



FLORIDA BAPTIST
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

LEGACY

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

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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 the story of the development and ministry of the state Baptist news journal, *The Florida Baptist Witness*. The *Witness* was officially adopted and served as an entity of the Florida Baptist State Convention from 1884 until 2017 when it was dissolved as a State Convention agency. During its 133-year history the *Witness* had 33 editors (plus a number of associate editors) and its ownership moved on several occasions between private owners to control by the Convention corporation.



William G. Stracener 1949 – 1970

W. G. Stracener “was always deeply concerned about what was best for the churches and interested in the work of the denomination,” observed Harold Bennett, president of the SBC Executive Committee and former Florida executive director (1967 – 1979). Recalling the years the two Florida leaders worked together, Bennett said in 1991, “We often talked about the work in Florida and dreamed how we could make it better.”

In 1949, W. Guy Stracener succeeded E. D. Solomon as editor of the *Florida Baptist Witness* and for the ensuing 21-years led the state Baptist newspaper to a new era of news coverage of Florida Baptists and Southern Baptists. Concurrently Stracener worked diligently to increase the readership circulation. At the time he was appointed editor in 1949, the circulation of the *Witness* was 23,000 and struggling financially. When he relinquished the reigns of the newspaper in 1970, the circulation was 68,000 with considerable operating reserves.

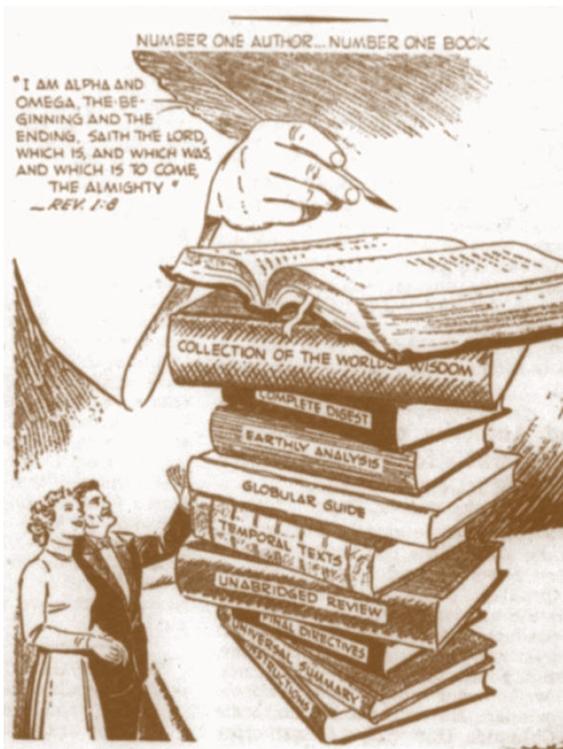


W. G. Stracener

A native of Kipling, Louisiana, Stracener was born December 8, 1905. He attended Louisiana State University and came to Florida to serve as pastor the First Baptist Church, Madison (1934 – 1938). He then went to serve as pastor of Riverside Baptist Church in Miami (1938 – 1944) followed by service at East Hill Baptist Church, Pensacola (1944 – 1949).

During his years at Pensacola, the Florida Baptist State Convention appointed Stracener as chairman of a study committee to review the operation of the *Florida Baptist Witness*. The committee, upon completing its work, had Stracener to recommend to the 1947 State Convention that a five-member *Florida Baptist Witness* Commission be established to oversee the publication of the *Witness* (which formerly had been the responsibility of the State Board of Missions). Within two years the necessary State Convention Bylaws revisions were made, and a *Witness* Board of Commissioners was appointed, which included Stracener. In June, 1949, the *Witness* Commission recommended Stracener, “over his protest,” to serve as editor, which he reluctantly accepted.

According to Dr. Jerry Windsor, retired Secretary-Treasurer, Florida Baptist Historical Society, “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.”



Editor Guy Stracener, beginning in 1952 and continuing nearly every week through 1970, included in the *Witness*, an editorial cartoon by illustrator Jack Hamm, an example of which is pictured.

In a major departure from prior editor practice, Stracener added several new and important features to the *Witness*. Beginning in 1952 the news and feature reports from *Baptist Press*, *Religious News Service* and the SBC Foreign Mission Board news service were added as wire services. These brought to Florida Baptists news from across the denomination and the larger Christian community. Among the several special features Stracener added (and the year added) included: the religious drawings of Jack Hamm (1952); the “Counselor’s Corner” by R. Loftin Hudson (1953); a regular column, “In Small Churches” by Garland A. Hendricks, highlighted activities and sermons from pastors of smaller congregations; and a family series, “Children’s Feature,” (1955).

In recognition of his work as an editor, the Southern Baptist Press Association in 1959, elected Stracener as president of its organization of state Baptist newspaper editors and writers.

Lee Nichols, pastor of the First Baptist Church, Daytona Beach, in 1949, wrote a congratulatory, yet somewhat prophetic, letter to the *Witness* about the then newly appointed editor William G. Stracener: “Conservative in his theology, our new editor is progressive in his thinking and in his actions. Selfless in service, he is a brother beloved by most of those who know him. He knows how to stay out of the ruts of dead reaction, without steering wildly into the ditches of shallow liberalism. As editor of the *Witness*, he will lead us to conserve that which is worthy in our glorious future.” And so it was.

After 21-years' service as editor, Stracener retired in December, 1970. However, that November, 1970, Stracener was elected president of the Florida Baptist State Convention to serve the following year. During the ensuing years in retirement Stracener did church pulpit supply, which he had to discontinue to devote full-time nursing his ailing wife Alleyne. At age 85, William Guy Stracener died on May 7, 1991.

-- continued next month --

Highlights of the Board of Directors' Annual Meeting:

During the April 22 meeting of the Florida Baptist Historical Society's Board of Directors, the following actions were taken:

- Re-elected Dr. Joel Breidenbaugh, pastor, Gospel Centered Church, Apopka, as chairman of the Society Board;
- Recommended to the State Board of Missions the revision of the Society's Governing Document to change the position title for the Society's Secretary-Treasurer to Managing Director;
- Recommended to the State Board of Missions to re-appoint Mrs. Arlene Vause of Sopchoppy to serve a new three-year term to the Society Board of Directors to be effective January, 2022;
- Approved a \$24,825 budget for the Society in 2022, which is dependent upon a \$20,000 allocation from the Florida Baptist Convention's Cooperative Program and additional income from membership dues and donor contributions;
- Approved the theme "The Legacy of Firsts Among Florida Baptists" and topics and persons to be featured in the 2021 *Journal of Florida Baptist Heritage* to be published and distributed this fall;
- Approved the presentation of the 25th annual Baptist Heritage Award for 2021 to Donald S. Hepburn of Jacksonville for his over 27 years of service in support of the mission and ministry of the Historical Society, as well as contributing a significant body of research and writing on Florida Baptist history; and
- Received several reports on the Society's church anniversary recognitions, website operation, the Historical Society's Collections, and the activities of the Society's managing director.