

The year 2020 will go down in the history books as a year in which the COVID-19 pandemic presented unique and confounding challenges for individuals, businesses and churches. Despite the various quarantine restrictions, the Florida Baptist Historical Society continued to perform its mission and ministry without any interruption. The following are highlights of the 2020 Annual Report of the Florida Baptist Historical Society.

2020 Annual Report to Members

The Society's Mission and Ministry: The primary mission and ministry of the Society is the *researching, preserving and promoting the Legacy of Florida Baptists*. These tasks are accomplished through assisting churches and individuals seeking historical information on Florida Baptist churches, individuals and events. Additionally, the staff produces a monthly newsletter, LEGACY, and the annual *Journal of Florida Baptist Heritage*, which are provided to Society members and interested Baptists.



Dr. David Elder

Who We Are: The Historical Society is managed by a six-member Board of Directors appointed by the State Board of Missions, Florida Baptist State Convention. Of the six, three members are appointed by the State Board of Missions and there are three permanent members who serve by virtue of their administrative position: Executive Director-Treasurer, Florida Baptist Convention, Inc (Dr. Thomas Green); the Secretary-Treasurer, Florida Baptist Historical Society (Donald Hepburn); and the Curator, Florida Baptist Archives, (Dr. Roger Richards), maintained by The Baptist College of Florida. **Those persons who have been appointed to serve on the Board (and their term of service) are: Dr. David Elder, St. Augustine (2018-2020); Dr. Joel Breidenbaugh, Apopka (2019-2022); and Ms. Arlene Vause, Sopchoppy (2019-2021). Dr. Elder, this December, concludes his service after six years on the Society Board.**

The Historical Society receives a \$20,000 Cooperative Program allocation, from the Florida Baptist Convention, which is the only source of the Society's total annual operating budget. Two staff persons serve the Society including Donald Hepburn, who as the non-compensated Secretary-Treasurer, has served since 2017; and the part-time employee, Administrative Ministry Assistant Penny Baumgardner, who has served since 2007.

PROTOCOL DURING "SAFE-AT-HOME" – In Jackson County, home of the Society's offices, there was a COVID-19 "safe-at-home" directive for several months during mid-year. However, we recognized that Penny Baumgardner was just as "safe" in the Society office as she would be in her home's living room. The Society's office is locked down all the time and we hardly ever have visitors, and there are no other workers, except an occasional volunteer, in the

office. However, the quarantine apparently did affect persons who normally would have been doing church history research and were unable to make contact with the Society office. As a result, we did experience reduced inquiries during the year.

SOCIETY RECEIVES BAPTIST HISTORY COLLECTION: In March the Society Board of Directors received an offer by leadership of The Baptist College of Florida for the Historical Society to assume stewardship of the Baptist History Collection. The collection, was originally established by the Society and initially maintained by Stetson University. In 1995 the Florida Baptist State Convention directed that the Collection be transferred to The Baptist College of Florida to be maintained by the college library. During the ensuing 25-years the Society continued to acquire books and resources that were added to the Collection. What had started as a collection of less than 2,000 volumes had grown to over 6,000 volumes.

Unfortunately, when Hurricane Michael struck the Florida Panhandle in 2018, the college library was severely damaged requiring the facility to shut down. Concern was expressed over the safety of and accessibility to the library holdings particularly the Baptist History Collection. Steps were taken to remove all the library holdings to permit major repair and renovation to the library building.

Subsequently the college administration developed a de-centralization plan for the College's library holdings including the Florida Baptist Historical Collection. The Florida Baptist Historical Society directors in March of this year agreed to accept the temporary stewardship of the Florida Baptist Historical Collection, that was subsequently transferred to the Society's office.

We appreciate the assistance of Dr. Roger Richards in making the transfer of the Collection possible. Having the Baptist History Collection readily available in the Society office should enhance our on-going research efforts and response to church leadership inquiries.

RESPONDING TO INQUIRIES from individuals continued to be an on-going task of the administrative ministry assistant. Most of these requests were for information about church histories or information on a church's prior pastors. To respond to these inquiries requires manually reviewing association annuals and back issues of the *Florida Baptist Witness*. Since January we have assisted several persons that needed help with history or biographical information as follows:

Historic people information researched – George Washington Hall; James Brooks (1765 – 1850) and Cassandra Osteen (1790 – 1815); provided a list of former pastors who had served the Suwannee Station Baptist Church; Charlie Green Ray; and Hugh Bethea.

Church and Associational history information researched or provided – First Baptist Church, Apalachicola; Palma Sola Bay Baptist Church, Sarasota; Pasadena Baptist Church, St. Petersburg; First Baptist Church, Auburndale; Mt. Olive Baptist Church, Polk City and Fort Clarke Baptist Church, Gainesville. We provided historical information on a half dozen early Florida Baptist churches to a Jacksonville pastor who produced a weekly on-line video live-stream. Other churches we researched included: Mt. Nebo Church, Bell; Highland Baptist Church, Miami; Lake Region Baptist Church; Beulah Baptist Association; Flagler Street Baptist Church, Miami; Gateway Baptist Church, Miami; Cutler Ridge Baptist Church, Miami. To prepare the monthly series on early Florida Baptist churches featured in the LEGACY newsletter, we researched or confirmed the history of 40 churches. Also, we researched the organizational histories of the: St Marys River/Jacksonville Association; the Wekiwa/Greater Orlando Association; Piedmont Association; Suwannee River Association; and the Alabama River (GA) Association.;

Miscellaneous inquiries that resulted in historic information provided –

A student researcher conducting a project on Sunday School development during the Depression years (1931-41) in Florida Baptist associations sought the assistance of the Society to provide extensive resources.

The disbanded Main Street Baptist Church, Jacksonville, provided to the Society original church documents containing church minutes, deacon minutes, and assorted other historically significant material about the church

THE JOURNAL OF FLORIDA BAPTIST HERITAGE- 2020: During 2020, the Society staff selected and enlisted writers to produce 13 articles for inclusion in this year's *Journal of Florida Baptist Heritage*. The earmarked articles, approved by the Society Board of Directors, focused on the Legacy Evangelism of Florida Baptists, including featured profiles on those legacy leaders who have contributed through various endeavors in Florida Baptist churches. The journal was released to the Society's members in late November and early December.

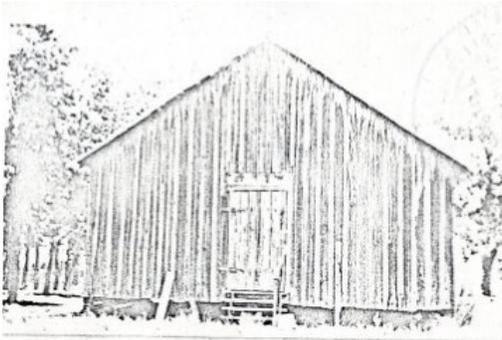


THE 2020 BAPTIST HERITAGE AWARD: As previously reported, the Society's annual award was publicly presented to L. David Cunningham, on Sunday, December 13, before the combined senior adult Sunday School at First Baptist Church, Jacksonville. Cunningham was honored for having written two significant volumes of the history of the Sunday School movement in Florida and a subsequent book on significant lay-Sunday school teachers. Since 1997 the Historical Society has conferred the Baptist Heritage Award upon 24 Florida Baptists, including four laymen, three women, six pastors, and eleven Baptist college or seminary professors/administrators.

CHURCH ANNIVERSARIES: The Society staff prepared and distributed a "Certificate of Recognition" to those 68 Florida Baptist churches that were to observe milestone anniversaries in 2020. Among the 68 churches, that have continuously functioned since being organized, to observe their respective milestone this year included: six churches that observed 175-years, having been established in 1845.

DIGITAL DOCUMENTS ON THE WEBSITE: To make the history of Florida Baptist associations accessible to interested Florida Baptists and researchers, we have continued an effort to post on the Society website PDF copies of association annuals which now includes the following early associations (and the years available): Florida (1845-1909); Alachua/Nature Coast (1848-1964); West Florida (1849-1906); Santa Fee Missionary [Santa Fe River] (1862-1964); South Florida (1867-1909); Greater Orlando [Wekiwa] (1870-1964); New River (1872-1966); Suwannee Missionary (1873-1964); St. Mary's/Jacksonville (1879-1901); Beulah (1879-1964); and Middle Florida (1900-2009);

BIOGRAPHICAL COLLECTION: The Society's has available on its website are over 5,250 biographical profiles on Florida Baptist pastors and other church leaders. During the year, we added nearly 1,200 newly researched biographical files. While the website entry is only a summary biographical profile, these are generally supported by other detailed information maintained in paper files.



CHURCH HISTORY COLLECTION: The Florida Baptist State Convention has over 3,100 cooperating congregations. Among these churches and some churches that were established but subsequently disbanded, the Florida Baptist Historical Society has secured and developed paper file histories on 904 active and deactivated congregations.

This concludes the summary highlights of the Society’s 2020 Annual report.

As we enter this Christmas season, we are thankful for the many blessings of God that we personally, as well as the Society organization, experienced during 2020, despite the challenges of a pandemic. More importantly we are thankful for the gift of Jesus Christ whom God provided to us one and all. We rejoice with the scripture announcement, “And the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring to you Good News of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a savior, who is Christ the Lord.’” [Luke 2:10-11]