam and Elizabeth Chambers, Elizabeth Daniel, Clark and Susannah Jackson, Robert Louckston, Martha Parker, W. and Martha Peacock, Nancy Philips, Elizabeth Taylor, Sarah Williams and Calloway. Sometime later the church affiliated with the Chattahoochee Baptist Association in Georgia.

By 1848, the church's membership had grown to forty-six and they called Joshua Mercer (1788-1869) who served as pastor from 1844-1853. This infusion of new leadership also inspired the church's commitment to missions which was evident when the Bethlehem Church became the first Missionary Baptist church in Florida to organize a woman's missionary society as early as 1848. The Campbellton First Baptist Church holds the honor of being the oldest continuously functioning church cooperating with the Florida Baptist State Convention.



Florida Territory Missionary Baptist Churches Established in the 1830s

Monticello, Olive Baptist Church – January 8, 1831

A church that later would become a footnote in the development of the Florida Baptist State Convention was established in 1831 on land that was then in the State of Georgia and later was made a part of the State of Florida. The Olive Baptist Church, located in present day Jefferson County, Florida, was organized by a group of settlers in the Bethel community of Thomas County, Georgia. These settlers were likely holding regular worship services in 1830 or earlier, and at some point, decided to form an official church. On January 8, 1831, a deed was recorded with the Superior Court of Thomas County which denoted the transfer of title of “one-acre parcel of land being conveyed to a Church Olive.” No other records are available that identify the charter members or the organization of the church. Further collaboration of the church’s early beginnings is provided by the presence of a cemetery on the present- day church property. The cemetery contains grave markers dating back to the early 1800s.

There are no available records that can report whether or not those pioneer Baptists were even aware of the struggle of sovereignty that would finally determine the governmental province of their church’s property. The church property was but an insignificant part of over 1,300,000 acres located between the St. Marys River to the east and the juncture of the Flint and Chattahoochee rivers to the west. Between those two river landmarks were two separate east-west survey lines that sought to establish the boundary between Georgia and Florida. The difference between those survey lines became the subject of a 46-



year dispute between the State of Georgia and the Florida Territorial government, which became a state in 1845. Beginning in 1826 and continuing until 1872, the two states secured their respective surveys, as well as provided their own interpretation of a land survey that was included in a 1795 treaty which had conveyed the land from Spain to the United States. During much of the 46-year period, the two states continued to issue land grants and record property sales on the lands believed to be within their respective jurisdiction. The matter was finally arbitrated with agreement by both state legislatures on the final boundary lines and approved by the U.S. Congress April 9, 1872. As a part of the agreement, each state recognized each other’s land grants or property sales that finally ended up in their respective jurisdiction. The land site on which the Olive Baptist Church was situated finally ended up in Florida’s Jefferson County, just three-quarters of a mile from the current- day boundary between the two states.

While the church was still officially in Thomas County, Georgia, the Olive Church achieved a footnote in Florida Baptist history. As the host church for the eleventh session of the Florida Baptist Association, it was within this church building that delegates to the annual association meeting took action to begin the process for the formation of the Florida Baptist State Convention the following year in 1854. The small congregation thrives in its present-day rural setting just a few miles northeast of Monticello.

Florida Territory Missionary Baptist Churches Established in the 1840s

Callahan, First Baptist Church (formerly Sharon) – 1841

On May 15, 1841, itinerant missionary James McDonald helped organize the Baptist Church at Sharon in Nassau County located in Northeast Florida.

There were 14 charter members present for the organization of the Sharon Church. These included: John Higginbotham, John Jones, Mary Ann Jones, Elizabeth Jones, Nancy Hagans, Hester Lowther, Henry F. Parmenter, Anna Tyner, Elizabeth Crozier, Charrity Tanner, Martha Bleach, James Bleach, Elenor Higginbotham and Salina Willis.

It is likely that the Nassau County congregation was the Sharon church registered as a participant in the organizational meeting of the Florida Baptist Association in 1843 inasmuch as James McDonald was present at the association gathering.

The Sharon congregation was one of seven churches that McDonald served concurrently as

pastor in the 1840s. Although McDonald later settled in Jacksonville, he traveled regularly to the Sharon Church for 13 years and nine months to fulfill his pastoral responsibilities.

When the settlement of Sharon became the town of Callahan, about 1857-1858, the church changed its name to the Callahan Baptist Church. It is now known as the First Baptist Church of Callahan and today is one of the largest congregations in the county.

Madison County, Concord Baptist Church – 1841

Among the several churches Richard Johnson Mays was responsible for starting was the Concord Missionary Baptist Church of Madison County. The significance of the church, established June 20, 1841, was particularly important to Mays. It was Mays who brought together the three families who constituted the church’s nucleus of charter members. It was this church that ordained Mays as a deacon in July, 1841. And in 1847, Mays provided the land on which the church was to be built.



The thirteen founding members of the church came from three families and included six African slaves, referred to as “servants.” The families included R. J. Mays and his wife, Eliza, and their two servants, Elbert and Phillis. The second family included William T. Johnson and his wife Elizabeth, their daughter Harriet, and two servants, Marshall and Nancy. The

third family was Joshua W. P. McCall and his wife, Mary. The other two founding members were identified only as Marmadore and April, the servants of D. H. Mays. It was not uncommon for slaves to be accorded full membership privileges in early Baptist churches, although they were relegated to be seated on the back pews.

The presbytery who helped organize the church were Elders Alexander J. Moseley and John Broome.

47 Churches will achieve milestone Anniversaries in 2020

In January the Society issued **Certificates of Recognition** to those churches which in 2020 will observe a milestone (25-year benchmarks) anniversary. Although there were many more churches established in each of the noted milestone years, many churches either disbanded or merged with other congregations. The listing contains only those churches that continue to function in 2020:

175-years (organized 1845)

Cluster Springs, DeFuniak Springs
Eden, Brooksville
Ephesus, Hilliard
Greenwood, Greenwood
Live Oak, Callahan
Milton First

150-years (organized 1870)

Gainesville First
Mt. Olive, Marianna
New Hope, Mayo
Palatka First

125-years (organized 1895)

Ferndale, Ferndale
Hurricane Creek, Westville
Kathleen, Kathleen
New Orange, Chipley
Oak Grove, Wauchula
Westville, Bonifay

100-years (organized 1920)

Archer, Archer
Auburndale First
Bethany, Bonifay
Dunedin First
Lake Worth First
Moore Haven First
Round Lake, Alford

75-years (organized 1945)

Castle Heights, Tampa
Gardenview, Jacksonville
Lake Region, Winter Haven
North Rome, Tampa
Northside, Plant City
Samsula, New Smyrna Beach
Southwide, DeFuniak Springs
West Highland, Pensacola

50-years (organized 1970)

Alva First
Antioch, Eagle Lake
Bayou George First, Panama City
Choctaw Beach First, Freeport
Cross Creek, Hawthorne
Islamorada First
Nazareth Spanish, Miami
Redlands First, Homestead
Resurreccion, Miami
Simmons Loop, Riverview

25-years (organized 1995)

Capernaum, Miami
Coral Springs First
Gulf to Lake, Crystal River
New Tampa First
Trinity, Sarasota
Westchase Community, Tampa