

The Journal of  
Florida Baptist  
Heritage  
Volume 23, 2021





# ***THE JOURNAL OF FLORIDA BAPTIST HERITAGE***

## **Published by the**

FLORIDA BAPTIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Donald S. Hepburn, Managing Director

Penny Baumgardner, Administrative Ministry Assistant

PO Box 95, Graceville, Florida 32440/Phone: 850.360.4179

Email: [Society1@FloridaBaptistHistory.org](mailto:Society1@FloridaBaptistHistory.org)

## **Board of Directors**

The State Board of Missions of the Florida Baptist State Convention elects the Board of Directors:

Joel Breidenbaugh  
Pastor  
Apopka

Donald Minshew  
Executive Director of Missions  
Plantation

J. Thomas Green  
Executive Director-Treasurer  
Florida Baptist Convention

Roger Richards  
Curator, Florida Baptist Archives  
Graceville

Donald Hepburn  
Managing Director  
Florida Baptist  
Historical Society

Arlene Vause  
Lay person  
Sopchoppy

The Florida Baptist Historical Society is a Cooperative Program-funded ministry of the Florida Baptist Convention.

COVER ILLUSTRATION: The line drawing, titled a "*Frontier Itinerant Preacher*," was produced by John Lane of Nashville, Tennessee, in 2004, at the request of the Florida Baptist Historical Society, which holds the copyright.

Volume 23/2021. Copyright 2021. All rights reserved.

## Table of Contents

<b>Preface</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>2021 Baptist Heritage Award</b>	<b>viii</b>
<b>The 200th Anniversary Observance of the Pigeon Creek Primitive Baptist Church</b>	<b>xii</b>
<b>THE LEGACY OF “FIRSTS” AMONG FLORIDA BAPTISTS</b>	
<b>1. The Church at Pigeon Creek: The Early Decades of Florida’s “First” Baptist Church</b> by Donald S. Hepburn	<b>1</b>
<b>2. The Missionary Question Caused a Parting of the Ways Between Nineteenth Century Baptists in South Georgia and North Florida</b> by Mark A. Rathel, PhD	<b>21</b>
<b>3. The Primary Theological Contrasts between Missionary and Primitive Baptists</b> by Joel Breidenbaugh, PhD	<b>35</b>
<b>4. Pigeon Creek Church’s Elder Reuben Crawford Set the “Gold Standard” For Georgia’s Wiregrass Primitive Baptists</b> by Michael Holt, DPA	<b>49</b>
<b>5. Florida Baptists’ First Missionaries to the World</b> Vignettes Drawn from the Resources of the Florida Baptist Historical Society	<b>65</b>

## **Table of Contents**

<b>6. First Among Primitive Baptist Preachers: Elders Isham Peacock and Fleming Bates</b> by Donald S. Hepburn	<b>79</b>
<b>7. The Firsts in the Baptist Faith Tradition Across the Georgia-Florida Frontier</b> by Susan G. Broome	<b>101</b>
<b>8. The First One-Hundred Years of Florida Baptists' Legacy – 1825 – 1925</b> by Rufus W. Weaver, ThD	<b>115</b>
<b>9. South Carolina's Rebellious Slaves Became Florida's First Anabaptists</b> by Donald S. Hepburn	<b>133</b>
<b>Life Members of the Florida Baptist Historical Society</b>	<b>153</b>
<b>Index</b>	<b>155</b>

## PREFACE

### **The Legacy of “Firsts” Among Florida Baptists**

The theme for this year 2021 issue of the *Journal* grew out of a suggestion made by former Society Board chairman Dr. David Elder of St. Augustine who proposed a Journal theme built around the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the organization of the first Baptist church – Pigeon Creek Baptist Church – established in the Florida Territory on January 7, 1821. During its 200-years of continuous ministry this rural Nassau County-based church has aligned itself with the faith and practice doctrines of Primitive Baptists who organized in the 1830s in South Georgia.

Primitive Baptist doctrine largely arose out of a blending of scriptural adherence and interpretation that evolved from Separate and Regular (also known as Particular) Baptists. As a reaction against missionary societies promoted by some Baptists at the beginning of the nineteenth century, these Baptists challenged and decried missionary societies as being without scriptural authority. In contrast these anti-missionaries, who came to designate themselves as “Primitive” Baptists, exalted original scripture as the single source authority of their faith and practice and prided themselves in following the “good old-fashioned ways,” of the “ancient” New Testament church. They adamantly opposed all that the pro-missions Baptists promoted – missionary societies, Sunday school societies, theological education – to highlight their dedication to original scripture. A leading scholar of the Primitive Baptist movement, John Crowley, explained that they, “wish not to change the world but to escape from it . . . They often refer to their churches as ‘little heavenly places,’ where they escape out of time and mundane concerns.”

## **PREFACE**

Seeking to profile the early history of the first Baptist church established in Florida naturally led to the identification of other subjects related to the early Primitive Baptist leaders of Pigeon Creek church, their doctrinal faith and practice, as well as the contrast between Primitive Baptists and Missionary Baptists. Additionally, by extension, other topical subjects evolved that seek to address the several “firsts” that have contributed to the legacy of Florida Baptists during the past two-hundred years.

## 2021 Baptist Heritage Award



**The Florida Baptist Historical Society, on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the award recognizing effective preservation and promotion of Florida Baptist history, is pleased to announce that the 2021 recipient of the Baptist Heritage Award is Donald S. Hepburn of Jacksonville, Florida.**

In considering a potential candidate to be the 2021 Baptist Heritage Award recipient, the Board of Directors of the Florida Baptist Historical Society determined there was one noteworthy individual who has had a long history of contributing to the preservation and promotion of Florida Baptist history: Donald S. Hepburn. A native of St. Petersburg, Florida, Hepburn is the co-author, with the late Dr. E. Earl Joiner (b. 1924; d. 1997), of the book, *Favored Florida, A History of Florida Baptists, Volume One 1784 – 1939*, published in 2013. He is currently working on volume two of the book. Additionally, he has written over 17 articles for the *Journal of Florida Baptist Heritage*. Since 2017, Hepburn has served as the volunteer Managing Director (Secretary-Treasurer) of the Florida Baptist Historical Society for which he does not receive compensation.

Hepburn's earliest relationship with the Historical Society dates from 1994 until 2015, during which time he served as the Florida Baptist Convention staff liaison to the Society as the designee on behalf of the executive director-treasurer of the Convention. In that liaison role he was assigned to draft the appropriate documents, subsequently approved by the State Board of Missions and the Florida Baptist State Convention to: (1) dissolve the Historical Society as an agency of the State Convention; (2) authorized that the Florida Baptist History Collection of books and memorabilia

to be transferred from Stetson University to The Baptist College of Florida; (3) established a re-defined Historical Society as an entity operating under the auspices of the State Board of Missions; and (4) drafted the Governing Document for the re-defined Historical Society.

Hepburn's commitment to the mission and ministry of the Historical Society was reflected in his efforts to lead the Historical Society Board of Directors to approve the establishment of a Society Endowment fund. To underscore Hepburn's commitment to the future mission of the Society he donated the majority seed money to establish the fund managed by the Florida Baptist Financial Services.

During his professional career, Hepburn was a public relations management specialist who worked a combined 45 years for several Southern Baptist-related entities. Before retiring in 2015, Hepburn served 32 years as the public relations director of the Florida Baptist Convention (1983 – 2015). His previous service included: director of communications, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (1970 – 1978); and director of Office of Communications and Public Relations, The Southern Baptist General Convention of California (1978 – 1983). He is a graduate of Carson Newman College (now University); Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary; and the University of San Francisco/College of Professional Studies. Hepburn resides in Jacksonville, Florida, where he is a member of the First Baptist Church.

**The following individuals are former Heritage Award recipients:**

- 1997 - 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.
- 2006 - Harry C. Garwood
- 2007 - Pope Duncan
- 2008 - John L. Rosser
- 2009 - Doak Campbell
- 2010 - Judith Jolly
- 2011 - Jack Dalton
- 2012 - James C. Bryant
- 2013 - David Elder
- 2014 - Mark Rathel
- 2015 - No recipient
- 2016 - David Lema and Roger Richards
- 2017 - Jerry M. Windsor
- 2018 - Sid Smith
- 2019 - Thomas A. Kinchen
- 2020 - L. David Cunningham



## **Our Mission:**

---



## **Serving Churches**

---

In fulfilment of our Mission to research, preserve and promote the Legacy of Florida Baptists, the Society assists leadership of Florida Baptist churches and associations in a variety of ways:

- ◆ the research of local church and association histories;
- ◆ the research of pastoral leader biography;
- ◆ provide resources for publishing a history; and
- ◆ encourage and assist churches and associations to celebrate their respective heritage and anniversaries.



## **The 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Observance of the Pigeon Creek Primitive Baptist Church**

Earlier this year, on January 7th, 2021, marked the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary since the 1821 organization of the first Baptist church in Florida. Just one month after - February 22, 1821- the control of the Florida Territory was transferred to the United States from Spain. In a rural area identified as just south across the boundary line between the Territory and the State of Georgia, in Nassau County, the Pigeon Creek Baptist Church was established on that first Sunday of 1821. The charter members included five men and seven women. Today, two centuries later, the church, which now identifies with the Primitive Baptist faith and practice tradition, was set to officially observe its 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary on Saturday, February 6.

Unfortunately, in February the church leaders announced that the observance had been temporarily postponed to a future unspecified date as a result of continuing issues caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, since last year the Florida Baptist Historical Society leadership has been working with the church leadership to not only plan and develop an appropriate celebration, but to gather information to develop related articles for use in the 2021 *Journal of Florida Baptist Heritage*.

Another entity – the Baptist History Preservation Society – additionally stepped forward to participate in the observance. The Society, headquartered in North Carolina, proposed to install a blue granite memorial marker – measuring 14 inches deep by 5-1/2 feet wide by 8-feet tall. The marker – with a summary of the Pigeon Creek Church history – is a gift of the Baptist History Preservation Society which seeks to install granite memorials in recognition of the

significant people, places and events in Baptist history that has occurred in the United States. The Preservation Society had placed 24 monuments in 13 states to date.

Unfortunately, the company that produces the granite memorial for the Preservation Society was sidelined during much of 2020 by the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, the granite supplier had closed down for an extended period and was unable to deliver the granite. Meanwhile, the company that shapes and engraves the granite continued to receive orders for gravestone markers, which grew to an unprecedented large number of backorders. As a result, when the gravestone company re-opened for business, it had to focus its efforts on fulfilling the gravestone orders. And although the Preservation Society had been a long-term annual customer, their order for the Pigeon Creek memorial went to the bottom of the “first come, first served” order list. In January, the Preservation Society did manage to pour and set the re-enforced concrete foundation which the marker will sit. Once the marker is ready, a celebration observance date will be set by the church leadership.

The Florida Baptist Historical Society plans to present a certificate of recognition during the anniversary celebration event. That certificate is reproduced to the right.



# **The Church at Pigeon Creek: The Early Decades of Florida's "First" Baptist Church**

*By Donald S. Hepburn  
Managing Director  
Florida Baptist Historical Society*



Britton Knight was born into a family that were committed South Carolinian Baptists in faith and practice.<sup>1</sup> By the early 1800s, the Knight family, along with two other related families, formed the nucleus of the twelve founding members who organized a small church positioned between the Pigeon Creek waterway and the Kings' Highway in northwest Duval County (now known as Nassau County), Florida.<sup>2</sup>

That congregation – today known as the Pigeon Creek Primitive Baptist Church – holds the distinction of being the first Baptist church to have been organized in the Florida Territory that at the time was under the control of the Government of Spain and decades before Florida became a state. Since its founding on January 7, 1821,<sup>3</sup> and during the past 200 years, this small rural congregation has continued to be steadfast and faithful to its founding theology and practices.

## **Seeking Land in a New Frontier**

The three founding families – Knights, Prevatts and Dixons – were Baptist by faith and practice in their homeland of South Carolina. But the opportunity to acquire free land in Georgia drew them to venture into Georgia in the early to mid-1790s. There the families joined the Sardis Baptist Church in what was then Camden County, which bordered the northern edges of the northeast Florida Territory.

Just as the prospect of acquiring free farm land that enticed these pioneers first to Georgia, other free land offers



subsequently attracted them to the Florida Territory's frontier. The British in 1763 first offered land grants to its citizens and to Colonial Loyalists as a means of increasing populated settlements. When the Spanish regained control of the Territory during its second reign beginning in 1783, they also offered land grants which were much more generous than what the British had offered, being as much as 640 free acres. The two governments had made the "generous land grants [which] induced responsible men to move settlers to the colony."<sup>4</sup> The free land strategy was based upon the belief that, "large farms with their slave labor" would not only provide foodstuffs for the territorial inhabitants, "but also produce staple crops for export."<sup>5</sup> As a further inducement to potential settlers, Spain no longer insisted that only devout Catholics could enter the Territory, but "Lutherans and other Protestant sects" were welcomed. As a result, "Protestant American farmers moved down from Georgia with their chosen forms of worship."<sup>6</sup>

The future of a Spanish-controlled Florida was soon challenged. American government leadership recognized that the western migration of American settlers and the



growing American demands for access to sea and gulf ports caused the situation between the two nations to become “tense.”<sup>7</sup> As a result of diplomatic negotiations and treaty ratifications that took nearly two years, finally on February 22, 1821, the Florida Territory came under the ownership of the United States.

Based upon Spanish land grant records, the earliest applicants included Britton Knight, Thomas B. Prevatt and John B. Dixon, among others who made claims as early as 1810 for land along the southern edge of the St. Marys River which served as the boundary between Camden County, Georgia, and the Florida Territory. The grants were adjacent to each other and in essence made the three families neighbors.<sup>8</sup> Each family owned slaves that they brought from either South Carolina or Georgia to clear and cultivate the land.<sup>9</sup> During this era, owning slaves was not considered as a question of morality, but rather viewed as inherent in the culture and an economic necessity, particularly if the need existed to cultivate hundreds of acres. “A few religious people perceived a potential conflict between their religious principles and the inhumanity inherent in slavery,” a historian explained.<sup>10</sup> Unfortunately, there is no available record on the opinions held by these three family leaders on the question of slavery other than their actions.

### **Florida’s “First” Baptist Church**

These early Baptists, who had been faithful Christian believers most likely had a spiritual yearning to worship God. They likely expressed their singular and collective thanksgiving for their safe travels, God’s watch care and protection from the occasional marauding group of Indians, to say nothing of the free land on which they settled and were able to produce a livelihood.

Initially these stalwart Baptists held worship services in one of their homes constructed using the plentiful pine trees. But as more neighbors came to join in the occasional worship experience, they likely constructed a brush arbor.

Reminiscent of what was used for revival camp meetings, these “outdoor churches” were set-up in an open clearing free of trees, with the limbs of the surrounding trees providing “a natural canopy which created a cathedral like effect.”<sup>11</sup> In the clearing, logs, benches and even wagons would serve as seating. These worship gatherings typically included the reading of scripture, the singing of hymns without the benefit of musical instruments, prayer and the hearing of a sermon often delivered by a godly layman, or on rare occasion, an itinerant preacher. One of those early itinerant preachers was Baptist Elder Fleming Bates,<sup>12</sup> who as early as 1818, traveled from Georgia across the St. Marys River into Spanish-controlled Florida.<sup>13</sup>

After several years of conducting monthly or semi-monthly worship services, the family leaders likely discussed with Elder Bates the potential of organizing a church. It was agreed that Bates and his fellow pastor Elder Isham Peacock of Georgia would serve as the presbytery to hear their individual experiential conversion testimony of Christian faith and examine the doctrinal integrity of these Baptists seeking to organize a church.

### **Founding Members**

Finally on January 7, 1821, the Knights, Prevatts and Dixons families met with Elders Bates and Peacock. (See related story on these two men in this issue of the *Journal*). Not only did these prospective members have to share their Christian testimony, they also had to present letters of dismission from the last church where they held membership – Sardis Church in Camden County, Georgia.<sup>14</sup> The founding members from the Knight family included: Britton Knight (b. abt. 1788; d. 1842) and his spouse Biskin Hudnell “Polly” Knight (b. 1785; d. unk), and Britton’s mother Chloe Knight (b. 1750; d. 1835). The Prevatts included Thomas B. Prevatt (b. 1774; d. 1837) and his spouse Mary “Polly” Studstill Prevatt (b. 1785; d. 1837), as well as Thomas’ brother Joseph R. Prevatt (b. 1784; d. 1877) and his wife Susannah Prevatt (b. 1790; d. 1890). The Dixon clan included John B. Dixon

(b. abt. 1771; d. 1837)<sup>15</sup> and his spouse Sophia “Sarah” Knight Dixon (b. 1770; d. unk.), who was the older sister of Britton Knight. In addition, John Dixon’s son Edward Dixon (b. 1790; d. 1834) and daughter Susannah “Nancy” Dixon (b. 1796; d. 1880), both of whom were unmarried at the time the Pigeon Creek Church was organized.<sup>16</sup> The twelfth founding member was Ellender Cread about whom little is known, as neither public nor ancestry records searches yielded any family information.

Previously published Pigeon Creek Church histories listed Fleming Bates (b. 1771; d. 1840) as a founding member, likely because he and Isham Peacock (b. 1742; d. 1850) led in the organization of the church. However, in the church’s *Minutes Book* that sequentially lists church members in the order of joining the church, Bates’ name appears after Elias Knight (a younger brother of Britton) who was received into the church fellowship in 1823.<sup>17</sup> Bates, who served concurrently as pastor of several other churches, followed a preaching itinerary that brought him to the Pigeon Creek area every four to six weeks. He was officially called as the Pigeon Creek pastor on May 18, 1822,<sup>18</sup> but did not seek membership until 1824.<sup>19</sup>

### **Declarations Doctrine, Practice and Discipline**

As a part of organizing the church, the founding members followed Elder Peacock’s direction in approving documents that included a church Constitution, a set of 12 Articles of Faith, and a 19-point list of Decorum which provided the rules of order for the business (called conference) meetings.<sup>20</sup> It is noteworthy, according to the current church clerk Myra Nelson Shuman, that “these founding documents have remained unchanged” during the church’s 200-years of existence.<sup>21</sup> At the organization, the group also agreed that Britton Knight should serve as the church moderator for their monthly conferences. A year later, Thomas Prevatt was ordained as a deacon,<sup>22</sup> which made the two men the church’s spiritual leaders in the absence of a pastor, as well as administrators of church business.



It was Elder Peacock who was the doctrinal source authority for Baptist theology, faith and practice in the area known as the Southeast Georgia Wiregrass, according to Primitive Baptist Historian John Crowley. Holding firmly to a hyper-Calvinism perspective on grace and salvation, Peacock often dictated the verbiage for the basic statement of faith – that provided the framework for the Articles of Faith document – for all the churches he started, including Pigeon Creek, which declared:

“The existence of one Triune God, the fall of man and his inability to recover himself, God’s Sovereign choice of his people in Christ, their covenant [sic] head, from before the foundation of the world, effectual calling, justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ alone, final perseverance of the saints in grace and eternal salvation in glory, and baptism [by] immersion, and the Lord’s supper.”<sup>23</sup>

In addition to the observance of the Lord’s Supper and baptism, the Pigeon Creek Church members, during a subsequent July, 1821, church conference, discussed the “duty of washing of each other’s feet.” It was agreed this practice was Biblically appropriate, in keeping with the example that Jesus set, and agreed, “that it is our indispensable duty to do so.”<sup>24</sup> The Lord’s Supper – consisting of actual wine and unleavened bread prepared by a church member – and the feet-washing are typically conducted during the quarterly church conference, a practice continued to the present day. (See on the accompanying page the Pigeon Creek Church’s Constitution and Articles of Faith.)

Also inherent in their rules of decorum is an implied strict code of discipline based upon scriptural directives. Church members were held accountable for their lifestyle witness and practice of Christian brotherly love toward others, even today. The Pigeon Creek Church *Minutes* records member

**Pigeon Creek Primitive Baptist Church**  
**Constitution of Faith**  
**January 7, 1821\***

For our faith and practice particularly the existence of one Triune God, the fall of man and his inability to recover himself, God's Sovereign Choice of his people in Christ. Their Covenant head from before the Foundation of the world. Effectual Calling and justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ alone. The final perseverance of the saints in Grace and Eternal Salvation in glory and by Baptism by immersion and the Lord's Supper.

**Articles of Faith\***

1. We believe in only one true and living God; that there are three persons in the Godhead, the Father, Son and Holy Ghost.
2. We believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the word of God and the only rule of faith and practice.
3. We believe in the doctrine of eternal and particular election.
4. We believe in the doctrine of original sin.
5. We believe in man's incompetency to recover himself from the fallen state he is in by nature of his own free will and ability.
6. We believe that sinners are justified in the sight of God only by the imputed righteousness of Christ.
7. We believe that God's Elect shall be called, regenerated and sanctified by the Holy Ghost.
8. We believe that baptism, the Lord's Supper and washing the Saint's feet are ordinances, and we believe that the only true mode of baptism is by immersion.
9. We believe that saints shall preserve in Grace and never finally fall away.
10. We believe that the punishment of the wicked shall be everlasting, and the joys of the righteous shall be eternal.
11. We believe that no minister has the right to the administration of baptism and the Lord's Supper, except such as are regularly called and come under hands of the Presbytery.
12. We believe in the resurrection of the dead and a general judgment.

[\*The original Constitution of Faith and the Articles of Faith were adopted at the organization of the Pigeon Creek Baptist Church on January 7, 1821. Subsequently on July 14, 1821, the church voted to amend the Articles of Faith to include, as an ordinance, the "washing the Saint's feet."]

misconduct that ranged from extended absences from worship to being drunk and/or disorderly in public, to the charge of adultery.<sup>25</sup> The maximum penalty the Pigeon Creek Church would impose on rare occasions was excommunication from the church fellowship. However, a member charged with a violation of the code of conduct was afforded an opportunity to come before the church to confess their “sin” and request forgiveness. The church members would then vote to restore the member to full fellowship or withdraw fellowship. In numerous instances, members who were summoned and who failed repeatedly to come before the church were subjected to withdrawal of fellowship.

The church’s Decorum holds the male members to a higher standard. As an example, the Decorum specifies, “Every male member of this church who shall fail attending a church meeting or conference . . . was expected to publicly render his reason for such neglect, and church judge of the same.” This standard for the male members is based upon another Decorum rule that reflects the Biblically-sanctioned teaching of the primacy of male authority<sup>26</sup> not only as the head of the household, but to “whom [church] government more particularly belongs,”<sup>27</sup> as the Decorum states.

### **Going Through an “Open Door”**

During its 200-year history, the Pigeon Creek Church has sought to meet one Sunday of each month, with the church conference being held on the preceding Saturday. This monthly schedule historically has accommodated the itinerant pastors’ schedule who served other churches on the other Sundays of the month. The Sunday preaching service includes the singing of hymns from a traditional hymnal published in 1841.<sup>28</sup> Without any musical accompaniment, the song leader sings the pitch then “lines out” a verse, followed by the members repeating the verse. The Saturday conference also consists of “divine worship” followed by consideration of church business. It is during these weekend meetings that the “the door was opened” to receive new members.

Persons who seek to enter the church's "open door" typically came by means of presenting a letter of dismissal from a Baptist church which affirmed "their standing as 'orthodox' and 'orderly' Baptists."<sup>29</sup> The second means is by a person presenting to the church an "experiential" testimony of conversion that must highlight a spiritual "awakening, struggle with sin, and final assurance of salvation."<sup>30</sup>

Primitive Baptist tradition holds that a person's conversion is the result of a divine plan in which, "the events of an individual's life leading up to the moment of conversion are



seen as participating in a sacred script authored by God before time began."<sup>31</sup> The baptism of a new convert will occur on the day they present their testimony or during the next conference. These baptisms, which originally were held in Pigeon Creek, are now conducted in the St. Marys River.

It is during the quarterly conference that the scriptural observances of the Lord's Supper and the washing of feet are conducted. When the annual conference is held, it has been the practice to read the Articles of Faith to the church members.<sup>32</sup> At the conclusion of every service the members sing the traditional hymn, "The Parting Hand," and go around the room shaking hands and embracing each other.<sup>33</sup>

Although the church has accepted persons from all walks of life, in the first several decades the Pigeon Creek Church did receive as members African-descendant slaves. This was a typical practice of Baptist churches, prior to the Civil War, with membership rights (including voting privileges) and responsibilities varying from church to church. Generally African-descendant persons were permitted to participate in the regular worship services, although they were required to sit in designated seating at the back of the church building.

The first such instance of an African-descendant slave coming into the Pigeon Creek Church was in 1822 when church member Abel G. Lopers presented his indentured servant Peter who was received as a “transit member” to be under the temporary watch care of the church.<sup>34</sup> Although the church records are inconsistent in regularly reporting the receiving or dismissing of African-descendant slaves as members, in 1846 the church issued letters of dismission to six slaves who had been members and were owned by longtime church clerk Samuel Walker.<sup>35</sup>

### **The Early Elders Provided Pastoral Care**

During the first four decades of the Pigeon Creek Church's life, there were seven men who provided “pastoral care,” as the *Minutes*' book states. These included (and their approximate dates of service): Fleming Bates (1821 – 1826); Thomas B. Prevatt (1826 – 1828); Isham Peacock (1828); Jesse Mizell (1828 – 1830); James McDonald (1838 – 1844); Elias Knight (1844 – 1860); and Reuben Crawford (1860 – 1865).<sup>36</sup>

It is noteworthy that among that group are three who were “home grown.” Prevatt, who was a founding member, was ordained as a deacon by the church in 1822,<sup>37</sup> although there is no record of him being ordained as an elder. Elias Knight who joined the church in 1823, ten years later requested the church to acknowledge God's call upon him and commissioned him to a preaching ministry.<sup>38</sup> The church also recognized Jesse Mizell's call to preach and authorized him to “use his gifts” when in 1828 they first licensed and in 1833 ordained him to the preaching ministry.<sup>39</sup>

There are several standard characteristics of these church elders (as pastors are called) which are common among Primitive Baptists. Foremost is the practice that these men are not paid for their ministry service. Rather they are expected to have a “tent-making” employment to provide the financial support of their family. In the early decades all the elders were farmers who served one or more churches during

the month. Typically, these men are not formally educated, but rather have experienced the call of God upon their lives which an “in order” Baptist church has affirmed by ordination. Most elders do not prepare a sermon, but rather select a King James version scripture passage and pray for God to speak through them during the time of “divine worship.”<sup>40</sup>

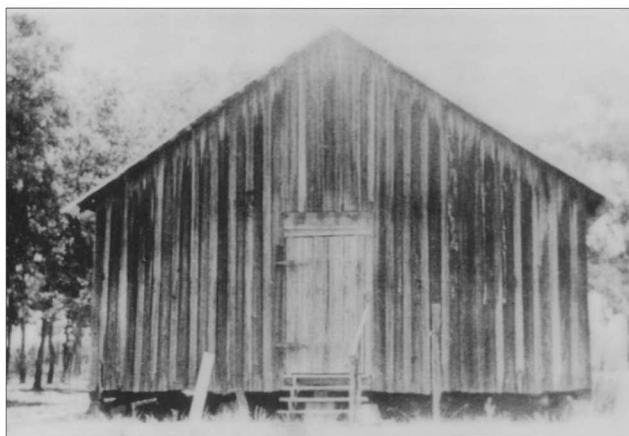
## **A Meeting House**

The historical tradition among early Baptists in America was to designate their church building as the meeting house. The Pigeon Creek Church records book do not indicate who provided the land site for their first meetinghouse, likely constructed from long-leaf pine trees that populated much of the area along the St. Marys River. The meeting house was located just east of the then free-flowing Pigeon Creek, a southern tributary off nearby Lake Hampton and the St. Marys River. The original log-framed meeting house structure was positioned facing east along the then-designated King’s Highway. Constructed during the British occupation of Florida (1763 – 1783), the highway was a 16-foot wide dirt road, covered with crushed oyster shells, that cut through the pine forest.<sup>41</sup> That main roadway into Florida initially ran from the Colerane, Georgia, ferry crossing on the St. Marys River, continuing south by southeast to St. Augustine.<sup>42</sup> On the roadway opposite the church meeting house is the church-owned cemetery that was established primarily for persons who had been members of the Pigeon Creek church.

Inside the Pigeon Creek meeting house, which is constructed in a “T” shape, seating arrangements have the men sitting on the right side facing the “Stand” (the pulpit) and the women sitting opposite,<sup>43</sup>



while visitors sit in pews directly in front of the Stand. The original Pigeon Creek meeting house was a log structure that was destroyed in 1836 having been, "burned by accident or malicious intent unknown to us,"<sup>44</sup> as the church *Minutes* record. A special dedication service was held in April of that year upon the completion of construction of a new meeting house. An existing photograph of a later Pigeon Creek meeting house – its second or third structure – was typical of the early church buildings in South Georgia and North Florida in terms of its simplicity and its windowless and



unpainted wood frame construction. Typically, these buildings had two doors which were designated respectively for male and female members. The current meeting house, built in the 1950s, is constructed of concrete block with 13 simple windows.

The former Old Kings' Highway that ran in front of the church was subsequently abandoned and today only parts of the original highway are now designated collectively as U.S. 1/U.S. 23/Hwy 301, near the unincorporated community of Boulogne. Traveling from U.S. 1, a visitor must travel east onto Lake Hampton Road and after about a mile there is a dirt road designated as the Pigeon Creek Road, which traverses south one-half mile, ending at the church property. The church and cemetery properties were formally deeded to the church in 1942 after the probate of a Last Will and

Testament bequeath made by the Thomas Lloyd estate and the H. L. Haddock families.<sup>45</sup>

### **Assuming the “Primitive” Moniker**

The existing and partially illegible church *Minutes* up until the 1850s do not provide a definitive action by which the church members embraced the “Primitive” moniker.

However, it is reasonable to conclude that the church membership was influenced by its pastoral leaders and the church’s affiliation with those Baptist associations that defined themselves as “Primitive.”

Likely at the urging of Isham Peacock the Pigeon Creek Church sought affiliation with the Piedmont Baptist Association in Georgia on October 13, 1821. Peacock was the “father” of the Piedmont Association<sup>46</sup> which had been established in 1815. In 1819, with Peacock serving as moderator of the annual meeting, the Piedmont Association “voted unanimously that they have nothing to do with missionaries.”<sup>47</sup> At the heart of this anti-missionary position was a disdain of money-based mission boards, Sunday Schools, Bible and Tract Societies, and seminaries which were considered non-scriptural. Those who opposed those non-scriptural institutions became known as Old School or Primitive Baptists. One scholar’s explanation noted, “By the mid-1830s, the faction who insisted that all Baptists — all Christians — needed to ‘ask for the old paths, where is the good way’ [Jeremiah 6:16] settled on the appellation, ‘Primitive’ in order to signify their direct descent from the primitive church — that is, the church gathered around Jesus nearly two thousand years earlier. They would look back in order to go forward.”<sup>48</sup> (See related article on the development of the Primitive Baptists movement in this issue of the *Journal*.)

Initially the Pigeon Creek Church was one of the largest contributors to the Piedmont Association — around two dollars annually — and its membership of 44 was considered healthy. In 1825 the church hosted the annual meeting of



the association and Fleming Bates was elected as association moderator. By 1831 the church stopped sending delegates to the association meeting and finally in 1839 the association voted to issue a letter of dismissal to the Pigeon Creek Church.<sup>49</sup>

In August, 1835, the church voted to affiliate with the newly organized Florida-based Suwannee River Association.<sup>50</sup> That association also adopted an anti-missionary position which was embraced implicitly by its member churches. Those Florida churches opposed to the anti-missions' position withdrew in 1843 to participate in the organization of the missionary-oriented Florida Baptist Association.<sup>51</sup> Subsequently, in 1845 the Suwannee River Association and the Alabama River Association (Georgia), organized in 1842, each adopted a resolution accepting Primitive Baptist as a denominational name.<sup>52</sup>

By 1847, the Pigeon Creek Church had affiliated with the Alabama River Association,<sup>53</sup> which previously had adopted an anti-missions' position. This association had as one of its leaders Elder Reuben Crawford who in 1860 became the pastor of the Pigeon Creek Church. (See related article on Reuben Crawford in this issue of the *Journal*.) The church retained its affiliation with the Alabama until 1911, when it voted to affiliate with the St. Marys River Baptist Association<sup>54</sup> comprised of churches primarily located along the northeast Florida and southeast Georgia state line. That association had been organized in 1879, but in 1902 all the churches located in Duval County acted to withdraw and establish the pro-missionary-oriented Jacksonville Baptist Association.<sup>55</sup> The remaining congregations retained their associational structure and added the descriptive adjective "Primitive" to their original name. The Pigeon Creek Church continued to maintain its relationship with the St. Marys River Primitive Baptist Association into the twenty-first century.<sup>56</sup>

## A Faithful Remanent

Although the scope of this article has been confined to the early decades of the Pigeon Creek Church, now after 200-years of existence, the church has come full circle. What began as a church organized by three families, continued to grow slowly. However, over the course of time, the church's membership remained small consisting of a few supporting families. Today, primarily two families – descendants of the Nelsons and the Sikes (direct descendants of the Britton Knight family) – comprise the church membership of 13.<sup>57</sup> One of the earliest settlers in Spanish-controlled Florida was William Nelson who in 1815 secured a Spanish land grant along the St. Marys River south to the Nassau River and east to the Atlantic Coast that included parts of Fernandina.<sup>58</sup> However, it was not until May, 1856, when the first known descendant – Isaac Nelson – sought membership in the Pigeon Creek Church.<sup>59</sup> The Sikes clan reunited with the church in 1920 with the call to pastoral service for Elder T.J. Sikes (and his wife Lou Sikes) to return to the Pigeon Creek Church from Macedonia Primitive Baptist Church, Wayne County, Georgia.<sup>60</sup>

Whether in season or out, this rural congregation has had a faithful remanent of members who steadfastly prayed for

God's watch care. And for 200-years God has blessed this congregation of faithful servants who have stood committed to their God-scripted experiential calling, the scriptures and their founding principles of faith.



---

## ENDNOTES

**[Editor's note:** *The scope of this article on the first four decades of the Pigeon Creek Primitive Baptist Church was dictated by the limited available church minutes. The original Minutes book is missing, but most years have been preserved on microfilm. However, those available first several decades, contain pages that are faded or non-existent. In addition, selected years of Minutes - particularly 1866, 1881, 1911 — are missing. Church Minutes books from 1882 to the present day are in the custody of church clerk Mrs. Myra Nelson Shuman of Fernandina Beach.]*

<sup>1</sup> Britton Knight was the son of Zachariah Knight of Beaufort, S.C. who was an active leader of the Coosawhatchie Baptist Church, located in the Beaufort District, S.C. until 1790, when the senior Knight moved his family to Liberty County, Georgia. Two years later he acquired 250 acres through the Georgia Land Lottery. See Zachariah Knight family history summarized on <https://ancestry.com/family-tree/person/tree/25935267/person/1744768404/story>.

<sup>2</sup> As a result of the Treaty of Versailles of 1783, Great Britain ceded Florida to Spain which divided the peninsula into East Florida and West Florida. Subsequently, on February 22, 1821, Spain officially ceded Florida to the United States, which appointed a territorial government that established two original counties – Escambia in the west and St. Johns in the east. In August, 1822, the Legislative Council of the Territory of Florida, divided portions of St. Johns County to create Duval County, whose boundaries extended east to west from the Atlantic Ocean to the Suwannee River and was bounded on the north by the St. Marys River (the boundary between Georgia and Florida) and the St. Johns River to the south. In 1824, the Legislative Council approved the creation of Nassau County which took over northern Duval between the St. Marys River to the north and the Nassau River to the south.

<sup>3</sup> *Minutes*, Pigeon Creek Primitive Baptist Church, January 7, 1821.

<sup>4</sup> Rembert W. Patrick and Allen Morris, *Florida Under Five Flags*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1967), 22.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* 23.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* 24.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* 29.

<sup>8</sup> Spanish land grant records, with the assigned parcels, for Britton Knight, John B. Dixon, Edward Dixon, Joseph Prevatt and Thomas B. Prevatt are available at: <https://babel.hathitrust.org>, accessed March 3, 2021.

<sup>9</sup> See biographical information on each head of household at [www.ancestry.com/U.S.Federalcensus](http://www.ancestry.com/U.S.Federalcensus): information and attached Federal Slave Schedules

---

<sup>10</sup> Young Hwi Koon, "The Spread of Anti-Slavery Sentiment Through Pro-Slavery Tracts in the Transatlantic Evangelical Community, 1740-1770s," *Church History*, Vol. 81, #2, (June 2012), 351.

<sup>11</sup> W. G. Travis, "Brush Arbor," *Dictionary of Christianity in America*, edited by Daniel G. Reid, (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 197.

<sup>12</sup> The term Elder was the title of respect that was assigned to the recognized pastoral leader of a Baptist or Methodist church in the American frontier during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. See "Pioneer Baptist Church Terminology," in Donald S. Hepburn and E. Earl Joiner, *Favored Florida: A History of Florida Baptists, Volume One: 1784 – 1939*, (Gainesville: Storer-Childs Printers, 2013) 60-61.

<sup>13</sup> "Died," *Florida Herald and Southern Democrat* (St. Augustine), Vol. 5, #32, 3.

<sup>14</sup> *Minutes*, Pigeon Creek Primitive Baptist Church, January 7, 1821.

<sup>15</sup> Previous published narratives of the church's history do not include John Dixon as a founding member. However, closer examination of the church minutes reveals John Dixon's name listed before his son Edward; see *Minutes*, Pigeon Creek Primitive Baptist Church, January 7, 1821.

<sup>16</sup> The birth and death dates for each family member was accessed using ancestry and public records information found on the website, <https://Ancestry.com/search>.

<sup>17</sup> *Minutes*, Pigeon Creek Primitive Baptist Church, May 17, 1823.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, May 18, 1822.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, July 17, 1824.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, January 7, 1821.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Mrs. Myra Nelson Shuman, Church Clerk, Pigeon Creek Baptist Church, conducted by the author on February 25, 2021.

<sup>22</sup> *Minutes*, Pigeon Creek Primitive Baptist Church, June 15, 1822.

<sup>23</sup> John G. Crowley, *Primitive Baptists of the Wiregrass South*, (Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 1998), 22; Also see *Minutes*, Pigeon Creek Primitive Baptist Church, January 7, 1821.

<sup>24</sup> *Minutes*, Pigeon Creek Primitive Baptist Church, July 14, 1821.

<sup>25</sup> *Minutes*, Pigeon Creek Primitive Baptist Church, examples of specific mis-conduct cited: May 16, 1835; November 20, 1824; August 13, 1840; and October 22, 1842.

<sup>26</sup> See scriptural examples of God-mandated male authority: I Corinthians 11:3; I Timothy 2:11-15.

<sup>27</sup> "Decorum," *Minutes*, Pigeon Creek Primitive Baptist Church, January 7, 1821.

<sup>28</sup> The standard Primitive Baptist hymnal used by the Pigeon Creek congregation is called *Primitive Hymns*, by Benjamin Lloyd, published in 1841.

<sup>29</sup> Crowley, 43.

<sup>30</sup> James R. Mathis, *The Making of the Primitive Baptists*, (New York: Routledge, 2004), 128.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

<sup>32</sup> *Minutes*, Pigeon Creek Primitive Baptist Church, May 15, 1824.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Mrs. Myra Nelson Shuman, Church Clerk, Pigeon Creek Baptist Church, conducted by the author August 27, 2020.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, July 20, 1822.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, March 14, 1846.

<sup>36</sup> Dates of Elders' service were partially available in the *Minutes* book, Pigeon Creek Primitive Baptist Church, and additionally researched information supplied by Myra Nelson Shuman, the long-time church clerk.

<sup>37</sup> *Minutes*, Pigeon Creek Primitive Baptist Church, June 15, 1822.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, October 19, 1833.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, November 15, 1828.

<sup>40</sup> Jerry Newsome, *A Modest History of the Primitive Baptists in the United States* (n.p.; n.p., 1977), 44

<sup>41</sup> William Ryan, *The Search for Old King's Road: The First Route into Florida*, (Columbia, S.C.: n.p., 2012), 31 – 33.

<sup>42</sup> The original Old King's Highway was relocated and abandoned over the years and today only small segments are incorporated into U.S. 1 that crosses the St. Marys River into Florida north of the Nassau County community of Boulogne.

<sup>43</sup> James L. Peacock and Ruel W. Tyson, Jr., *Pilgrims of Paradox*, (Washington: The Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989), 16.

<sup>44</sup> *Minutes*, Pigeon Creek Primitive Baptist Church, April 16, 1836.

<sup>45</sup> Copies of the property deed and the documents assigning the church site and cemetery properties are in the guardianship possession of the Church Clerk, Pigeon Creek Primitive Baptist Church, and were reviewed by the author February 25, 2021.

<sup>46</sup> Crowley, 24.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>48</sup> Joshua A. Guthman, "Primitive Baptists, the Protestant Self, and the American Religious Imagination," a PhD dissertation for the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2008, 4-5.

<sup>49</sup> Susan G. Broome, "Florida Baptists with Georgia Relations: Brothers and Sisters in the Faith," unpublished manuscript, Georgia Baptist History Depository, Special Collections, Jack Tarver Library, Mercer University, 2.

<sup>50</sup> *Minutes*, Pigeon Creek Primitive Baptist Church, August 15, 1835.

<sup>51</sup> Hepburn and Joiner, 127.

<sup>52</sup> Crowley, 84.

<sup>53</sup> Broome, 4.

<sup>54</sup> *Minutes*, Pigeon Creek Primitive Baptist Church, November 18, 1911.

<sup>55</sup> *Minutes*, St. Mary's River Baptist Association, October 1902.

Subsequently the remaining churches retained an organization as an association and re-named itself as the St. Mary's River Primitive Baptist Association.

---

<sup>56</sup> Interview with Mrs. Myra Nelson Shuman, Church Clerk, Pigeon Creek Baptist Church, conducted by the author on February 25, 2021.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> Spanish land grant records, held by the State of Florida Library and Archives and available at:

[https://www.floridamemory.com/FMP/SLG/doc\\_images/Nelson\\_William\\_24x4/24x4\\_20\\_24\\_Nelson\\_William\\_015](https://www.floridamemory.com/FMP/SLG/doc_images/Nelson_William_24x4/24x4_20_24_Nelson_William_015).

<sup>59</sup> *Minutes*, Pigeon Creek Primitive Baptist Church, May, 1856.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, January 31, 1920.

## Membership

---

- ◆ You can create a LEGACY by joining the Florida Baptist Historical Society.
- ◆ Your Legacy membership will underwrite the on-going mission and ministries of the Society. There are two basic types of membership: annually renewed and lifetime. These memberships are open to individuals, churches and associations. In consideration of your Society membership, your Legacy contribution will ensure:
- ◆ Your receipt of the monthly newsletter *Legacy*;
- ◆ Your receipt of the annual *The Journal of Florida Baptist Heritage*; and
- ◆ You'll be supporting research of Florida Baptist history.

**ACT TODAY by calling the Florida Baptist Historical Society offices at (850) 360-4179 or emailing [Society2@FloridaBaptistHistory.org](mailto:Society2@FloridaBaptistHistory.org) for more information.**





# **The Missionary Question Caused a Parting of the Ways Between Nineteenth Century Baptists in South Georgia and North Florida**

*by Mark A. Rathel, PhD  
Professor of Theology and Philosophy  
The Baptist College of Florida, Graceville*



In 1792, a Baptists meeting in Nottingham, England, launched the modern mission movement when William Carey, a cobbler-pastor, preached a sermon at the Nottingham Baptist Association on Isaiah 54.2-3 with the theme “Expect great things from God and attempt great things for God.” Baptist historian Leon McBeth commented that Carey’s sermon “provided a turning point in Baptist history.”<sup>1</sup> Carey’s message and publication of his book *An Inquiry Into the Obligation of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens* led to the formation of the Particular Baptist Society for the Propagation of the Gospel among the Heathen.<sup>2</sup> Carey soon embarked to India as a missionary supported by the Society.

Yet, the birth of modern missions among Baptists did not develop without controversy. In an earlier association



meeting in which Carey [pictured] proposed the discussion topic “Whether the command given to the apostles to teach all nations was not binding on all succeeding ministers to the end of the world.” The reverend Dr. Ryland, Sr., retorted, “Sit down young man. You are an enthusiast! When God pleases to convert the heathen, He will do it without consulting you or me.”<sup>3</sup>

Thus, the early period of Baptists origins exhibited a bombastic struggle for the support of organized cooperative



mission. The purpose of the author is to examine the early nineteenth century anti-missionary movement labeled as “Primitive Baptists,” “Particular Baptists of the Old School,” “Hardshell Baptists,” or “Anti-Effort Baptists.” First, the author will review the early beginning of a Baptist missionary movement in the U.S. that functioned as the precipitating issue in the development of Primitive Baptists. Second, the author will examine the broader anti-mission theology among North American Baptist. Third, the author will narrow the focus to the anti-mission movement in south Georgia and north Florida in the context of describing the historic Primitive Baptist origins of Southern Baptist churches in Florida in the era of Jacksonian democracy. The author contends that although Primitive Baptists planted the earliest Baptist churches within Florida, the missionary mandate proved too strong to hinder cooperative missions among pioneer Florida Baptists.

### **The First Cooperative Baptist Missions Organization as a Divisive Precipitating Issue**

The Anti-Missions movement among Baptist cannot be understood without examining the first cooperative national Baptists mission organization. Luther Rice [pictured] functioned as the key influencer for the development of the first national Baptist organization in the United States known as the Triennial Convention. Rice left his appointment as a Congregational Church missionary to India and became a Baptist in 1812 due to the influence of William Carey and his associates in India. Rice returned to America to seek missions funding from Baptists. Rice was instrumental in the establishment of the first national body of Baptists.



At a consultation, in Boston, it was determined to appoint him an agent to visit all parts of the country, and enlist churches and individuals in the cause. He journeyed

throughout the entire length of the country, and met with the most encouraging success. Delegates were appointed from all parts of the land to meet for conference, and on the 18th of May, 1814, a large number assembled at Philadelphia, Dr. Richard Furman [of South Carolina] presiding. After several days' deliberation the General Convention of the Baptist Denomination in the United States for Foreign Missions was formed.<sup>4</sup>

The General Convention of the Baptist Denomination became known as the Triennial Convention since the body met every three years. The General Convention of the Baptist Denomination was a direct outgrowth of the Second Great Awakening in the early part of the nineteenth century. One of the lasting influences of the Second Great Awakening was an activism among most Protestant denominations designated as the “the benevolent empire”<sup>4</sup> of Protestant missions and social ministries and based upon a postmillennial viewpoint that hoped to “hasten the millennium (and Christ’s earthly reign) through missions.”<sup>5</sup>

**One of the lasting influences of the Second Great Awakening was an activism among most Protestant denominations designated as the “the benevolent empire”**

The General Convention combined associational and societal methods of missions funding for the purpose of “a plan for eliciting, combining, and directing the Energies of *the whole denomination* in one sacred effort.”<sup>6</sup> The General Convention

adopted a society method of missions funding rather than an associational model – meaning membership in the General Convention was comprised of churches or individuals based upon monetary contributions supporting a single focused

entity rather than a denominational model of supporting numerous broad causes.

### **Historical Origins of Primitive Baptists**

One of the long-standing debates among Baptists focuses on the origin of the Baptists. Primitive Baptists and the nineteenth century Landmark movement claim that Baptists origins can be traced to the New Testament. Primitive Baptists have several nicknames including “Hardshell,” “Anti-Mission” or “Anti-Effort” Baptists, but Primitive Baptists understand themselves to be “Original” Baptists going back to New Testament times.<sup>7</sup>

Perhaps a more accurate description affirms that Primitive Baptists arose as a reactionary movement to mission-supporting Baptists. The beginning of the anti-mission movement within the United States

**Primitive Baptists  
arose as a  
reactionary  
movement to  
mission-supporting**

can be connected to two associational meetings and the resulting documents. The first occurred in the Kehukee Association of North Carolina in 1827. The association was one of the oldest, largest, and influential associations in the South.<sup>8</sup> In 1803 the Kehukee Association published an unanimously approved resolution called “The Kehukee Declaration: A Declaration Against the Modern Missionary Movement and other Institutions of Men.”

“The declaration was a call to discard all Missionary Societies, Bible Societies and Theological Seminaries, and the practices heretofore resorted to for their support, in begging money from the public . . . believing these societies and institutions to be the inventions of men, and not warranted from the word of God.”<sup>9</sup>

Although the Kehukee Baptist Association supported the revival of the Awakenings for twenty years, the cry for money

and extra-church organizations caused the churches to withdraw from what later Baptists would call “cooperative mission.” The Kehukee Declaration attacked the New School Baptists supporting the mission enterprise on three factors. First, the Association attacked the missionary enterprise arising from the Second Great Awakening as “New.”

“The subject of Missions was proposed to her by Martin Ross in 1803; it was never proposed before that time. The Association was constituted in 1765, and was therefore thirty-seven years old before the subject was brought to her notice. The subject was therefore new to her then, and those originating it must be called a ‘new order’ or ‘New School Baptists.’”<sup>10</sup>

In 1832, the Baltimore Baptist Association meeting in the Black Rock meeting house published an address “The Particular Baptist Churches in the ‘Old School’ in the United States...” Yet, the stated purpose of the document was to “. . . affectionally entreat those Baptists who revile us . . . to pause and consider how far they have departed from the ancient principles of the Baptists....”<sup>11</sup> Both documents, therefore, are more of early reactionary defenses of Primitive Baptists convictions against the viewpoints of missionary Baptists rather than an expression of positive aspects of the Primitive Baptists understanding of the Great Commission.

The Kehukee Association began to publish the *Primitive Baptist*, a publication that began to circulate in south Georgia and north Florida in 1838. John G. Crowley attributes the denominational name “Primitive Baptists” to the influence of the publication.<sup>12</sup> The mast head of the *Primitive* stated “Come Out of Her, My People,” a war cry for “total separation from the Missionaries...” The self-designation “Primitive” highlighted “. . . their direct descent from the primitive church—that is, the church gathered around Jesus nearly two thousand years earlier.”<sup>13</sup>

The Kehukee Declaration, the Black Rock Address, and the publication of the *Primitive* evidences the origin of Primitive Baptists as a distinct movement within the early nineteenth century by the 1830s.

### **Anti-Missions Theology among Baptists in the South**

In the opinion of Baptist historian Walter Shurden, the “Anti-Missions Controversy” was one of the most damaging controversies among Baptists in America.”<sup>14</sup>

For the early Primitive Baptists, opposition to “man-made contrivances” to support the cause of mission did not mean that the early nineteenth century Primitive Baptists were opposed to missions, at least according to the early Black Rock Address.

“Previous to stating our objection to the mission plan we will meet some false charges brought against us relative to this subject. By simple declaration we declare that we regard of first importance the command given by Christ primarily to his Apostles and through them to his ministers in every age to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature, and do feel an earnest desire to be found acting in obedience thereunto as the providence of God directs our way and opens a door of utterance for us. We also believe it to be the duty of individuals and churches to contribute according to their abilities for the support, not only of their pastors, but also of those who go preaching the Gospel of Christ among the destitute.”<sup>15</sup>

Yet, the subsequent reputation and practice of Primitive Baptists belie the sentiments of this early Primitive Baptist statement.

The anti-missions movement among Baptists in the south arose because of multi-faceted reasons, including but not limited to the issues of theology and the nature of ministry.

Baptist historian Robert Torbert described the multifaceted nature of the anti-mission movement.

“The anti-mission forces in the churches (the ‘anti-effort’ forces, as they were called) were opposed to centralization of authority, to an educated and paid ministry, and to such man-made organizations as Sunday schools, missionary societies, and theological seminaries. The hyper-Calvinism, which so often characterized the theological frame of mind of this group, was frequently used to bolster and justify their other arguments against exerting any effort to evangelize the lost.”<sup>16</sup>

In addition, the ministerial jealousy of Baptists leaders in the West of the better educated clergy in the East was a causal factor, perhaps an East-West divide could be designated a societal factor rather than a theological factor.

Although opposition to missions had multiple causes, the remainder of this article will focus on theological factors that led to the opposition to missions. The theological factors of anti-missionism were more harmful to the mission cause than the cultural or societal factors. In the nineteenth century Baptists in the South experienced controversies in terms of missions on the basis of ecclesiological (doctrine of the church) and soteriological (the doctrine of salvation) reasons.

### **Ecclesiological Reasons for Opposition to Missions**

The center of Primitive Baptist life and culture is the local church, albeit Primitive Baptists did create influential associations. Nineteenth century Primitive Baptists opposed “new measures” including “mission societies, tract societies, Sunday schools, religious fairs and festivals to raise funds for the church’s work, temperance societies, and theological seminaries.”<sup>17</sup> For Primitive Baptists the “new measures” lacked scriptural support from the New Testament.

**The center of  
Primitive  
Baptist life and  
culture is the  
local church**

Daniel Parker, founder of the Two-Seed-in-the-Spirit Predestinarian Baptists published his anti-mission sentiments in an attack on the 1814 Triennial Convention titled *A Public Address to the Baptist Society* published in 1820.<sup>18</sup> Parker opposed

“missionary societies not under church control” rather than the missionary societies.<sup>19</sup> Further, Parker argued that mission societies denied congregational polity, Jesus did not create a theological school, and membership in the Triennial Convention was based upon monetary contributions and accepted funds from slaveholders.<sup>20</sup> Thus, in the missionary movement, Parker claimed cooperative missions were separated from the church.

**Soteriological Reasons for Opposition to Missions**

The Anti-Mission coalition accused the missionary Baptists of departing from the faith “of the common salvation” that was “once delivered to the saints” as described in Jude 3. In the viewpoint of the Anti-Missionaries they obeyed Jude 3 by “earnestly contending for the faith.” According to the Old Baptists (Primitive), mission organizations and the theology undergirding the mission movement highlighted doctrinal deficiencies. Primitive Baptist historian Sylvester Hassell delineated the following summary of the doctrinal problems of missionary Baptists:

- Missionary Baptists believed in general atonement;
- Missionary Baptists accused orthodox Baptists (i.e., Primitive) of being Hyper-Calvinists;
- They neglected the doctrines of depravity, election, divine sovereignty, and final perseverance;
- Bitterness against the doctrine of election;
- “Old, staid preachers were removed to give room for those of captivating discourse, which excited the passions of congregations, and so augmented the number of conversions.”<sup>21</sup>

Nettles counters the soteriological issues highlighted in Hassell's critique of missionary Baptists by correctly emphasizing the Calvinist theology of missionary Baptists.<sup>22</sup> Yet, the Calvinism of the missionary Baptists did not conflict with the mission mandate. Nettles noted, "Particularly in the southern states strong Calvinism and strong support of missionary organization went hand in hand."<sup>23</sup>

**Calvinism of the  
missionary  
Baptists did not  
conflict with the  
mission  
mandate**

If the nineteenth century missionary Baptists and the Primitive Baptists both espoused Calvinism, how did the doctrine of salvation contribute to the divide? Primitive Baptists differed from missionary Baptists in their understanding of the nature of regeneration and faith from the missionary Baptists. At the launch of the missionary Baptist movement in the early part of the nineteenth century, the dominant Baptist confession was the 1742 Philadelphia Baptist Convention. Describing saving faith, the Confession states, "The grace of faith, whereby the elect are enabled to believe to the saving of their souls, is the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts, and is ordinarily wrought by the ministry of the Word..."<sup>24</sup> Thus, the order of salvation in the Philadelphia Confession is as follows: God's grace enables an elect individual person to believe; thus, believe precedes salvation of the soul. The Primitive Baptist Articles of Faith affirm that faith (believe/belief) are subsequent to regeneration. "We believe that being born again is not the act of man, nor does it result from what he may believe or do; but it is the word of God, who gives eternal life, thus quickening the sinner, which causes him to confess his sin, and to feel the need of a Savior."<sup>25</sup>



## **Primitive Baptists of South Georgia and North Florida**

The earliest settlers of South Georgia came from the Carolinas. By the 1840's about forty-eight percent of the religious population of the South Georgia was Primitive Baptists and approximately twenty-four percent were Missionary Baptists.<sup>26</sup> Thus,

Baptists by the 1840's comprised about seventy-two percent of the religious population of south-Georgia with Primitive Baptists being the larger group.

**Baptists by the  
1840's  
comprised  
about seventy-  
two percent of  
the religious  
population**

Isham Peacock and Fleming Bates functioned as key Primitive Baptist preachers involved in what twenty-first century Baptists would term "church planting" in South Georgia and North Florida. These two titans of Primitive Baptists might be surprised if they knew their labors as planters of Primitive Baptist churches provided the foundation for what became Southern Baptist life in Florida.

Revolutionary War veteran Isham Peacock "burst upon the Georgia religious scene in 1802, during the Great Revival [the Second Great Awakening].<sup>27</sup> A contemporary account of his ministry described Peacock in the following manner:

"Though young in the ministry, and without the advantage of a learned education, Mr. Peacock was eminently owned in converting sinners from the error of their ways . . . Numbers who had never shown the least concern for their souls before, were emboldened, publicly, and with tears to find peace with God . . . In some instances, these arduous struggles of the mind were attended with convulsions, similar to those which have so generally marked the present extensive and glorious revival of religion."<sup>28</sup>

Peacock “became a more high-toned predestinarian in his later years.”<sup>29</sup> In July 1830, Peacock led the church he pastored in Georgia to adopt the following motion, “. . . we suffer not any person to address this church or any people in this house on the subject of foreign missions or the Temperate Society knowing the times to be pregnant with doctrinal error.”<sup>30</sup>

Fleming Bates was one of several ministers discipled by Isham Peacock. Peacock and Bates established the Pigeon Creek Church in what is now Nassau County fourteen months before Florida officially became a territory of the United States on February 22, 1821 - “meaning the church was Florida’s only known Protestant church when the territory became a part of the United States.”<sup>31</sup> Under the leadership of Peacock and Bates, the Pigeon Creek church joined the anti-mission Piedmont Association in Georgia.<sup>32</sup>

### **Beginning of Missionary Baptists Hegemony**

Heated rhetoric dominated Baptist life in south Georgia and Florida over the issue of cooperative missions. The issue of missions created a final divide in Florida when in 1842 a new article adopted by the Ochlocknee Association in south Georgia led to the withdrawal of several missionary supporting churches in Florida. The new article prohibited fellowship with any church supporting,

“modern Missionary, Bible, Tract, or Sunday School Union Societies, or Theological Schools either in themselves or in any other persons or any other society that now is or may hereafter be constituted, under a pretense of circulating the Gospel of Christ, nor will she correspond with any Association that supports or fellowship with any Association that support or fellowship any of the above named societies.”<sup>33</sup>

The new article of the Primitive Baptist Ochlocknee Association provided the impetus for missionary supporting Baptists to form the Florida Baptist Association in March

1843. Several churches affiliated with the anti-mission Ochlocknee Association withdrew and became part of the new missions supporting association.<sup>34</sup> Thus, the Florida Baptist Association birthed cooperative Baptist missions within the state.

---

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage*. (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1987), 184.
- <sup>2</sup> Jim Reapsome, "Carey, William (1761-1834)" in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, ed. A. Scott Moreau. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 162-63.
- <sup>3</sup> McBeth, 185.
- <sup>4</sup> William Cathcart, ed. "Rice, Rev. Luther," in *The Baptist Encyclopedia: A Dictionary of the Doctrines, Ordinances, Usages, Confessions of Faith, Sufferings, Labors, Successes and the General History of the Baptist Denomination in All Lands*. (Philadelphia: Louis H. Everts, 1881), 979.
- <sup>4</sup> Winthrop S. Hudson, *Religion in America: An Historical Account of the Development of American Religious Life, Second Edition*. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973), 172.
- <sup>5</sup> Shelby M. Balik, "Benevolent Societies," *Encyclopedia of Christianity in the United States Volume 1*, eds. George Thomas Kurian and Mark A. Lamport. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016), 228.
- <sup>6</sup> Claude L. Howe, Jr. *Glimpses of Baptist Heritage*. (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1981).
- <sup>7</sup> Anthony Chute, "Primitive Baptists," in *Encyclopedia of Christianity in the United States, vol. 4*, eds. George Thomas Kurian and Mark A. Lamport. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016), 1857.
- <sup>8</sup> Julietta Hayes, "A History of Primitive Baptists," (Ph. D. dissertation University of Texas 1969), 57.
- <sup>9</sup> Joshua Guthman, *Stranger Below: Primitive Baptists and American Culture*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 3-4.
- <sup>10</sup> *The Kehukee Declaration*. <http://baptiststudiesonline.com/wp-content/uploads/2007/02/the-kehukee-declaration.pdf>
- <sup>11</sup> Appendix II "Black Rock Address," in Haynes, 318.
- <sup>12</sup> John G. Crowley, *Primitive Baptists of the Wiregrass South: 1815 to the Present*. (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1988), 75.
- <sup>13</sup> Guthman, 6.
- <sup>14</sup> Walter B. Shurden, *Not a Silent People: Controversies That Have Shaped Southern Baptists*. (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2019), 19.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 322.
- <sup>16</sup> Robert G. Torbert, *A History of the Baptists, Third Edition*. (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1978), 268-69.

---

<sup>17</sup> Arthur Carl Piepkorn, "The Primitive Baptists of North America," *Baptist History and Heritage* 7 no. 1 1972 – page 33.

<sup>18</sup> W. Patterson, "Parker, Daniel (1781-1844)," in *Dictionary of Christianity in America*, ed. Daniel G. Reid. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), n.p.

<sup>19</sup> James Leo Garrett, *Baptist Theology: A Four-Century Study*. (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2009), 206.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 206-207.

<sup>21</sup> This is an abridgment of thirteen "delinquencies" listed by Hassell and summarized by Tom Nettles, *The Baptists: Key People in Forming a Baptist Identity. Volume Two: Beginnings in America*. (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Mentor, 2009), 239-40.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 240.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Philadelphia Confession of Faith - The language of the Philadelphia Confession of Faith mirrors the Calvinistic Second London Confession of 1677.

<sup>25</sup> Baptist theologian Bruce Demarest labels this view "Regeneration a Work of God in Response to Faith (Reformed Evangelicals." Demarest includes famed English Baptist preacher Charles Spurgeon in this category. Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation: The Doctrine of Salvation. Foundations of Evangelical Theology*, ed. John S. Feinberg. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1997), 289.

<sup>26</sup> Jerah Johnson and Joseph A. Perdiago, "The Pioneers of Old Lowndes County: A Case Study of Settlers on the Antebellum Southern Frontier," *Piney Woods Journal of History* (1989-1990); 3, 6, 7; cited in Crowley 19.

<sup>27</sup> Crowley, 23.

<sup>28</sup> Crowley, 22. *Analytical Repository* 1 (September-October 1802, 124; cited in Crowley, 22. The description of convulsions was common during the Second Great Awakening. *Analytical Repository* 1 (September-October 1802, 124; cited in Crowley, 22.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Crowley, 65. The church under Peacock's leadership united with the Anti-Missionary Canoochee Association in 1831.

<sup>31</sup> <https://aigensoc.org/cemeteryRecords.php?cid=54>

<sup>32</sup> Donald S. Hepburn and E. Earl Joiner, *Flavored Florida: A History of Florida Baptists Volume One 1784-1939*. (Jacksonville, FL: Florida Baptist Historical Society, 2013), 119-120.

<sup>33</sup> Crowley, 81.

<sup>34</sup> Researchers disagree with the number of churches that withdrew from the Ochlocknee Association. Hepburn claimed six of the member churches left the Ochlocknee Association. Crowley claimed five churches withdrew from the Ochlocknee Association.

## **Historical Society Endowment**

---

You can create a personal, God-honoring Legacy by contributing to the Florida Baptist Historical Society endowment fund that will support the future on-going mission and ministries of the Society. Society ministries include researching, collecting, preserving, and publishing Florida Southern Baptist historical materials. The Society assists local churches in preserving their respective Legacy by offering assistance in research, writing and publication of local church documentaries and histories. Gifts to this fund are tax deductible and all checks may be made out to the Florida Baptist Historical Society Endowment Fund. Mail to: Florida Baptist Historical Society, PO Box 95, Graceville, FL 32440.

### **Florida Baptist Historical Society**

**PO Box 95  
Graceville, FL 32440  
850-360-4179  
[www.FloridaBaptistHistory.org](http://www.FloridaBaptistHistory.org)  
[Society2@FloridaBaptistHistory.org](mailto:Society2@FloridaBaptistHistory.org)  
10/2019**

# **The Theological Contrasts between Missionary and Primitive Baptists**

*By Joel Breidenbaugh, PhD  
Lead Pastor, Gospel Centered Church  
Apopka, Florida*



Depending on how entrenched you are in Baptist life, there is a common joke that plays off of Jesus' words in Matthew 18:20 and it goes something like this: "Where two or three Baptists are gathered, there are at least 4 opinions!" We Baptists can have more than one opinion on the same subject! On a related note, I've met few Baptists who weren't ready to give their views on any Bible issue, whether they could support that view with Scripture or not. Many of those Baptists who have used the Bible often take it out of context. While other Protestant groups made fun of Baptists for being "people of the Book," we have not always read and interpreted that Book consistently and faithfully.

Just because they are both called Baptists, the doctrinal differences between Missionary and Primitive Baptists are significant. Since both groups were important in the early years of Florida Baptist life, it is important to overview who they are through some of their beliefs and practices. This article will briefly cover their origins and respective views of sin, grace, regeneration, election, predestination, effectual calling, and the final perseverance of the saints. This paper will also explore their practices of baptism, the Lord's Supper, and foot-washing, as well as their views of church government and missions.<sup>1</sup>

## **Origin and Basic Definitions**

Tracing Florida Baptist roots finds them intertwined with both Missionary and Primitive Baptists. A brief consideration of their origins and a couple of basic



definitions would be helpful as foundational to the rest of this article.

Missionary Baptists are a subset of Landmark Baptists and claim to be able to trace their lineage back to Jesus Christ and the apostles.<sup>2</sup> Missionary Baptists favor home and foreign missions, theological institutions, Bible societies, conventions, associations, etc.<sup>3</sup> In short, Missionary Baptists comprise, “a Protestant denomination with distinct beliefs about the identity of the church. The denomination also places special focus on fulfilling the Great Commission through missionary efforts.”<sup>4</sup>

Primitive Baptists, sometimes called Hardshell or Old School Baptists, also prefer to trace their ancestry to the time of Christ. But they also recognize many Baptists point to their start in 1832. Primitive Baptists question this argument by asking, “If the New School or Missionary Baptists claim to have a regular, unbroken succession from the Primitive Baptists of the Apostolic Age, upon the ground that they

**Missionary  
Baptists favor  
home and  
foreign  
missions**

were largely in the majority when the division took place in 1832, will they please tell us why the claim of successionism made by Catholics is not equally clear and valid?”<sup>5</sup>

Leon McBeth observed Primitive Baptists “originated in a protest against the rise of missionary work in the early 1800s. Their extreme Calvinism undercut the theology of missions and their ecclesiology could not make room for the societies and other organizations needed to raise and disburse money for a successful mission operation. Their opposition went beyond missions to include Sunday Schools, Bible societies, theological seminaries, and other ‘human effort’ organizations. While they favored local churches and associations, they opposed the emergence of a more complete denomination.”<sup>6</sup>

This observation of their differences plays out in closer observation of their respective beliefs and practices.

### **Total Depravity**

When Calvinists clarified their views of soteriology in response to Arminian doctrine at the Synod of Dort in 1619, no one could guess how many future denominations would splinter over various nuances. One of the first issues to address is that of the sinfulness of man – how depraved is he and how did he become depraved?

Missionary Baptist B.G. Gardner writes, “Missionary Baptists believe the Bible Doctrine of total hereditary depravity. That

**Primitive  
Baptists claim,  
“every part of a  
spiritually dead  
sinner is affected  
by sin.”**

the entire man, mind, body, and Spirit is affected and defected by Sin from conception and natural birth.”<sup>7</sup> On a sermon on Ishmael and his cry for help in time of need, R.T. Perritt exclaims, “How much the sinner is like Ishmael in this condition! Regardless of where he is or what he is doing, the sinner is in



great need. He is dead spiritually and faces physical death because of sin (Ephesians 2:1; Romans 5:12).”<sup>8</sup>

Like Missionary Baptists, Primitive Baptists claim, “every part of a spiritually dead sinner is affected by sin.”<sup>9</sup> But, while Missionary Baptists are strong on sin, they do not argue for the *imputation* of Adam’s sin to his posterity but the *inheritance* of sin. The Primitive Baptists, on the other hand, go further and argue for the imputation of sin. In discussing the first sin of Adam, Primitive Baptists claim, “We believe that Adam fell from this state of moral rectitude, and that he involved himself and all his natural offspring in a state of death; and, for that original transgression, we all are both filthy and guilty in the sight of a holy God.”<sup>10</sup> Likewise, Radcliff writes, “The first Adam had all human nature in him and covenant head representative of all his posterity and so they sinned in him.”<sup>11</sup>

### **Grace and Regeneration**

While all Christians recognize God’s grace at some level, “Missionary Baptists believe (sic) the Bible Doctrine of salvation by Grace through faith in Jesus Christ . . . When one believes in Jesus Christ, he is born of God. I John 5:1 and I John 5:13.”<sup>12</sup> This view of grace sees conversion (repentance and faith) immediately leading to regeneration.

Primitive Baptists, on the other hand, argue for regeneration occurring before conversion. Hassell writes, “The monergistic or scriptural theory of regeneration teaches that there is but one efficient agent or actor in the renovation of the soul, namely, the Holy Spirit; that the will of fallen man is, like all his other faculties, utterly depraved, and has not the least ability or inclination to act holily until it has been renewed by Divine grace. This view was plainly set forth by Christ and His Apostles.”<sup>13</sup> Similarly, in light of the gospel,

“the Apostles were commanded by Christ to preach, and did preach, not the power of dead sinners or of human appliances of any kind, but the power of a Divine and Almighty Savior to save every sin-laden soul – yea, even the amazing power of the voice of the

Son of God to penetrate the soul of the spiritually dead sinner, and make him live (Mark xvi. 15; Rom i.16; Matt. i.21; John v.25; Eph. ii.1-10). The Apostles could not utter that voice, much less can any other men; not the Apostles, but only the Divine Spirit, could impart spiritual life and hearing to one dead in trespasses and sins, and make him a new creature in Christ, prepared to hear and believe the gospel and be baptized and be saved (John vi.63; Eph. i.19, 20; ii.1-10; 2 Cor. v.17, 18; John iii.1-8).”<sup>14</sup>

### **Election/Predestination**

Missionary Baptists tend to argue against several of the Reformation doctrines or the doctrines of grace. One modern church says,

“We as Missionary Baptists do not believe in unconditional election. This seems to relate to . . . ‘Irresistible Grace’ . . .but relates more to the fact that anyone can be saved. It has nothing to do with a list that God put together before he created the world. The belief of unconditional election would imply that God chooses some people over others, but the Bible teaches the opposite. “Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, ‘Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons’ (Acts 10:34).”<sup>15</sup>

Primitive Baptists, on the other hand, claim “only those ordained to eternal life believe, and this ordination is of God (Acts xiii.48; Rom. viii.29-39; Eph. i.3-14; 2 Thess. ii.13, 14; 1 Peter i.1-5).”<sup>16</sup> Similarly, “God, in his mercy and for reasons known only to Himself chose or elected a people before the foundation of the world and determined that He would save them from their sins (Eph. 1:4; II Tim. 1:9).”<sup>17</sup>

**This matter of  
predestination  
is so important  
to Primitive  
Baptists**

This matter of predestination is so important to Primitive Baptists, Radcliff opens his book on their identity by saying, “We believe that God purposed or intended beforehand, the salvation of a people, and that God’s purpose or intention embraced a people to be saved out of the fallen race of the human family.”<sup>18</sup> Later, he adds, “This predestination is of particular persons who are called, according to the purpose of God, and not according to their works.”<sup>19</sup> Moreover, “Christian predestinarianism far surpasses Arminianism in its moral results.”<sup>20</sup> Other religious groups have undermined predestination “by a denial of the fundamental Protestant, Baptist and Bible doctrine of sin and grace, of redemption and justification . . . if we except some Presbyterians and some Baptists, it would be hard to find any one on earth today believing this old scriptural doctrine.”<sup>21</sup>

**Effectual Calling**

Missionary Baptists do not have much to say about calling but hold to a general call to God’s people. This view is shown in the following statement – “Missionary Baptists believe the Word of God teaches that all infants and all children under the age of accountability, and all irresponsible people who are without a sense of sin are under the Blood of Jesus Christ and safe from eternal condemnation in hell.”<sup>22</sup>

The Kehukee Primitive Baptist Association (N.C.) believes in effectual calling. Article VII of their confession of faith from 1777 says, “We believe that in God’s own appointed time and way (by means which He has ordained) the elect shall be called, justified, pardoned and sanctified; and that it is impossible they can utterly refuse the call, but shall be made willing, by Divine grace, to receive the offers of mercy.”<sup>23</sup> Article IX affirms, “We believe, in like manner, that God’s elect shall not only be called and justified, but that they shall be converted, born again, and changed by the effectual

working of God's Holy Spirit."<sup>24</sup> Moreover, "this effectual call is of God's free and special grace alone."<sup>25</sup> In recent years, Guess affirms this belief when he writes, "God's grace must take the dead sinner and must make him alive again. Total depravity implies that an **irresistible**, powerful grace of God is the only hope for the dead sinner (author's emphasis)."<sup>26</sup>

### **Perseverance of the Saints**

Both groups of Baptists in this study are in general agreement here, for "Missionary Baptists believe the Bible Doctrine of Security (sic) of the Believer . . . Everlasting life means salvation without an end, and nothing can separate the Soul from Christ."<sup>27</sup>

Similarly, Primitive Baptists claim, "We believe that such are converted, justified, and called by His grace, shall persevere in holiness, and never fall finally away."<sup>28</sup> Radcliff argues both for

**. . . Everlasting  
life means  
salvation  
without an end**

this doctrine of perseverance and against the doctrine of apostasy, claiming, "When we consider the attributes of God and his perfection, the doctrine of the final apostasy of some of the redeemed family of God crumbles as the snow would melt before the sun in midsummer."<sup>29</sup>

### **Baptism**

Someone cannot be a Baptist without believing in immersion. Missionary Baptists and Primitive Baptists are no different. Missionary Baptists, however, have a very strict view on alien immersion, the belief that anyone baptized outside of a Missionary Baptist church has an invalid baptism. They claim, "the Bible teaches that Missionary Baptist baptism is the only

**Missionary  
Baptists,  
however, have  
a very strict  
view on alien  
immersion**

Scriptural baptism” and that “Christ placed the authority to baptize in His Church. (The Missionary Baptist church.) Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16.”<sup>30</sup>

Furthermore, “the Missionary Baptist church that Jesus organized during personal Ministry is the only Church that the Bible reveals having divine authority to baptize. No other Commission, other than the Great Commission as found in Matt. 28:18-20, Mark 16:15-16, Acts 1:8, etc., could apply to any other church, because none existed for at least 250 years after the ascension of Christ.”<sup>31</sup>



Likewise, Primitive Baptists argue, “that persons who were sprinkled or dipped while in unbelief were not regularly baptized according to God’s word, and that such ought to be baptized after they are savingly converted into the faith of Christ.”<sup>32</sup>

## **The Lord’s Supper**

When it comes to the Lord’s Supper, both groups have similar beliefs, especially against an open communion view. Missionary Baptists hold to, “Closed Communion in the observance of the Lord’s Supper in the Church.”<sup>33</sup> Those who partook in communion in Scripture “were disciples (they that gladly received the Word, no babies). Acts 2:41 . . . Were baptized (immersed). Acts 2:41 . . . Church Members (same day they were added to the Church). Acts 2:41.”<sup>34</sup> They argue, “‘Open Communion’ would destroy the ‘Oneness’ of the Church, I Cor. 10:17” by allowing unbelievers and those outside the fellowship.<sup>35</sup>

Primitive Baptists view both baptism and the Lord’s Supper as “gospel ordinances, both belonging to the converted or true believers.”<sup>36</sup> As such they argue for closed (or close) communion, for “no one was admitted to the Lord’s table without first being baptized.”<sup>37</sup> Moreover, “those who believe

and practice open communion say it is the Lord's table. Yes, it is the Lord's table, that is why we should leave it where the Lord left it."<sup>38</sup>

### **Foot-washing**

L.M. Branch, in his book *Missionary Baptist Distinctives*, argues for only two church ordinances – believer's baptism by immersion and the Lord's Supper as a memorial. He adds, "These two – no more, no less – are the pictorial ordinances left for the church today. Foot washing would be one too many."<sup>39</sup>

Primitive Baptists, however, are open to foot-washing today. In 1782 a question to the Kehukee Association asks, "Is washing feet an ordinance of Christ's church which ought to be continued in the church? Answer: We look upon it a duty to be continued in the church."<sup>40</sup> As time passed, however, they allowed believers and churches to come to their own conclusions on the practice without breaking fellowship.<sup>41</sup>

### **Church Governance**

On the subject of polity, Missionary Baptist churches promote independent democracies to handle church discipline issues and carry out their business of electing pastors and deacons, receiving members, baptizing,

**Primitive Baptists  
believe in  
"independent" or  
congregational  
polity**

observing the Lord's Supper, among others.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, Missionary Baptists adhere to the "Doctrine of the priesthood of the Saved. That each individual has the right to pray directly to God without earthly intercessors or other indirect medium."<sup>43</sup>

Likewise, Primitive Baptists believe in "independent" or congregational polity or government of each local church, subject only to the Headship of Christ."<sup>44</sup>

## **Missions**

Missionary Baptists get their name from the practice of believer's baptism by immersion and their focus on missions. They believe Jesus was a missionary, as is the Holy Spirit and the church Jesus built. Moreover, "the New Testament is a Missionary Baptist Bible" and "God is a Missionary Baptist God."<sup>45</sup> While these types of statements sound good, they are impossible to support from Scripture. The main point is Missionary Baptists are missionary people because the Triune God they serve is a God-on-the-move and a God-on-mission.

Primitive Baptists view the vast majority of missions work through conventions and societies as man-made. They have regularly argued against any man-made societies, whether they be mission societies, Bible societies, tract societies, and the like because they are not taught in God's Word.<sup>46</sup> God's Word speaks of the church as the organization tasked with spreading the gospel. Others have labeled Primitive Baptists as anti-missions because they do not contribute to these man-made organizations.

### **Primitive Baptists view the vast majority of missions work through conventions and societies as man-made**

They also argue that missionary proponents "have *gone away* from the original fold or church of Christ . . . Also, that the constant tendency of the Missionaries is *from* the doctrine of

*predestination and election as set forth in the Bible* to the doctrine of a *Conditional Salvation*, made sure only by man."<sup>47</sup> They place blame on such men as Andrew Fuller in England and Adoniram Judson and Luther Rice in America for their promotions of foreign missions, arguing such a promotion lacks a biblical basis.<sup>48</sup>

## Conclusion

When comparing and contrasting the views of Missionary Baptists and Primitive Baptists, it is easier for the vast majority of Florida Baptists to side with the Missionary side, especially since we are bound together by the Cooperative Program. I have even heard some Baptist pastors try to dismiss Primitive Baptists as non-existent today, but that is not accurate. A few years ago, I had a couple leave my church because I called people to repentance and faith to be saved. They believed such preaching was antithetical to the gospel. They were loving, friendly people who cared about me and my family, but they left in search of a Primitive Baptist church in the area.

In the end, we take a bit from both groups of Baptists. Many Southern Baptists lean toward the Reformed side of soteriology, borrowing from our Primitive Baptist brothers. But virtually every Southern Baptist sides with Missionary Baptists to spread the gospel to as many people as we can. May we learn what to retain and what to jettison as we seek to be a faithful people to our Lord Jesus Christ.

---

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Based on my research, Primitive Baptists are much more likely to trace their views of church history than Missionary Baptists. The former group covers every matter under the sun in their history and the latter group tends to state their beliefs in writing through basic outline form and little depth to their argument. Of course, Missionary Baptists may depend on the larger group of Landmark Baptists to make their arguments for them but they do not commonly reference such works. I do not intend to imply there is no depth to Missionary Baptist beliefs but that they are not prone to articulate them thoroughly in writing.

<sup>2</sup> See J.M. Carroll, *The Trail of Blood: Following the Christians Down through the Centuries... or The History of Baptist Churches from the Time of Christ, Their Founder, to the Present Day* (Lexington, KY: Ashland Avenue Baptist Church, 1931); H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1987), 749-751.

<sup>3</sup> See Thomas White, ed. *Selected Writings of James Madison Pendleton*, vol. 3 (Paris, AR: Baptist Standard Bearer, 2006), 453. Pendleton was the



theologian of the Landmark movement and wrote widely on issues related to the subject—see Joel Breidenbaugh, “Pendleton, James Madison” in *Encyclopedia of Christianity in the United States*, vol. 4, edited by George Thomas Kurian and Mark A. Lamport (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 1766-67.

<sup>4</sup> <https://classroom.synonym.com/the-beliefs-of-the-missionary-baptist-church-12086939.html>; accessed June 14, 2021.

<sup>5</sup> Cushing Biggs Hassell, *History of the Church of God, From the Creation to A.D. 1885; including especially The History of the Kehukee Primitive Baptist Association*, revised by Sylvester Hassell (Middletown, NY: Gilbert Beebe’s Sons, 1886), 356.

<sup>6</sup> McBeth, 717.

<sup>7</sup> B.G. Gardner, *Why I Am a Missionary Baptist* (Minden, LA: Clover Memorial Press, 1966), 10.

<sup>8</sup> R.T. Perritt, “Hearing an Ishmael’s SOS” in *The Missionary Baptist Pulpit*, vol. 2, edited by Kenneth Bazar (Texarkana, AR: Bogard Press, 1968), 13.

<sup>9</sup> Zack M. Guess, *Undeniable Doctrinal Truths: that Primitive Baptists Believe* (Ann Arbor, MI: Sheridan Books, 1994), 16.

<sup>10</sup> Hassell, 699. The Kehukee Association borrowed a confession of faith from 1777. Hassell claims Primitive Baptists are in agreement with the Second London Confession of Faith (1689), 661-95.

<sup>11</sup> C.W. Radcliff, *Doctrine and Practice of Primitive Baptists and Church Identity* (Greenfield, IN: Wm Mitchell Printing, 1928), 4.

<sup>12</sup> Gardner, 12.

<sup>13</sup> Hassell, 329.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 317-18. Radcliff quotes several scholars to promote the Primitive Baptist view on regeneration, 56-59.

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.landmark-lakewood.org/fivepoints.php>; accessed June 14, 2021.

<sup>16</sup> Hassell, 318.

<sup>17</sup> Guess, 18.

<sup>18</sup> Radcliff, 1.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>20</sup> Hassell, 333.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Gardner, 10.

<sup>23</sup> Hassell, 699.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 377. On the matter of effectual calling and infants, Primitive Baptists cite the Second London Confession (1689)—“Elect infants dying in infancy are (John iii.3, 5, 6) regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit... so also are all other elect persons, who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the word” (*ibid.*). Notice that only “elect infants” will be saved. They do not address non-elect infants but their view clearly differs with Missionary Baptists on this matter.

<sup>26</sup> Guess, 105.

<sup>27</sup> Gardner, 13.

<sup>28</sup> Hassell, 699.

<sup>29</sup> Radcliff, 210. See also his treatment for perseverance and against apostasy on 208-227.

<sup>30</sup> Gardner, 8. The belief about alien immersion was preached by J.R. Graves and influenced J.M. Pendleton, see Breidenbaugh, 1766.

<sup>31</sup> Gardner, 8—this section follows the section on Jesus organizing the Missionary Baptist Church.

<sup>32</sup> Hassell, 699-700. See also Radcliff, 135-152.

<sup>33</sup> Gardner, 14.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>36</sup> Hassell, 699.

<sup>37</sup> Radcliff, 251.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> L.M. Branch, *Missionary Baptist Distinctives: A Study of Missionary Baptist Beliefs on Basic Bible Doctrines* (Texarkana, TX: Bogard Press, 1966), 40. The title of this booklet is misleading because the focus is on the Bible and the church without any discussion of significant doctrines, other than a brief mention of the two ordinances.

<sup>40</sup> Hassell, 830.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 845-847.

<sup>42</sup> See Gardner, 21.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>44</sup> Hassell, 291.

<sup>45</sup> Gardner, 1-2.

<sup>46</sup> See Hassell, 747-48.

<sup>47</sup> Hassell, 749. Radcliff quotes several Missionary Baptists in labeling Primitive Baptists as anti-missions and he criticize Missionary Baptists for going beyond the Bible, 275-282.

<sup>48</sup> See Hassell, 758-776.

## Membership

---

- ◆ You can create a LEGACY by joining the Florida Baptist Historical Society.
- ◆ Your Legacy membership will underwrite the on-going mission and ministries of the Society. There are two basic types of membership: annually renewed and lifetime. These memberships are open to individuals, churches and associations. In consideration of your Society membership, your Legacy contribution will ensure:
- ◆ Your receipt of the monthly newsletter *Legacy*;
- ◆ Your receipt of the annual *The Journal of Florida Baptist Heritage*; and
- ◆ You'll be supporting research of Florida Baptist history.

**ACT TODAY by calling the Florida Baptist Historical Society offices at (850) 360-4179 or emailing [Society2@FloridaBaptistHistory.org](mailto:Society2@FloridaBaptistHistory.org) for more information.**



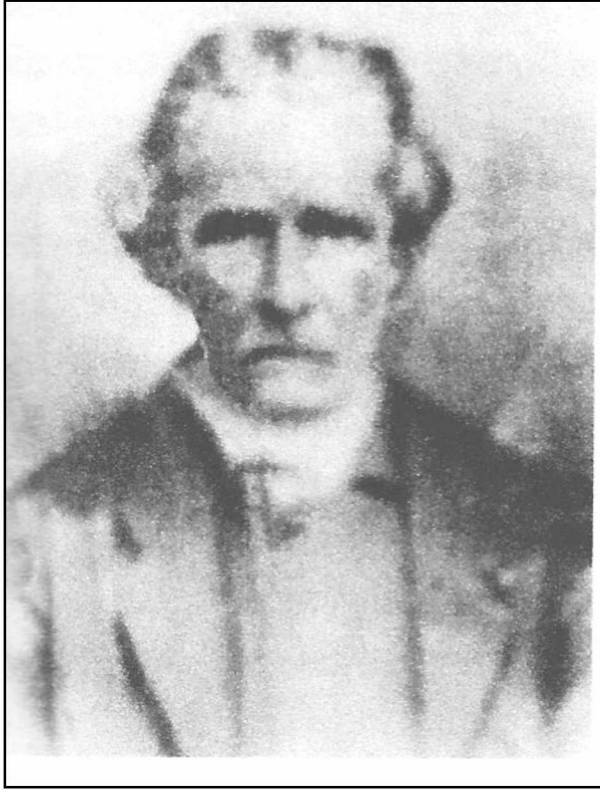
## **Pigeon Creek Church's Elder Reuben Crawford Set the "Gold Standard" for Georgia's Wiregrass Primitive Baptists**

*by Michael O. Holt, DPA  
Associate Professor  
Louisiana State University Library  
Baton Rouge, Louisiana*



The Primitive Baptists of the Wiregrass regions of South Georgia and North Florida are not a group of Baptists that is typically associated with change or exploring the latest frontiers in theology. However, not even this seemingly unmovable denomination is immune from alteration. Numerous Primitive Baptist associations and congregations have undergone substantive changes since the denomination first arrived in the region in the first half of the nineteenth century. Over time, the various doctrinal disputes, associational splits, and movements that have defined the Primitive Baptist tradition, have taken some congregations and groups, such as the Progressive Primitive Baptist movement, quite far from the original practices of the Primitive Baptists of the region.

Though these disputes often result in one association or another moving away from their traditional practices, some associational splits result in the opposite outcome. One such split, that has important ramifications to the Primitive Baptist faith to this day, involved the pastor of Pigeon Creek Baptist Church, a small church in North Florida that was founded 200 years ago this year. This church was a member of the Alabama River Primitive Baptist Association, which underwent a bitter dispute and split over the Georgia Homestead Law of 1868. This split contained two factions, one lead by Elder Reuben Crawford, who was a pastor of Pigeon Creek at the time, and Elder Richard



Elder Reuben Crawford

Bennett. The faction led by Elder Crawford, who came to be known as “Crawfordites,” slowly became isolated from the rest of their Primitive Baptist brethren throughout the region, eventually dropping their correspondence with all other Primitive Baptist Associations. As a result, the Crawfordite Alabama Association has become one of the most isolated Primitive Baptist congregations in the region.

The isolated character of the Crawfordites has produced an interesting side effect. As other Primitive Baptist congregations moved away from the original practices of the denomination, the Crawfordites have held firm to their original practices. Even today, a trip to a Crawfordite

Church, with its distinctly old-fashioned unfinished appearance, can feel like a trip to another time. This association, more than any other, has held fast to the original heritage and practices that gave rise to the Primitive Baptist denomination in the early nineteenth century. In fact, it can be said that the Crawfordites represent the “gold standard” of traditional Wiregrass Primitive Baptist beliefs and practices.

Primitive Baptist beliefs largely arose out of those Regular and Particular Baptists, who exalted original scripture as the single source authority of their faith and practice and prided themselves in following the “good old-fashioned ways.” They adamantly opposed all

that the pro-missions Baptists promoted – missionary societies, Sunday school societies, theological education – and came to designate

**Primitive Baptist  
beliefs largely arose out  
of those Regular and  
Particular Baptists**

themselves “Primitive” Baptists to highlight their dedication to original scripture. A leading scholar of the Primitive Baptist movement, John Crowley, explained that they “wish not to change the world but to escape from it . . . they often refer to their churches as ‘little heavenly places,’ where they escape out of time and mundane concerns.”<sup>1</sup>

Establishing a link between the Crawfordites and the “good old-fashioned way” is critical in understanding why they deserve the moniker of the “gold standard” of traditional Wiregrass Primitive Baptist doctrine. To accomplish this, three primary areas must be covered. First, it is important to examine the origins of Primitive Baptist beliefs in the area. Second, it is necessary to explore the state of their belief and practice at the time when the Alabama was originally constituted. Finally, it is important to examine the time around the split and the period immediately after it. By studying these three periods, one can compare them to the

present-day Crawfordites to see if the "gold standard" title has any merit.

### **Faithful to Doctrinal Roots**

Most religious historians state that Primitive Baptist doctrine has its roots in the "Hyper-Calvinism" of the English Independent and Particular Baptists and that their church practices derive from the union of Regular and Separate Baptists during colonial times.<sup>2</sup> The "Hyper-Calvinist" component has its foundations in the London Confession of 1689, which is an important document for understanding the roots of Primitive Baptist belief. Several tenets of the document can be found in modern Primitive Baptist statements of faith and some associations still employ the London Confession's rules of decorum nearly verbatim.<sup>3</sup> However, this strong Calvinistic bent is often mixed with the

### **Primitive Baptist doctrine has its roots in the "Hyper- Calvinism"**

practices and beliefs of the colonial Separate Baptists, who were more Arminian than Calvinist. It is this mixture that has come to define Primitive Baptist belief.

The union between the more orderly and reserved Particular and the somewhat more charismatic and evangelical Separate Baptists can be traced back to the time period preceding the Revolutionary War, when Separate Baptists were quickly gaining converts in the South. Despite rough condemnation from religious leaders from other denominations, like Anglican Parson Charles Woodmason<sup>4</sup>, the Particular Baptists realized the success of this denomination and sought union with them. Both groups quickly moved into Georgia, but never officially joined or separated.<sup>5</sup> It was at this time that the Georgia Baptist Association was formed. And by 1793 it had grown so large; it was split into two groups. The peaceful times following the Separate and Particular union had resulted in a bountiful

harvest for the newly united Baptist denomination, which would rise to prominence after the Revolutionary War.<sup>6</sup>

The peaceful times in the denomination did not last. The drive towards reform and improvement during the union would result in what would become the Primitive Baptist Schism. The split would create a new breed of Baptist that was a unique product of Baptist history. The split would eventually reach South Georgia and north Florida, where the new denomination would find its strongest following. Most importantly, it was during this split that the faith and practice of the Primitive Baptists would begin to emerge.<sup>7</sup>

## **Committed to Three Practices**

### **Preaching**

Because it is impossible to provide the reader with a comprehensive discussion on early Primitive Baptist practices in a limited space, this article will examine three aspects of belief and practice that are dominant in modern day Crawfordite churches. These are: preaching, hymnody, and the “Means Doctrine.” The preaching in the early years of the Primitive Baptists owed a great deal to their Separate Baptist forebears. Early Primitive preachers were by no means seminary-trained and all spoke extemporaneously. Elders would deliver (and still do) their sermons in a chanted tone. Such sermons are still the order of the day at Crawfordite churches, and the author has been an eyewitness to many of them.<sup>8</sup>

**preaching,  
hymnody, and  
the “Means  
Doctrine.”**

### **Distinction of Hymnody**

In addition to the unique form of preaching, Primitive Baptist hymnody is another distinctive feature of the denomination. At the time of the Alabama Association’s constitution, hymns were not sung with musical accompaniment. They were often sung out of hymnbooks that contained no musical notation as well. One of the most



popular hymnbooks among the Primitive Baptists in South Georgia and North Florida in their early years was Benjamin Lloyd's *Primitive Hymns*, which was first published in 1842, the same year the Alabaha was founded. The hymnbook is still utilized by the Crawfordites, in a style that resembles the old ballad tunes that were sung around the time of the hymnal's publication.<sup>9</sup>

### **The "Means Doctrine"**

The preaching and hymnody are distinct among the Crawfordites, though similar styles can be heard in other associations. What truly sets Crawfordites apart from other associations is their stance on what is called the "means doctrine." This doctrine states that the Gospel acts as the "means" to salvation. More staunchly Calvinist Primitive Baptists balk at this idea, but this doctrine is closer to what early Primitives believed. The denomination arose from a Union between the Separate and Particular Baptists, and the means doctrine is an accurate representation of the compromise between those groups, though many Primitive associations opposed it.<sup>10</sup>

With these three aspects of belief and practice guiding their way, four churches in South Georgia and North Florida noted what they perceived to be "a number of Baptist Churches who differ from us in Faith and Practice", which led them to form "A combination of Churches... amongst all churches of the same faith and order" in 1842.<sup>11</sup> Out of this desire, a committee appointed by the Suwannee Association convened at Mount Pleasant Church in Appling County, Georgia on the 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, and 10<sup>th</sup> of October, 1842 to discuss forming a new association. With the support of her mother organization, the Suwannee, the Alabaha River Primitive Baptist Association was born at this meeting.<sup>12</sup>

### **Opposition to the "Means Doctrine"**

Several items in the early minutes indicate the direction the association would take in later years. Common to Primitive Baptist decorum then and now was article 21 in the

association's decorum, which would eventually play a role in the isolation of the Association in later years. The article states:

“Art. 21. To give the best advice they can in matters of difficulty and if the union be broken between any of the sister Churches, to enquire into the cause of the breach, and to use their best endeavors to remove the difficulty, but if the breach cannot be healed, to withdraw from any Church or Churches whom they may judge unsound in principle or immoral in practice until they be reclaimed.”<sup>13</sup>

The opposition to the “means doctrine” led to the beginnings of what became the Crawfordites move towards isolation. In 1860, the Association promptly dropped correspondence with the Suwannee Association after its moderator, E.W. Smith, addressed the

congregation by holding up a Bible and saying, “You have been told that this is the word of God; do you believe it? I say it is not, it is ink and paper.” He went on to note that the gospel had “no saving efficacy” and “was only for the feeding of the flock.” This greatly troubled the Alabama who stressed free offer preaching then and now.<sup>14</sup>

**The opposition  
to the “means  
doctrine” led  
to... the  
Crawfordites  
move towards  
isolation**

Despite this dispute, the first 29 years of the association's existence were relatively peaceful. Occasionally a delegation was sent out to inquire into the status of one church or another. The Association did maintain correspondence with a few other associations during this time, including the Suwannee River, the Upper Canoochee, the Pulasiki, and the Union. The association even remained peaceful as the Civil War raged around it. The war received only a brief mention in 1864, when the annual meeting had to be moved on account of the enemy's proximity to the original location.<sup>15</sup>

However, five years after the Civil War came to a close, a bitter battle would tear the Alabama Association in two permanently.<sup>16</sup>

### **Homestead Act Split Primitive Baptists**

When the Alabama Association split in 1871, the state of Georgia was still in the midst of post-war Reconstruction efforts. It was a piece of legislation related to these efforts that would end up causing the split. The Georgia Homestead

**the law created  
an unbiblical  
relationship  
between creditor  
and debtor**

Act of 1868 enabled debtors to retain a small amount of property from creditors seeking payment for a debt.<sup>17</sup> This law did not find favor with most Primitive Baptists, who thought the law created an unbiblical relationship between creditor and debtor. Primitive Baptists

had always taken an uncompromising stand towards honoring financial obligations, which helps clarify their reaction to the 1868 constitution. It also explains their virulent reaction to the Georgia Homestead Law of 1868, a piece of Reconstruction legislation that permitted debtors to withhold some property from their creditors. Primitive Baptists were not known for trying to evade their creditors. Elder C.W. Stallings of Cat Creek Church in Lowndes County, Georgia, gave everything he owned to his creditors and relied on Providence to sustain him, despite being an invalid with a wife and six young children. However, there were some Primitives who gave out before this point and took advantage of the Homestead Act, which caused controversy to erupt at a number of meetings.<sup>18</sup>

No association suffered more from the fallout over the Homestead Act than the Alabama River. In 1870, the Association adopted a lengthy declaration from the Western Georgia Upatoie Association concerning the Homestead Act. The declaration stated that the association fully appreciated, "the difficulties by which some brethren are surrounded who

are in debt and who have lost their property by the late war, but we still hold that they are not thereby justified in doing wrong.” The wrong, according to the declaration, was “the right to withhold from the payment of his debt, if he has any, the sum or equivalent of \$3,000.00 in gold.” The Association noted, “This is a privilege of which we may naturally and reasonably expect the world to . . . benefit: and some members of the church... have been so inconsiderate as to support that it was not wrong . . . inasmuch as it is the law of the land.” The supporters of this view said that “taking the Homestead” was a violation of the “law of God” which “declares that the borrower is servant to the leader [lender].” Nevertheless, the declaration concluded by saying, “that any member who resorts . . . to the Homestead be dealt with . . . not as an enemy, but an erring brother . . . And we advise all brethren who have resorted to the Homestead to renounce it and return to Christ.”<sup>19</sup>

### **Elder Reuben Crawford**

Perhaps the controversy was made more profound because a man who took shelter under the law was the son of prominent association member and pastor, Reuben Crawford. Crawford was born in Effingham County, Georgia, in 1801. He later resided in McIntosh County where he served as a lieutenant in the militia in 1823.<sup>20</sup> He first appeared in church records as a delegate from Wesley Creek Church in McIntosh County to the Piedmont Association in 1835. He was preaching by 1836 and one year later, in an unusual move, he was ordained by the association and not his home church.<sup>21</sup> His home church was one of the four churches that formed the Alabama River Association in 1842, and Crawford attended every session after 1843. Around 1845, he relocated to Pierce County, where he joined Shiloh Church where he remained a member and pastor until 1886. He died the following year and was buried at Shiloh. A contemporary source suggests Crawford was still exhibiting considerable vitality and a good relationship with Shiloh church even as he neared the end of his life. According to a newspaper account published the year before his death, he

was preaching "at the church known as 'Old Shiloh' and he was also "in his 88th year and this season has been making his crop by his own labor with the plow and hoe."<sup>22</sup>

In addition to his work at Shiloh, Crawford also was a pastor at Pigeon Creek Church in Nassau County, Florida.

According to the minutes from the church, Elder Crawford served as pastor here as well from 1860-1865.<sup>23</sup> This church, founded in 1821 by Alabama Association founders Isham Peacock and Fleming Bates.

In the year 2021, the church observed its 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary and is the oldest Primitive Baptist church in the state. It also was the only non-Catholic group functioning when Florida became a U.S.

### **Crawford also was a pastor at Pigeon Creek Church**

Territory. Though it would later leave amicably to join the St. Marys River Primitive Association, it too would be dropped from correspondence by the Crawfordite faction of the Alabama River Association in 1911 over the question of calling assistant pastors, but that is a story for another article.<sup>24</sup>

### **Elder Richard Bennett**

Crawford's opponents were led by another elder in the association, Richard Bennett, who we know far less about. He was born in Appling County, Georgia, in 1825 and served in the Confederate Army as a Captain during the Civil War.<sup>25</sup> He first appears in the minutes of the Alabama Association as a delegate and an elder from Big Creek Church in Appling County, Georgia, in 1867.<sup>26</sup> He adopted a strong anti-homestead stance against Crawford, whose son had felt compelled to "take the homestead."<sup>27</sup> During the height of the controversy, Bennett was said to have had more fellowship for a horse than for Reuben Crawford. Tradition holds that Crawford predicted that Bennett would commit suicide, which he did in 1898.<sup>28</sup>

It is through the minutes that the fierceness of the split can be felt. The controversy first appears in the 1870 minutes in item 23, which contained a page-long screed against the Homestead Act.<sup>29</sup> By the summer of 1872, a special session was called to try and salvage the split. This effort was apparently not successful, as the delegates noted in the minutes, they left things “a little worse than we found them.”<sup>30</sup> By 1873, the split was final and the two factions were divided into the two parties that remain today: Crawfordites and Bennettites.<sup>31</sup>

Immediately following the split, the raw nerves of the division were still exposed. An 1884 circular letter finds the Crawfordites lambasting the Bennettites, stating: “One that is enabled to see with an eye of faith and hears them make these declarations are more fully convinced that they know nothing about the matter, than if they had heard them use the bitterest oaths.”<sup>32</sup> Bennett’s faction was actively hostile in the split as well and were able to obtain recognition from other Primitives in the region as the true Alabama Association. The group of five churches declared the Crawford faction in disorder and invited them to come back to unity, but called upon other Primitives not to receive baptisms performed by Crawfordites after the division. The Bennettites accused their opponents of withdrawing, “without reserve or explanation,” though the minutes of the Crawford faction do indicate an attempt to explain the division.<sup>33</sup>

### **The Growing Isolation of the Alabama Association**

The Alabama Association was already a relatively isolated group during the time of the split in the early 1870s. After the division, the Crawfordites moved into a deeper isolation that exists to this day. By 1875, the Alabama had decided to affirm their commitment to avoiding correspondence with all

other associations.<sup>34</sup> However, they did correspond for a time with the St. Marys River Association, which was constituted out of the Alabaha in 1878.<sup>35</sup> However, even this correspondence was dropped in 1911, which also ended the Alabaha's connection to Pigeon Creek Church, who left that year to join the St. Marys River Primitive Association.<sup>36</sup> Though the Alabaha still calls for correspondence from other associations, it does not receive any and only sends out a letter to the churches within the association.<sup>37</sup>

After the split, the Crawfordite faction of the Alabaha River Association maintained its isolation, but also continued to grow. The group continued to swell from the time of the split in 1873 to the time they cut off correspondence with the last outside association in 1911 by more than 300 members.<sup>38</sup> The growth continued after this final move to isolation, with the association peaking at 810 members in 1932 and 1933.<sup>39</sup> Thereafter, the association began to decrease in membership, falling under 100 members by 1985 and staying under that number through the present day.<sup>40</sup> Today there are four churches left in the association, with a membership of just over 50 people.<sup>41</sup>

### **Conflict over Sacred Harp Sings**

Though the Crawfordite/Bennettite split occurred over 100 years prior, there is one more incident to discuss that led to more churches leaving the association for the Bennettite

#### **Primitive Baptists' historic tradition of a cappella hymnody**

faction of the Alabaha. Though the Crawfordites managed to avoid the controversies surrounding the modernization of the Primitive Baptist denomination during the Progressive Primitive Baptist movement, they encountered their own brush with modernity

in the late 1990s concerning members attending Sacred Harp sings. These events were designed to promote fellowship and nurture the Primitive Baptists' historic

tradition of a cappella hymnody as previously described. However, at this time, the sings were moving out of Primitive Baptist circles and becoming more popular with people with no connection to the church.

The problem arose when several members of the Crawfordite Association decided to lend their assistance to the rekindling of the Sacred Harp's popularity in the region. Many of these new sings took place in other churches, where they were opened and closed with prayer. The Crawfordites made their feelings clearly known about members attending other denominations as far back as 1882, when they recommended, "the other churches to admonish their brethren that make a practice of running out after other denominations and if they will not hear but continue to go to deal with them as for other offenses."<sup>42</sup> Those involved in the sings were called to account and they initially yielded to the demands of the more conservative faction. However, tensions still existed, and in 1996, those involved with the outside sings were sent out of the association. Reportedly, at the moment he was expelled, one of the Sacred Harpers arose from his seat and left the church singing the hymn "Liberty" from the Sacred Harp: "No more beneath th' oppressive hand, Of tyranny we groan, Behold the smiling, happy land, That freedom calls her own."<sup>43</sup> This would be the last split to date for the association, but it was one that reopened the wounds of the 1873 split and saw the Crawfordites hold fast to their dedication to preserving the old ways.

### **Holding Fast to Tradition**

The Crawfordite Alabama Association has managed to maintain the old traditions of the Primitive Baptists while numerous others have changed. The traditions shared by the modern day Crawfordites differ little from those that were practiced in Elder Reuben Crawford's day or those that were present when the Primitive Baptist denomination first appeared as its own distinct denomination. They have retained this tradition, in part, because of the extent of their



isolation after their split with the Bennettites shortly after the Civil War. Though they endured splits and controversies throughout their existence, this should not overshadow the greater majority of years the Alabaha has been at peace. Although their numbers have dwindled in recent years, it should be noted that the number of churches in the association today is identical to those at its founding. This was a fact not lost on the association at the time it shrank to its present number, noting the number of churches at the beginning, by observing:

“At the close of this session there are four churches . . . There were four men and four women aboard the ark when it left this Earth in the days of the flood. These same four were on board when it returned. Is this the Saviour and His Bride representing His church extending to the four winds of the Earth and above the dead works of men?”<sup>44</sup>

As the years pass by the Lord seems to continue, “blessing this precious few in their efforts of walking in the path of righteousness.”<sup>45</sup> The original Constitution of the Alabaha Association continues to persevere onwards in the “good-old-fashioned-way” of the days of its founding. Current Elder Daniel Drawdy noted in a 2005 interview with the author, that his own hope is that it is the Lord’s will that a portion of the true church will remain at the end of days, even if it doesn’t necessarily have to be their association.<sup>46</sup> Until that time, the Crawford faction of the Alabaha River Primitive Baptist Association shall likely remain the “gold standard” of the Wiregrass Primitive Baptists of North Florida and South Georgia.

---

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> John G. Crowley. *Primitive Baptists of the Wiregrass Georgia South 1815 to the Present*. (Tallahassee: University Press of Florida, 1998), 189.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>3</sup> Alabaha Primitive Baptist Association. *Minutes of the One Hundred and Sixty Third Annual Session*, MS. In possession of the author, 2005.

---

S.N. 1689 *Baptist Confession*, Association of Reformed Baptist Churches of America. Accessed, March 17, 2021. <https://www.arbca.com/1689-confession>

<sup>4</sup> To understand the level of disdain for the Separate Baptists, see the Chapters on the New Light Baptists in Charles Woodmason. *The Carolina Backcountry on the Eve of the Revolution: The Journal and Other Writings of Charles Woodmason, Anglican Itinerant*, ed. Richard J. Hooker. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1953).

<sup>5</sup> Crowley, 13.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 44-45-

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 84-85.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 23-24.

<sup>12</sup> Alabama River Primitive Baptist Association (Crawford Faction after 1871), *Minutes* 1842-2005, photocopy in possession of the Author, 1842.

<sup>13</sup> Alabama Association, *Minutes*, 1842.

<sup>14</sup> Alabama Association, *Minutes*, 1860.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 1864.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 1842-1865.

<sup>17</sup> J.H. Thomas "Homestead and Exemption Laws of the Southern States." *The American Law Register*, 19, no. 1(1871), 4-5.

<sup>18</sup> Crowley, 110.

<sup>19</sup> Alabama Association, *Minutes*, 1870.

<sup>20</sup> Huxford Society, "Pioneers" Vol. 5, 83.

<sup>21</sup> Piedmont Association, *Minutes*, 1836, 1837

<sup>22</sup> Quoted in, Dean Carl Broome, *History of Pierce County Georgia Volume 1*, (Blackshear, GA: Broome Printing and Office Supplies, 1973), 55, 202.

<sup>23</sup> Pigeon Creek Church, *Minutes*, 1860-65.

<sup>24</sup> Alabama Association, *Minutes*, 1911.

<sup>25</sup> Huxford Society, *Pioneers*, Vol 4, 18.

<sup>26</sup> Alabama Association, *Minutes*, 1867

<sup>27</sup> Broome, "Pierce County", 202.

<sup>28</sup> Crowley, 108-109.

<sup>29</sup> Alabama Association, *Minutes*, 1870.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 1872.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 1873.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 1884.

<sup>33</sup> Alabama River Association (Bennett Faction) *Minutes*, 1877, Alabama River Association (Crawford Faction), *Minutes*, 1881.

<sup>34</sup> Alabama River Association (Crawford Faction), *Minutes*, 1875.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 1878.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 1911.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 2005

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 1873, 1911.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 1932, 1933.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 1985.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 2005.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 1882.

<sup>43</sup> John G. Crowley. "The Sacred Harp Controversy in the Original Alabama Primitive Baptist Association." *Baptist Studies Bulletin*, July, 2004. Retrieved from <http://www.centerforbaptiststudies.org/bulletin/2004/july.htm#Dates>.

<sup>44</sup> Alabama Association, *Minutes*, 1996.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Daniel Drawdy, Interview with the Author, October 28, 2005 via telephone.

# Florida Baptists' First Missionaries to the World

*Vignettes Drawn from the Resources of the Florida Baptist Historical Society*

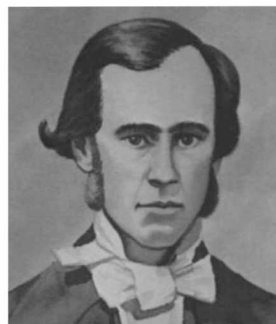


As noted in this issue of the *Journal*, the struggle between pro-missions and anti-missions was inherent in the development of Baptists, particularly in the South. However, it is evident that God, in His own time, called individual men and women to carry the message of Jesus Christ to other parts of the world. And such has been the case for individual Florida Baptists who heard and responded to God's call to missions. Within the past two hundred years there have been literally hundreds of Florida Baptist men and women who committed their life and work to the Great Commission of Jesus Christ to faithfully, "go and make disciples of all nations." But before these many, there were the few pioneers – the first Florida Baptists to respond to the call of missions outside Florida. The following are brief vignettes of a few of those first Florida Baptist pioneer missionaries.

## **Thomas Jefferson Bowen: Pioneer Missionary to Africa and Brazil**

Former Florida Baptist pastor Thomas Jefferson Bowen (b. 1814; d. 1875) holds the distinction of being the first Southern Baptist appointed missionary to serve in Yoruba, Central Africa and Brazil, South America.

Born in Jackson County, Georgia, January 2, 1814, Bowen by age 20 had joined the Georgia militia to respond to the Indian uprisings in Georgia and Florida. Soon thereafter he found himself leading troops against military troops in Mexico in an effort to make Texas an independent state.





Having come under the convictions of the claims of Jesus Christ, the young man surrendered his life to Christianity in October, 1840, and began an itinerant preaching ministry in 1841. Bowen later wrote in a biography that he had resigned his military commission with regret out of a “deep seated conviction that I could not become a Christian while my life and heart were devoted to military service.”

Within a few years Bowen had migrated to Florida as an itinerant preacher. The Florida Baptist Association appointed Bowen as one of its domestic missionaries to serve in 1845 and 1846. Soon thereafter he was serving as pastor of three churches in Gadsden County, including Liberty, Hebron and Providence. He also served the Lake Jackson Church in Leon County. During those years Bowen came to

understand that God was calling him into foreign mission service.

Bowen's visionary calling was to take the gospel to the peoples of Central Africa. Bowen subsequently made his proposal to the Foreign Mission Board (now the

**Bowen's  
visionary  
calling was to  
take the gospel  
to the peoples  
of Central  
Africa**

International Missions Board) of the Southern Baptist Convention. So impressed by his missionary vision, the Board in 1849 agreed to commission Bowen and appointed two other missionaries to assist in the pioneering endeavor. They included experienced missionary Henry Goodale and a young free-African Robert F. Hill.

Although Southern Baptists' African mission work had been limited to the coastal country of Liberia, Bowen's ambitious missionary efforts were to penetrate the interior to Yoruba (modern day Nigeria). He spent 18 months in Abbeokuta where he made a study of the Yoruba language. The result of those efforts was an 1858 published book on the language which then made it possible to translate from English to Yoruba the gospel message.

At the encouragement of the Foreign Mission Board, Bowen between 1852 and 1853 returned to the United States to recruit additional missionary personnel to serve in Yoruba. While on furlough, Bowen met and married Lurena Henrietta Davis of Greensboro, Georgia. With two other couples, the entourage sailed for Africa, in July, 1853.

Upon arrival the Bowens established mission stations in Ijaye and Ogbomosho. Bowen's mastery of the language and his assimilation into the cultural ways of the Yoruban tribes made him acceptable to at least be given a hearing. But Bowen encountered much resistance sharing the gospel in

the Muslim dominated country. The missionary kept a diary which resulted in a book that detailed his missionary efforts and other exploits that went beyond the purview of his assignment.

Soon health maladies caused the Bowens to end their work in Africa and return home in 1859. But ever the zealous missionary, Bowen requested that the Board assign him to Brazil, a country the Board had long targeted for missionary expansion.

Ironically his initial missionary efforts were directed toward Yoruban slaves who had been transported and sold in Brazil. Unfortunately, Bowen's health had not sufficiently recovered from his African illness and the climate of Brazil proved to be daunting. By 1861, Bowen returned to America. Doubtless Bowen holds the distinction of being the first Southern Baptist missionary appointed to Brazil. However, it would be the 1880 appointment and sacrificial commitment of William B. and Anne Luther Bagby of Texas that would initiate a Baptist missionary endeavor that flourished in the South American country.

From 1868 to 1874 Bowen continued his itinerant preaching in Texas and Florida. He died November 24, 1875, after having been committed to a Georgia mental hospital.

### **Lulu Fleming: Daughter of Florida Slave Served As Medical Missionary**

Louise (Lulu) Cecilia Fleming (b. 1862; d. 1899) holds the distinction of being the first female African-American born in Florida to serve as a Baptist missionary.

The daughter of a slave, Lulu Fleming was born January 28, 1862 in Hibernia, Clay County, on a plantation located near Green Cove Springs.



As a child, Lulu would travel with her family and their Anglo owners to Jacksonville to attend the Bethel Baptist Church. The Bethel Church had been organized in 1838 by itinerant missionary James McDonald with a membership of eleven Anglo and 145 slaves. Following the Civil War, the Anglo and African-descendant members parted company and formed their own separate congregations. As a result of a court-ordered financial settlement in 1867, the Anglo group was required to pay the former slaves for their share in the church property and formed the Tabernacle Baptist Church (now called First Baptist Church), Jacksonville. In addition to the financial compensation, the former slaves were permitted to retain the name Bethel Baptist Church, which continues to function into the twenty-first century.

After completing her basic education (probably the equivalent of a tenth-grade education) Lulu Fleming began teaching school, first in Florida, then in North Carolina. While in North Carolina she was given the opportunity to attend Shaw University, an American Baptist Home Missions Society-founded school designed to serve emancipated slaves and their children. Ms. Fleming subsequently graduated as class valedictorian on May 27, 1885.

In her final semester at the University, Lulu Fleming felt the call of God to foreign missions' service. She sought and received a missionary assignment from the Women's American Baptist Foreign Missionaries Society. In May, 1886, she was assigned as the Society's first missionary to the Congo (known today as Zaire).

After several years' service as a missionary-teacher, Ms. Fleming was forced by a debilitating illness to return to the United States for medical treatment. While recuperating Lulu Fleming realized that the people in the Congo desperately needed medical services. This led her to enroll in the Women's Medical College at Philadelphia with tuition assistance provided by the American Baptist Missionary Society.



Upon completing her medical training in 1895, Dr. Fleming was appointed by the Women's Missionary Foreign Mission Society (American Baptist) to serve as a medical missionary to Upper Congo at the Irebu mission station. She subsequently was transferred to the Bolengi mission station in 1898.

During this period Lulu Fleming became ill with what is known as African sleeping sickness. She returned to the United States for treatment and recuperation.

Unfortunately, the sickness caused her death on June 20, 1899.

**Lulu Fleming  
realized . . .  
people in the  
Congo  
desperately  
needed medical  
services**

### **W. F. Wood Had a Passion To Take Cuba for Christ**

"Cuba for Christ" became an evangelistic rallying cry for Florida Baptists and Southern Baptists in the last half of the nineteenth century as they became intrigued over the possibilities of taking the gospel into the island nation located ninety miles off the coast of Florida. Leading the spiritual charge was a retired Union Army Lieutenant Colonel (chaplain) W. F. Wood.

Little is known about the early life of William F. Wood (b. 1826; d. 1890), other than he was a native of Ireland, and his family had moved to America, settling in Indiana. Details of his spiritual conversion and his call to the ministry which resulted in him being commissioned as a chaplain, are lost to history. However, with the beginning of the American Civil War, Wood joined the First Indiana Calvary



in 1861 with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel chaplain, as a part of the Union Army of the Southwest. In early 1863 the Union Army began to recruit free African-American men into the military. Officers of these new regiments would be white while the enlisted would be African-American. Intrigued by the Army's plan, Wood decided to join the crusade. He resigned April 2nd from the First Indiana Cavalry to assume the colonelcy of the First Arkansas Infantry of African Descent. This new regiment was mustered on May 1, 1863 at Helena, Ark. Because of his seniority, Wood was assigned command of the African Brigade that was stationed in a section of Louisiana for the next year. Tired and unwell Colonel William F. Wood resigned August 15, 1864 from the army. Wood's ministry service bringing him to Florida is largely unknown, until he accepted the pastorate of the Baptist church at Fernandina around 1880.

Before W.F. Wood began his missionary efforts in Cuba, all spiritual matters in Cuba were under Roman Catholic domination. So strong was this influence that Bible distribution and Christian missionary efforts by other groups were met with strong official Catholic resistance.

In addition to the restrictions upon people's spiritual life, the social, political and economic deprivations experienced by Cubans began to cause civil unrest. An ensuing revolt by native inhabitants against the colonial control of Spain continued for 30 years until Cuba officially separated from Spain in 1898.

**Wood felt the  
call of God to  
go to Key West  
with the gospel**

The ongoing revolutionary conditions caused a 30-year exodus of Cuban exiles into three American communities: Key West, New Orleans and New York City. The migration into Key West resulted in approximately 1,100

Cubans living in Key West by 1870. Census figures reflected that by 1873, Cubans in Key West constituted a majority of

the population. Yet the lone Baptist church – comprised largely of African-American members – in the port town was without pastoral leadership. Florida Baptist Pastor T. J. Sparkman, of Plant City's Hopewell Baptist Church, who had gone to Key West on business, witnessed the large number of Cubans with spiritual needs and no pastoral leadership. He sent a letter describing the situation and his concerns to Florida Baptists' Corresponding Secretary W. N. Chaudoin.

By 1880, Chaudoin forwarded the Sparkman letter to *The Christian Index*, the Georgia Baptist newspaper, reporting on the situation in Key West. This became a "Macedonian call" for William F. Wood. Although a pastor of the Baptist church in Fernandina – well over 500 miles to the north of Key West – Wood felt the call of God to go to Key West with the gospel. In January, 1883, the Florida Baptist State Convention's State Board of Missions appointed Wood as the missionary to Key West at an annual salary of \$200. That action set into motion a 20-year commitment by Florida Baptists to underwrite missionary efforts to the Cuban populations in Key West, Havana, Tampa and Ybor City.

At Key West, Wood met Adela Fales whose Cuban family were members of the Baptist church. Miss Fales was bilingual which proved a great asset to Wood's pastoral ministry. By December 1884, Wood requested the State Board of Missions to provide financial assistance that employed Adela Fales as a "missionary to the Cubans." In that same year, Pastor Wood presented a resolution to the Florida Baptist State Convention to approve taking the gospel to Cuba. The unanimously embraced missionary challenge came to be called "Cuba for Christ."

At about this same time Adela Fales learned from family correspondence that there was a man in Havana preaching Baptist doctrine – a rarity in Catholic Cuba. When the news was shared with W. F. Wood, he secured the help of the Little Manatee and the South Florida Baptist Associations to provide the funding for Wood and Fales to sail to Havana to

confirm and support the evolving Baptist missionary efforts. There they met Alberto and Minnie Diaz, who as laypersons, were teaching and preaching the Bible.

So impressed by the Diaz's evangelistic work in Havana, W. F. Wood led the Key West church to ordain to the gospel ministry Alberto Diaz. At the urging of Florida Baptists' Corresponding Secretary W. N. Chaudoin, the State Board commissioned Diaz as a missionary to Cuba beginning in January 1886.

**the State Board  
commissioned  
Diaz as a  
missionary to  
Cuba**

Later in the Spring 1886, the State Board sent Wood to the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting and the Georgia Baptist State Convention annual meeting to report on the great missionary developments and opportunities now known as "Cuba for Christ." Soon thereafter the missionary efforts in Cuba were assumed by the Home Mission Board (now called the North American Mission Board) of the Southern Baptist Convention.

**Frank and Daisy Fowler:  
Florida's First Missionary Couple**

Had he followed his father's footsteps Frank Fowler could have prospered as a plantation owner in Melrose, harvesting crops of oranges in Alachua County's rich groves. Instead, Frank Fowler (b. 1870; d. 1933) followed his Heavenly Father's call, harvesting souls in Argentina's pioneer mission fields.

Fifty years after the birth of the Florida Baptist State Convention (1854), the Melrose native was the first Floridian appointed by the Foreign Mission Board (now called the International Mission Board) of the



Southern Baptist Convention as a missionary to the new mission field of Argentina, South America.

However, before missionary service, the then 16-year-old Fowler accepted Christ as his Savior during a revival service conducted by H. M. King of Gainesville. Fowler later attended Mercer University in Macon, Georgia, and began to sense the call of God to mission service.

After graduation, he pursued his spiritual calling by attending The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. He interrupted his seminary experience to serve as pastor to churches in Florida's Santa Fe Missionary Baptist Association (later called the Santa Fe River Baptist Association). These churches were in Waldo, New Hope, LaCrosse, Lake Butler and Starke. While serving in Starke, his first wife, Mattie Aiken of Barnesville, Georgia, died leaving a young daughter, Elvey. Despite poor health, Elvey lived until her death in 1922 at age 21. The young widower returned to seminary and while there he felt God's call had been narrowed to service as a foreign missionary.

While attending the seminary, Fowler served as pastor of the Trenton Street Baptist Church in Harriman, Tennessee. There he met and married his second wife, Daisy Cate (b. 1880; d. 1953), on October 26, 1904. She was active in her church, especially the W.M.U. organization, and also felt that God had called her to be a foreign missionary.

**“I have always  
had a burning  
desire to see  
souls saved, . . .”  
-- Frank Fowler**

The Fowlers applied to the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board and were accepted for appointment in 1904. They were assigned to serve as the first Southern Baptist foreign missionaries to Argentina, South America. As a missionary candidate, the young Fowler said his greatest passion was evangelism. “I have always had a burning desire to see souls saved, and if I have any especial [sic] strength it is in evangelistic work,” he once wrote.

Fowler and his wife Daisy remained on the mission field throughout their lifetime (1904 – 1933). The fruit of Fowler’s work and his love for the people so apparent, the Argentine people called him “Don Francisco, Apostle of Love.”

With three other missionary couples, the Fowlers started pioneer work in Argentina with house-to-house visitation, open-air preaching and house prayer meetings. Subsequently, they established the First Baptist Church of Buenos Aires in a rented feed store hall.

From Buenos Aires the Fowlers moved to other under-evangelized areas in Western Argentina including Santa Fe (1906-1910), Rosario (1911-1917), and Mendoza (1917-1933). In Santa Fe, the headquarters of the Jesuits, the Fowlers were pioneer evangelicals in a thoroughly Catholic city. Despite Jesuit interference and resistance, the Fowlers’ ministry efforts focused upon establishing new churches, starting schools, and maintaining preaching outposts. So successful was he in starting numerous churches, that Fowler organized the country’s first Baptist association in 1908.

The last 15 years of their ministry was spent in the city of Mendoza located in the eastern foothills of the snow-covered

Andes Mountains. The missionary's district included the provinces of San Juan and San Luis.

During his missionary service, Fowler was instrumental in beginning 67 churches in Argentina and nine churches in the Andean district along the Andes Mountains. The combined membership of the churches totaled 4,703 new believers in Christ. The final year of service in Mendoza, Fowler baptized 401 new Argentine Christians.

**Fowler was  
instrumental in  
beginning 67  
churches in  
Argentina**

Although Daisy Fowler was the mother to three children – James, Margaret and Franklin – she organized and led W.M.U. groups and B.Y.P.U. groups in the Argentine churches. Yet she suffered from rheumatoid arthritis, according to Elizabeth Provence in her published account of the Fowlers' missionary service. Unable to get adequate medical treatment for the arthritic pain in Mendoza, Frank Fowler, in the fall 1933, took Daisy to the British hospital in Buenos Aires. While there, Frank decided to undergo a minor operation for a prostate problem.

The couple was placed in adjoining rooms and though they could not see each other they could talk back and forth between their rooms. "The morning of November 14, 1933, Mrs. Fowler heard her husband gasp, and when a nurse was summoned, it was found that he was dead," Provence wrote. (The family's records affixed the cause of death due to a blood clot and the date of death occurred on his 63rd birthday, November 13.) Fowler was buried in the British cemetery in Buenos Aires. Although Daisy Fowler retired from missionary service in 1933, she lived until age 73 when she died in 1953.

The Fowlers' youngest son Franklin, trained as a medical doctor, married Dorcas Hauk, who was a registered nurse.

The couple responded to God's call to medical missions' service and the Foreign Mission Board (now called the International Mission Board) of the Southern Baptist Convention appointed them to Paraguay, South America, where they served from 1947 to 1961.

---

## ENDNOTES

### THOMAS JEFFERSON BOWEN

#### Sources:

Florida Baptist Association, *Minutes*, 1845, 1846, and 1848.

E. C. Routh, "Thomas Jefferson Bowen," an article in the *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists*, Vol. I, (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1958), 183.

Cal Guy, "T.J. Bowen – Southern Baptist Innovator on the African Scene," *Baptist History and Heritage*, July, 1967, 67 – 74.

Mary Emily Wright, *The Missionary Work of the Southern Baptist Convention*, (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1902), 153 – 165; 213 – 219.

H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage*, (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1987), 419 – 421.

H. A. Tupper, *The Foreign Missions of the Southern Baptist Convention*, (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1880), 369 – 387.

T. J. Bowen, *Central Africa: Adventures and Missionary Labors in the Interior of Africa*, (Charleston: Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1857).

### LULU FLEMING

#### Sources:

Joseph R. Moss, "The Missionary Journey of Louise 'Lulu' Fleming, M.D.," Monograph, published by the Florida Baptist Historical Society, Deland, Florida, May, 1996; available in the Society files in Graceville, Florida.

### W. F. WOOD

#### Sources:

Cliff Dean, *Colonel William F. Wood*, posted at <https://mydeltaworld.com/2020/01/11/colonel-william-f-wood/>; accessed June 12, 2021.

Una Roberts Lawrence, *Cuba for Christ*, (Atlanta, Georgia: Home Mission Board, SBC, 1926), 139 – 150.

State Board of Missions, *Minutes*, January 3, 1883; December 14, 1884; November 14, 1885 January 5, 1886; and April 7, 1886.

Gerald E. Poyo, "Key West and the Cuban Ten Years War," *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 57, issue 3.



**FRANK AND DAISY FOWLER**

*Sources:*

Margaret Fowler Drake, "Golden Footprints – The Story of Frank Fowler," *The Journal of Florida Baptist Heritage*, Volume 4, Fall, 2002, 24 – 36.

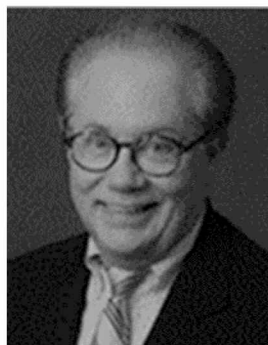
Elizabeth Provence, *God's Troubadours*, (Jacksonville: The Woman's Missionary Union, The Florida Baptist Convention, 1951), 1 – 4.

Mark A. Rathel, "Frank Fowler: Apostle of Love," *The Journal of Florida Baptist Heritage*, Volume 4, Fall, 2002, 37 – 55.

"Florida's First Foreign Missionary," *Florida Baptist Witness*, July 19, 1984, 12.

# **First Among Primitive Baptist Preachers: Elders Isham Peacock and Fleming Bates**

*By Donald S. Hepburn  
Managing Director  
Florida Baptist Historical Society*



## **Introduction**

Isham Peacock (b. 1742; d. 1850) and Fleming Bates (b. 1771; d. 1840) were among the leading Particular Baptist preachers in the Wiregrass country of Southeast Georgia and North Florida in the early nineteenth century. These two men who had nearly a 30-year age difference – may have reflected a “Paul and Timothy” mentoring relationship – were responsible for organizing dozens of churches that became the nucleus of the anti-missionary movement that defined Primitive Baptists in the 1830s.

## **Isham Peacock’s Early North Carolina Years**

Although Isham Peacock was born in then designated Dobbs County, N.C. on October 8, 1742, little is known about the man’s young life. Family records reveal that his father was Samuel Peacock II (b. 1705; d. 1793) and his mother was Matilda “Cicily” Tilsey Peacock (b. 1709; d. 1800). That union produced nine children – five boys and four girls. Isham was the third oldest son in the middle of the combined birth order.<sup>1</sup>

Isham’s father Samuel, between 1743 and 1790, acquired from English Lord Granville a total 2,036 acres in and around the Nahunta Swamp that ran from east to west through Johnston and Dobbs County, North Carolina. Earlier, the King of England gave Granville nearly twelve percent of the total land area of the Carolina colony,<sup>2</sup> which Granville was free to sell or grant to loyal Tories. No doubt



the senior Peacock had to be a strong supporter of the English Crown to be considered eligible for the half dozen grants of fertile lands he received over the years. Additionally, the land along the Nahunta was surrounded by a forest of hardwood trees which could be harvested. As a result, a large number of family members, as well slave labor, were required as “hands” to raise animals, maintain a family garden, and serve as field workers to cultivate the crops and harvest the lumber for commercial sale. As a consequence, Isham likely spent the first three decades of his life working on his father’s lands whether tending crops or cutting down trees.

Beyond those few facts, 52-years of Isham Peacock’s life is devoid of details between his birth (1742) and 1794 when he settled in Warren County, Georgia. However, this writer

believes there are sufficient corollary facts to piece together a somewhat clearer picture of his possible early life.

### **Growing Opposition to the English Crown**

While Isham Peacock was likely working on his father's farm, his native North Carolina colony was experiencing a growing



discontent among the populous. The English Crown had enacted at least three taxes that included colonial government expense, county operating expenses, and a poll (voting) tax.

Additionally, there were “unlawful exaction of fees” by county clerks and registrars of deeds.<sup>3</sup> Complaints to the Crown-appointed Governor Tryon and his appointees fell on deaf ears. In fact, Tryon contended that the Baptists had organized the Regulators and were “enemies to society and a scandal to common sense.”<sup>4</sup> Yet in reality, the Regulators – a volunteer militia that resorted to both peaceful protests and armed assaults – “whose purpose was to secure redress from grievances and relief from unjust taxes and the extortion” by government officials.<sup>5</sup> And although the Regulators represented a cross section of citizens, a large number of those persons identified themselves as Baptists or Quakers.

Among the twelve or so counties that experienced “turbulence and violence” was Dobbs,<sup>6</sup> the home of the Peacock family. And it is noteworthy to recognize that three Baptist churches – which could have served as rallying points for the Regulators – had been established in Dobbs County prior to the beginning of the Revolutionary War: Bear Creek (1752); Southwest (1759); and Great Contentnea (1761). A family history stated that Samuel Peacock, if not other family members, was a member of the Bear Creek Church before the beginning of the Revolutionary War.<sup>7</sup> Isham's Baptist affiliation was indirectly confirmed by a later Isham Peacock-handwritten document seeking pension compensation for his service during the Revolutionary War. In that document, in addition to citing his service record,<sup>8</sup>

Peacock noted that he had been captured by English forces, but was released by a British officer who learned (likely through the Masonic handshake) Peacock was a fellow Mason.<sup>9</sup> A prospective Mason not only had to believe in a supreme Being, but the assumption, in that era, was that the Mason was a member of a Christian-oriented church.<sup>10</sup> If these assumptions are correct, these facts would give credence to Isham Peacock's earliest Baptist affiliation.

### **Likely Religious Influences Upon Peacock**

It is noteworthy that the aforementioned churches also had affiliated with the first association of Baptist churches in North Carolina which was the Kehukee, organized November 6, 1769.<sup>11</sup> That association initially was established to provide fellowship and theological integrity among the growing number of

Regular/Particular Baptist churches that had a strong Calvinistic emphasis upon particular redemption, or limited atonement. As a

**Hyper-Calvinism  
doctrine...a person's  
conversion is the  
result of a divine plan**

result, a person who offers a confession of faith in Jesus Christ was generally expected to present to the church an "experiential" testimony of conversion that had to highlight a spiritual "awakening, struggle with sin, and final assurance of salvation."<sup>12</sup> In the evolving tradition of Hyper-Calvinism doctrine, it was believed that a person's conversion is the result of a divine plan in which, "the events of an individual's life leading up to the moment of conversion are seen as participating in a sacred script authored by God before time began."<sup>13</sup>

It could be rightly assumed that Peacock's later-life belief and practice as a Hyper-Calvinist had its origin in the Particular Baptist church(es) of North Carolina. The seeds of anti-missions' sentiment were subsequently planted and disseminated in the South by the Kehukee Association of

North Carolina. The strongly Hyper-Calvinist and predestinarian-oriented association declared non-fellowship – a form of corporate excommunication – with the Missionary Baptists.<sup>14</sup>

There is also the possibility that Peacock – either as a layman or as someone struggling with a call of God to the preaching ministry – met and came under the influence of Elder Silas Mercer. By 1771 Mercer – who was the father of Jesse Mercer – was actively involved in the Kehukee Association and primarily was an itinerant preacher following a circuit throughout middle North Carolina.<sup>15</sup> “In talents as a preacher,” as a then-contemporary minister observed, “he was equaled by few of any denomination . . . in private conversation he was . . . instructing to all, especially to young preachers.”<sup>16</sup> Mercer moved to Georgia in 1775, but with the beginning of the Revolutionary War in Georgia, Mercer returned to North Carolina, “and for the next six years was incessantly engaged in preaching in different places around.”<sup>17</sup> The likelihood that such an influential minister could have met, mentored or otherwise had a spiritual effect upon Isham Peacock is too significant to go unaddressed. Although, it should be noted, there were many other North Carolina itinerant preachers during this period that could have influenced Isham. However, there is no indication that Peacock, now in his thirties, was either licensed or ordained to the preaching ministry. That would come later after settling in Georgia. However, the fact that Peacock moved to Georgia either at the suggestion of a “Macedonia call” by Mercer or simply out of the pursuit of free farm land, only adds to the mystery of Isham Peacock’s adult life.

### **Fleming Bates’ Early Years**

While the original 13 colonies were struggling to “form a more perfect union” by separating from English control, Fleming Bates was born in an unknown month in 1771 in Halifax County, Virginia Colony. During his teenage years he became acquainted with Virginia native Margaret “Peggy” Milner (b. 1769; d. 1841). So intense was their love for each

other that that couple – Fleming at age 21 and Peggy at age 23 – married and within the same year their first son James Maston Bates (b. 1792; d.1870) was born. Two years later their second son Wilson (b.1794; d.1860) was born.<sup>18</sup>

Within two years of the death of Bates' mother in 1798 (given his father and only sister died years earlier in 1777), Fleming and his brother Matthew (b.1772; d.1830) loaded their

**By now Bates  
would have been  
involved in a  
Baptist church**

families in ox-drawn carts and followed the southern migration to Abbeville, South Carolina, in the northwestern corner of the state where they settled.<sup>19</sup> Although the record is silent, it is likely that he

acquired a land grant in the hopes of producing marketable crops. Apparently, the acreage was sufficient to require him to have ten slaves to tend to the crops.<sup>20</sup> By now Bates would have been involved in a Baptist church given that his later testimony in Georgia of being called to preach would require his presentation of a letter of dismission from an “in order” Baptist church. Fleming Bates and his family stayed there for several years – between the 1800 and 1810 national censuses which otherwise would have recorded his residency – and pulled up stakes to follow the southern migration to Georgia. There, at least, existed the possibility of acquiring free land by lottery.

### **Peacock's Revolutionary War Experiences**

As previously noted in this narrative, events surrounding the growing discontent among the people in the thirteen colonies over the abuses by the English Crown led to armed conflict. The ensuing American Revolutionary period (1763 – 1789) resulted in a “call to arms” among the colonists. Isham Peacock was drafted into the North Carolina militia. According to his own statement, Peacock served, between 1778 and 1779, four tours of two months each, which “consisted entirely of marching up and down the Carolinas for eight months seeing no action at all. After he left the

service, the Tories captured him and took his papers.”<sup>21</sup> As previously noted, Peacock was subject to death by hanging, except that a British officer, recognizing Peacock as a Mason, released him to go free.<sup>22</sup>

Peacock likely married between 1774 and 1776 to Martha Easterling (b. 1746) of Johnston County,<sup>23</sup> before his military service, given that his first child Sarah was born in 1776. It is possible the war disrupted the Tory-government records offices which contributed to incomplete marriage and birth records during this era. Additionally, due to the expense (50 English pounds) of securing a marriage certificate and an official government record, the common practice of many couples, without the financial means, was to resort to posting a “marriage bann.” These were printed announcements informing the community of a couple’s plan to wed became the unofficial recognition of marriage.<sup>24</sup> The couple packed their belongings and moved to Anson County, N.C. It is ironic to note that despite his father having acquired land and benefited from the English Crown-supported Tory government, Isham participated in the revolution against the Crown. This may have been one of the several issues that caused Isham to take the unprecedented action to sever family ties and move away from his family and its support system. Given that the territories in the Carolinas were populated by native Indians, the Peacocks likely traveled down the state and settled with several other families.

Anson was located along North Carolina’s southern border with South Carolina, and the Great Pee Dee River served as Anson’s eastern edge which provided fertile farmland. Having established a home for his family, Isham and Martha were able to add a second child, a son John (b.1781).<sup>25</sup> Although it is uncertain on which side of the Pee Dee River the Peacocks settled. At the time, South Carolina land grants were available to settlers who were only required to pay annual rents or in lieu of rent a farmer would surrender a percentage of their marketable crops.<sup>26</sup> In the entire county



there was only one Baptist congregation, the Rocky River Church that had been organized in 1776.<sup>27</sup> Whether or not Peacock joined that church, again, the record is silent. Although it could be reasonably assumed this church could have provided a letter of dismissal for Peacock's use when he later settled in Georgia. An additional possibility is that those years in the Pee Dee River basin could have been Isham Peacock's "spiritual wilderness years" in which he came to understand God's call to ministry service.

### **Peacock's Initial Georgia Ministry**

The Great Wagon Road was the most traveled roadway used by people migrating from the northern colonies south through North Carolina and South Carolina connecting to the King's Highway into Georgia and Florida.<sup>28</sup> The King's Highway as a main entry into Georgia, making the otherwise daunting challenge of travel on foot with an ox cart loaded with family and possession, somewhat more convenient to reach the potential free farm lands in Georgia. As early as 1763 the British offered land grants to the Colonial Loyalists as a means of increasing populated settlements.<sup>29</sup> After Georgia became a state the General Assembly continued between 1805 and 1833 to make available free farmlands by means of land lotteries.<sup>30</sup> For a person without financial resources – such as Isham Peacock – this could be the start of the development of a potential "financial nest egg" if the planted crops produced income.

The first U.S. Census was conducted in 1790 and Isham Peacock was not recorded in any state. Now at age 52 in 1794, Peacock undertook the Georgia chapter of his life having settled in Warren County – identified as Capt. Hatcher's district – his first known place of residency. He came to acquire 200 acres of land, as recorded in the 1794 tax-digest of Warren.<sup>31</sup> Initially focused on developing his farm, it was eight years before Peacock began to fulfill his spiritual yearnings.

In the August 15, 1802, now at age 60, Peacock was ordained to preach by the Lott's Creek Church, Bulloch County, Georgia.<sup>32</sup> Participating in the ordination council were Henry Holcombe, John Goldwire and Henry Cook, who were all ministers at the church. On that same day, Peacock baptized thirteen people. Those new converts became the nucleus of a congregation organized by Peacock called Upper Black Creek Church, located south of Savannah.<sup>33</sup> This became Isham Peacock's first pastorate.

**at age 60,  
Peacock was  
ordained to  
preach**

Church Historian John Crowley cites Henry Holcombe who provided the first recorded eyewitness report on the dynamic preaching ministry of Isham Peacock in 1802 during the period of Georgia's Great Revival:

"Though young in the ministry, and without the advantages of a learned education, Mr. Peacock was eminently owned in converting sinners from the error of their ways. He commanded very general attention, and powerful impressions were made on the mind of many under his ministrations. Numbers who had never shown the least concern for their souls before, were emboldened, publicly, and with tears to request his prayers, and were under such engagements to find peace with God, that they spent whole nights, as well as days in religious exercise. In some instances, these arduous struggles of the mind were attended with convulsions similar to those which have so generally and strongly marked the present extensive and glorious revival of religion. It was feared in a few cases, that these bodily afflictions would terminate in death; but though from their strength, and continuance for several days and nights, with intermissions, they were truly alarming, they all issued in the unspeakable joys of assured salvation. Others who were exercised gently, gave, however, very

satisfactory evidence that they had passed from death to life.”<sup>34</sup>

Although Peacock was a committed Calvinist, when he undertook his preaching ministry, one historian said, “he became a more ‘high toned predestinarian’ in his later years.”<sup>35</sup>



Two years later Peacock assisted in organizing both the Beard’s Creek Church (1804) [pictured] and years later the Salem Church (1811), which were located in remote Tallnall County,<sup>36</sup> which had been created out of Montgomery County. He served as pastor at Beard’s Creek

until 1811.<sup>37</sup> He would later return to serve a second term as pastor of the Beard’s Creek Church, from 1819 to April 1835, when he moved to Ware County.<sup>38</sup>

### **Bates Arrival in Georgia Resulted in Ministry Call**

By 1810 Bates and his family also had moved to Warren County, Georgia, where he subsequently acquired 100 acres of land along the Big Briar Creek on which he paid taxes.<sup>39</sup> It also was an eventful year in his spiritual journey as he responded to God’s call to the preaching ministry by seeking the affirmation of the Williams Creek Church to confirm a license for him to preach the gospel.<sup>40</sup> After five years of having demonstrated his preaching effectiveness the members of the Big Briar Creek Church, Warren County, in 1815, ordained Bates making him an elder or pastor.<sup>41</sup> With Bates and Peacock living in Warren County, it is reasonable to expect that their paths crossed as early as 1810. Peacock most likely heard from other pastors of Bates being licensed. Learning of a young preacher in the area, Peacock probably offered to take Bates “under his wing,” and teach him Bible knowledge and theology as well as mentor him in the techniques of being an effective gospel preacher. Such a mentoring practice by older preachers in the nineteenth

century was normal, particularly for God-called men who had no formal ministerial education or training. It could be described as a “Paul and Timothy” arrangement without written letters. Rather, Bates would learn many things from talking with Peacock, observing the older preacher in action, and most importantly, by praying together.

“Perhaps Peacock’s most lasting contributions to the character of the Primitive Baptists in his area,” of southeast Georgia, observed Primitive Baptist Historian John Crowley, “was his influence on a rising generation of young ministers.” Among those men were Fleming Bates who, “often traveled and worked with him.”<sup>42</sup>

As the parallel ministries of Isham Peacock and Fleming Bates began to take hold, these two men were growing in their pastoral roles as elders/pastors and as church starters. Because most Baptist churches at the time only met once a month, most elders served several churches by traveling a circuit to preach at a given church on an



assigned Sunday. It was a standard practice that Peacock and Bates were not paid for their ministry service. Rather they were expected to have a “tent-making” employment to provide the financial support of their family. In the early decades practically all the church elders were farmers who, in some cases, had to use slave labor to tend to the several hundred acres that produced marketable crops. However, in his mid-fifties, Bates also served as the county tax collector for Lowndes (which became Brooks) 1827 – 1830.<sup>43</sup> Neither Peacock nor Bates were formally educated, but rather had experienced the call of God upon their lives which an “in order” Baptist church had affirmed by ordination. Their biblical and theological education came from a diligent reading of the scriptures and seeking understanding from God’s Holy Spirit. And typically, these and other elders did not prepare a sermon, but rather selected a King James Bible

scripture passage and prayed for God to speak through them during the time of “divine worship.”<sup>44</sup>

**In an 1823  
circular letter  
Peacock  
expressed his  
views on  
restrictive  
predestination**

Unlike some prominent Baptist ministers of the era, neither Peacock nor Bates were men of letters. Their views were most often reflected in a Baptist association’s “Circular Letters” they occasionally wrote and were circulated among the respective association’s churches. At other limited times, their comments would be recorded in the

proceeding minutes of a Baptist association’s annual meeting. In an 1823 circular letter Peacock expressed his views on restrictive predestination:

“Brethren, if it is true that every church . . . is a branch of the living vine in him before the foundation of the world planted by his own hand, has he not a just right to expect the same fruit the vine produced? . . . Do we find the spirit that governed the Lord Jesus abiding in us richly? If so, we are . . . faithful receiving members. We shall not be willing to fill the house of God with unprepared materials which cannot bear the fruit of God’s elect nor bear the rein of close discipline which God requires of us . . . Every unfruitful branch shall be taken away, and have no more a name of place among the [saints].”<sup>45</sup>

During the ensuing years Bates continued to pursue a parttime itinerant preaching ministry in South Georgia along the St. Marys River, and in 1818 he crossed over into Spanish Florida to seek out settlements where he would preach.<sup>46</sup> The following year while traveling on his preaching circuit into present-day Brantley County, Georgia, he and Isham Peacock organized the High Bluff Church.<sup>47</sup> And beginning in 1821 Bates was serving as the High Bluff parttime pastor,

while also serving the Sardis Church in Camden County, which he had helped organize in 1819.<sup>48</sup>

### **The Duo Organized Florida's Pigeon Creek Church**

The preacher duo served as the presbytery that organized the first Baptist church in the Florida Territory, which was still under the control of the Spanish government. On January 7, 1821, Elders Isham Peacock and Fleming Bates served as the presbytery to hear the individual experiential conversion testimonies of

Christian faith and examine the doctrinal integrity of those Baptists who were seeking to organize the Pigeon Creek Church, in current-day Nassau County. The twelve persons seeking to constitute the new church presented letters of dismission from the Sardis Church in Camden County,

**The preacher duo  
served as the  
presbytery that  
organized the first  
Baptist church in  
the Florida  
Territory**

Ga.<sup>49</sup> Bates subsequently served as the Pigeon Creek's parttime pastor from 1821 to 1826. And Peacock was later called by the church to provide pastoral care during 1828. (See the early years' history of the Pigeon Creek Church in this issue of the *Journal*.)

As a part of organizing the church, the founding members followed Elder Peacock's direction in approving documents that included a church Constitution, a set of 12 Articles of Faith, and a 19-point list of Decorum which provided the rules of order for the business (called conference) meetings.<sup>50</sup> It was Elder Peacock who was the doctrinal source authority for Baptist theology, faith and practice in the area known as the Southeast Georgia Wiregrass, according to John Crowley. Holding firmly to a Hyper-Calvinism perspective on salvation by limited atonement, Peacock often dictated the verbiage for the basic statement of faith – that provided the framework for the Articles of Faith

document – for all the churches he started, including Florida’s Pigeon Creek Church, which contained the following provisions:

“The existence of one Triune God, the fall of man and his inability to recover himself, God’s Sovereign choice of his people in Christ, their covenant [sic] head, from before the foundation of the world, effectual calling, justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ alone, final perseverance of the saints in grace and eternal salvation in glory, and baptism [by] immersion, and the Lord’s supper.”<sup>51</sup>

In October, 1825, a group of Baptists convened at Carter’s Meeting House (near present-day Lakeland) in Irwin County, Georgia, to organize the Union Church. Serving as the presbytery for the constituting church (also known as Burnt church) were Fleming Bates and Matthew Albritton.<sup>52</sup> Although Bates never served as pastor, but was a member of the Union Church, the church on several occasions expressed their appreciation for “his fatherly admonitions and him as a brother and gospel preacher and his knowledge in discipline.”<sup>53</sup>

With the authorization by the Piedmont Association in October 1827, Union Church members Fleming Bates and Matthew Albritton, as ordained ministers, were appointed to serve as the presbytery for the organization of a new association. The Ochlocknee Association, which was constituted on November 17, 1827, was comprised of the seven churches, that had been duly dismissed from the Piedmont. Bates was elected as moderator of the Ochlocknee.<sup>54</sup>

Earlier in 1827, Bates traveled to Hahira, Georgia, where he organized and served as pastor of the Friendship Church. His service lasted about four years until he had “differences” with church member Tasset Douglass. The church record only specified “eledged crimes” which forced Bates to resign and apparently cause him to lose the confidence of the

Baptists in South Georgia.<sup>55</sup> One can only assume that as a Baptist minister being accused of a “crime” likely had to involve some moral transgression or the contested acquisition of property or animals.

### **Peacock Led the Anti-Missionary and Anti-Temperance Causes**

The *Minutes* of the Piedmont Association show that Peacock was pastor of Salem Church in Liberty Co, in 1815, the year the association was organized. He was one of four or five Baptist elders who attended and took part in constituting the association. He was subsequently and repeatedly elected moderator of the association, 1819-1824 inclusively. Bates as the pastor-delegate of the Pigeon Creek Church, and following in Peacock’s footsteps, was elected moderator in 1825 and 1827. <sup>56</sup> Peacock, who was considered the “father” of the Piedmont Association <sup>57</sup> was serving as moderator during the 1819 annual meeting, when the Piedmont Association, “voted unanimously that they have nothing to do with missionaries.”<sup>58</sup> At the heart of that anti-missionary position was a disdain for money-based mission boards, Sunday schools, Bible and Tract Societies, and seminaries all of which were considered non-scriptural. Across the South, those Baptists who opposed those non-scriptural institutions became known as Old School or Primitive Baptists. One scholar’s explanation noted, “By the mid-1830s, the faction who insisted that all Baptists — all Christians — needed to ‘ask for the old paths, where is the good way’ [Jeremiah 6:16] settled on the appellation, ‘Primitive’ in order to signify their direct descent from the primitive church — that is, the church gathered around Jesus nearly two thousand years earlier. They would look back in order to go forward.”<sup>59</sup> (See related article on the development of the Primitive Baptists movement in this issue of the *Journal*.)

With the encouragement by correspondence and representatives from the Kehukee Association of North Carolina, Baptist associations in wiregrass Southeast Georgia took up the cause to neither have fellowship with, nor



support, man-made missionary endeavors. In addition to the Piedmont, the other South Georgia associations (and their year of action) included: Hephzibah (1816), Ochlocknee (1833), Canoochee (1828), and Alabama River (1842).<sup>60</sup> Florida's only existing association up until 1843, the Suwannee River took up the anti-missionary banner in that same year. The anti-missionary position taken by the several associations typically were embraced implicitly by their member churches. Promoting and defending the anti-missionary cause was a widely circulated publication in the South, *The Primitive*, published since 1835 by the North Carolina Kehukee Association.<sup>61</sup>

### **Peacock was greatly opposed to the Georgia Temperance Society**

In addition to his opposition to the missionary-related causes, Peacock was greatly opposed to the Georgia Temperance Society organized in 1827, which was a response to a growing alcohol abuse problem. "Prior to this time," according to early Georgia Baptist leader Jesse Mercer, "Baptists in the South approved drinking in moderation and accepted the medicinal use of alcohol as a normal part of frontier life."<sup>62</sup> To underscore his viewpoint, Peacock led his Beard's Creek Church, in July, 1830, to adopt a motion that prevented any person from speaking in the church on behalf of either foreign missions or the temperance society. "Knowing the times to be very pregnant with doctrinal error," the Peacock motion stressed.<sup>63</sup> Peacock's indignation toward efforts to control the drinking of alcohol was enhanced by his own behavior which was characterized as being "a whiskey drinking anti-missionary preacher."<sup>64</sup>

### **Bates Continued his Ministry in Florida**

Following his public humiliation by the Friendship Church, Bates returned to Florida (now a U.S. territory that would not acquire statehood status until 1845), and became involved in establishing churches in the northeast area of the

Territory, along with other notable itinerant missionaries. He labored with and was survived by another pioneer itinerant preacher in northeast Florida named John Tucker, who came to the Florida Territory in 1832 as a Missionary Baptist. Together they organized several churches in northeast Florida, and after Bates' death in 1840 Tucker was the only Baptist minister in that area for several years.<sup>65</sup>

Bates and Tucker helped organize three Florida churches in 1833 which drew upon former members of the Pigeon Creek Church who had migrated south. One of the churches established by John Tucker – who was assisted by a presbytery comprised of Bates, John B. Colson and William A. Knight – was organized July 13, in present-day Union County. The members initially declared themselves as the Church of Christ at Providence (now known as the Old Providence Baptist Church).<sup>66</sup> Later in August, the New River Church in Brooker (current Bradford County) was organized by Tucker, Bates and Colson.<sup>67</sup> And in September, members of the Providence Church agreed to participate in the organization of a church near Hogtown (present-day Gainesville) which was called the New Zion Church in Alachua County. The presbytery consisted of Bates, Tucker and Colson.<sup>68</sup>

### **Bates and Peacock Retired in Florida**

By 1835, Bates who had been described as “almost worn out” by John Tucker,<sup>69</sup> seemed to have retired from the preaching ministry as he moved further south settling in Newnansville, Alachua County.<sup>70</sup> However, at age 66, Bates joined the Florida Militia Mounted Volunteers to fight during the Second Seminole Indian War (1835-1842). Interestingly, Bates served alongside his 43-year-old son James Maston Bates.<sup>71</sup>

**at age 66, Bates  
joined the Florida  
Militia Mounted  
Volunteers**

Having mustered out of the militia July, 1837, Fleming Bates Sr. returned to farming in Alachua County. He died, at age 69, on January 4, 1840.<sup>72</sup>

Peacock lived in Tattnall County until about 1835 when, his 89-year-old wife Martha died. Peacock, now at age 93, moved to Ware (now Pierce) County to make his home with his son John. There Peacock met and married his second wife Mrs. Lydia Bennett (b. 1764). He and Lydia were living alone in Ware as recorded in the 1840 Census.<sup>73</sup> In March, 1844, Peacock organized the Providence (also called Camp Creek) Church in Ware County, Ga., and was called as its first pastor, serving 1844-1845.<sup>74</sup> Age never stood in the way for Isham Peacock to fulfill his call to preaching. One association record noted that Peacock, at age 80, made a preaching tour into Florida and at age 90 was still able to baptize converts.<sup>75</sup>

In 1845, while serving at the Providence Church, Peacock gradually lost his eyesight. He decided to resign the church and with Lydia, moved to the Mayport Mills community along the bluffs of the St. Johns River (now the site of the Mayport Naval Station) in Duval County, Florida. While on a visit to his grandchildren in present-day Pierce County, Ga., he suffered from congestive heart failure caused by edema<sup>76</sup> and after an illness of 42 days, he died in February 1850, at age 108 years.<sup>77</sup> He was buried in the cemetery at Shiloh Primitive Baptist Church in Pierce County. His aged widow Lydia, at age 91, having experienced failed eyesight, was still living in 1855 at Mayport Mills.<sup>78</sup>

---

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Peacock family record available at [www.myheritage.com/research/record-1-757225971-2-501700/isham-peacock-in-my-heritage-family-trees](http://www.myheritage.com/research/record-1-757225971-2-501700/isham-peacock-in-my-heritage-family-trees)

<sup>2</sup> Samuel Peacock, between 1743 1790, acquired land grants totaling 2,036 acres in Dobbs County that are available for viewing at the State Archives of North Carolina <https://archives.ncdcr.gov/doc/search-doc>

These records consist of land sold or granted by Lord Granville through his Granville Proprietary Land Office. In 1663 King Charles II of England granted land in the Carolinas to eight men, including Lord Granville, who had helped him regain the throne. These men who were called the Lords Proprietors of Carolina, had the right to sell or grant to others portions of the land.

<sup>3</sup> George W. Paschal, *History of North Carolina Baptists, Vol I: 1663 – 1805*, (Raleigh: The General Board North Carolina Baptist State Convention, 1930), 367.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 362.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 367.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 373.

<sup>7</sup> John J. Pierce, *Birds of a Feather: The Origins of the Southern Peacocks*, (no location: Peacock Family Association of the South, 1984), 15.

<sup>8</sup> C. H. Cantrell provided a transcription of Peacock's handwritten pension application posted on the website: [www.ancestry.com/Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty Land Warrant Application/North Carolina veteran Peacock, Isam](http://www.ancestry.com/Revolutionary%20War%20Pension%20and%20Bounty%20Land%20Warrant%20Application/North%20Carolina%20veteran%20Peacock,%20Isam); accessed July 20, 2020. Copies of the related documents are in the Isham Peacock file held by the Florida Baptist Historical Society.

<sup>9</sup> The Ancient Free and Accepted Masons, known as Freemasons or Masons, is a secret fraternal society that stresses the members' duty to their families, their country, and their fellow men and women, as well as the importance of religious belief, according to the website: <https://www.ncpedia.org/freemasons>; accessed January 26, 2021. Colonial-era Masons included English military officers, Tory government officials, merchants, teachers, farmers, and ministers, among others.

<sup>10</sup> Website <https://www.britannica.com/topic/order-of-Freemasons>; accessed January 26, 2021.

<sup>11</sup> Paschal, 417.

<sup>12</sup> James R. Mathis, *The Making of the Primitive Baptists*, (New York: Routledge, 2004), 128.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

<sup>14</sup> John Crowley, *Primitive Baptists of the Wiregrass South*, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998), 59.

<sup>15</sup> Paschal, 428-429.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 496-497.

<sup>18</sup> Folks Huxford, *Pioneers of Wiregrass Georgia, Vol. 6*, (Jesup, GA.: Jesup Sentinel, 1971), 309. Additionally, see Fleming Bates, Sr. (Reverend) biography summary sourced at: <https://person.ancestry.com/tree/32774550/person/1832724723/facts>; accessed January 26, 2021

<sup>19</sup> [www.ancestry.com/1800 U.S. Federal Census for 1800](http://www.ancestry.com/1800%20U.S.%20Federal%20Census%20for%201800); accessed May 3, 2020.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Crowley, 21; citing Peacock's Revolutionary War Pension file.

<sup>22</sup> C. H. Cantrell.

<sup>23</sup> Huxford, Vol 6, (1971), 207.

<sup>24</sup> L. Maren Wood, "Marriage in Colonial North Carolina," available at website <https://www.ncpedia.org/anchor/marriage-colonial-north>; accessed April 17, 2021.

<sup>25</sup> Huxford, Vol. 6, (1971), 207.

<sup>26</sup> Herbert B. Adams, ed., *John Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Studies: Volume 8, South Carolina, Maryland and Virginia*, (Baltimore: John Murphy and Company Printers, 1895), 66-67.

<sup>27</sup> Paschal, 549.

<sup>28</sup> The Great Wagon Road described at website: <https://piedmonttrails.com/2019/12/14/the-southern-migration-during-the-18th-century>; accessed April 17, 2021.

<sup>29</sup> Rembert W. Patrick and Allen Morris, *Florida Under Five Flags*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1967), 22.

<sup>30</sup> Farris Cable, *Georgia Land Surveying History and Law*, (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1991).

<sup>31</sup> Huxford, Vol. 6, (1971), 207.

<sup>32</sup> *Christian Index* Compilation (no author), *History of the Baptist Denomination in Georgia*, (Atlanta, GA: James P. Harrison and Co., 1881), 67.

<sup>33</sup> Crowley, 22.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, citing *Analytical Repository* 1 (September – October 1802), 124.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> No author, *Pioneers of Wiregrass Georgia*, Vol. 7, (Homerville, GA., Huxford Genealogical Society, 1975), 553.

<sup>38</sup> Huxford, Vol. 6, (1971), 207.

<sup>39</sup> [www.Ancestry.com/Georgia](http://www.Ancestry.com/Georgia), Property Tax Digest, 1793 – 1892; accessed January 29, 2021.

<sup>40</sup> Robert G. Garner, Charles O. Walker, J. R. Huddlestun, and Waldo P. Harris, *A History of the Georgia Baptist Association, 1784 – 1984*, (Washington, Georgia: Wilkes Publishing Company, 1988), 84, 107.

<sup>41</sup> W. L. Kirkpatrick, *The Hephzibah Baptist Centennial, 1794 – 1894*, (Augusta, Georgia: Richards and Shaver, 1894), 54. Also see endnote #18.

<sup>42</sup> Crowley, 23.

<sup>43</sup> Folks Huxford, *History of Lowndes County, Georgia, 1825 – 1941*, (Homerville, Georgia: Daughters of the American Revolution, 1942, Reprinted 1978), 63. Also see Folks Huxford, *The History of Brooks County, Georgia*, (Quitman, Georgia: Daughters of the American Revolution, 1948), 27.

<sup>44</sup> Jerry Newsome, *A Modest History of the Primitive Baptists in the United States*, (n.p.; n.p., 1977), 44.

<sup>45</sup> Crowley, 64, citing Piedmont Association, *Minutes*, 1823.

- 
- <sup>46</sup> “Died,” *Florida Herald and Southern Democrat* (St. Augustine), Vol. 5, #32, 3.
- <sup>47</sup> Summary history of the High Bluff Primitive Baptist Church available on website <https://www.hrcga.org/church/high-bluff-primitive-baptist>; accessed January 31, 2021.
- <sup>48</sup> Huxford, Vol. 1, (1951), 326.
- <sup>49</sup> Pigeon Creek Primitive Baptist Church, *Minutes*, January 7, 1821.
- <sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>51</sup> Crowley, 22; Also see Pigeon Creek Primitive Baptist Church, *Minutes*, January 7, 1821.
- <sup>52</sup> “Constitution of Union Church,” Ray City History Blog, at <https://raycityhistory.wordpress.com/tag/fleming-bates>; accessed May 23, 2020.
- <sup>53</sup> Crowley, 28, who cites Union Church, *Minutes*, February and November 1827; and February, 1829.
- <sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 31, citing Piedmont Association, *Minutes*, 1827.
- <sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 28
- <sup>56</sup> Piedmont Association, *Minutes*, 1825, 1827.
- <sup>57</sup> Crowley, 24.
- <sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 63, citing the Piedmont Association, *Minutes*, 1819.
- <sup>59</sup> Joshua A. Guthman, “Primitive Baptists, the Protestant Self, and the American Religious Imagination,” a PhD dissertation for the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2008, 4-5.
- <sup>60</sup> Crowley, 55 – 67.
- <sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.
- <sup>62</sup> Anthony L. Chute, *A Piety Above the Common Standard: Jesse Mercer and the Defense of Evangelistic Calvinism*, (Macon, GA.: Mercer University Press, 2004), 197.
- <sup>63</sup> Beard’s Creek Church, *Minutes*, July, 1830.
- <sup>64</sup> Christian Index, *Baptist Denomination in Georgia*, 89.
- <sup>65</sup> John Rosser, *A History of Florida Baptists*, (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1949), 6.
- <sup>66</sup> Old Providence Baptist Church, *Minutes*, July 13, 1833.
- <sup>67</sup> New River Baptist Church, *Minutes*, August 24, 1833.
- <sup>68</sup> Old Providence Baptist Church, *Minutes*, Augusts 24, 1833.
- <sup>69</sup> John Tucker described Fleming Bates ministry in a letter to the *Christian Index*, February 28, 1845.
- <sup>70</sup> Huxford, Vol. 7, (1975), 500, “Fleming Bates.”
- <sup>71</sup> [www.Ancestry.com/Florida,U.S.CompiledServiceRecords,FloridaIndianWar,1835-1858](http://www.Ancestry.com/Florida,U.S.CompiledServiceRecords,FloridaIndianWar,1835-1858). Accessed January 29, 2021.
- <sup>72</sup> *Florida Herald and Southern Democrat* (St. Augustine), Vol. 5, #32, 3.
- <sup>73</sup> Huxford, Vol. 6, (1971), 207.
- <sup>74</sup> Folks Huxford, ed., *History of Clinch County, Georgia*, (Macon, GA: The J.W. Burke Company, 1916). 125.
- <sup>75</sup> Crowley, 23, citing the Beard’s Creek Church, *Minutes*, June-July 1831.

<sup>76</sup> Most records report that Peacock had dropsy which is more correctly diagnosis as edema, according to the website:

<https://www.medicinenet.com/dropsy/definition.htm>. It states that “in years gone by, a person might have been said to have dropsy. Today . . . the person might have edema due to congestive heart failure.”

<sup>77</sup> No author, *Pioneers of Wiregrass Georgia, Vol. XI*, (Homerville, GA., Huxford Genealogical Society, 2002), 518.

<sup>78</sup> Huxford, Vol. 6, (1971), 207.

# **The Firsts in the Baptist Faith Tradition Across the Georgia- Florida Frontier**

*by Susan G. Broome  
Associate Professor Emerita  
Mercer University Library  
Macon, Georgia*



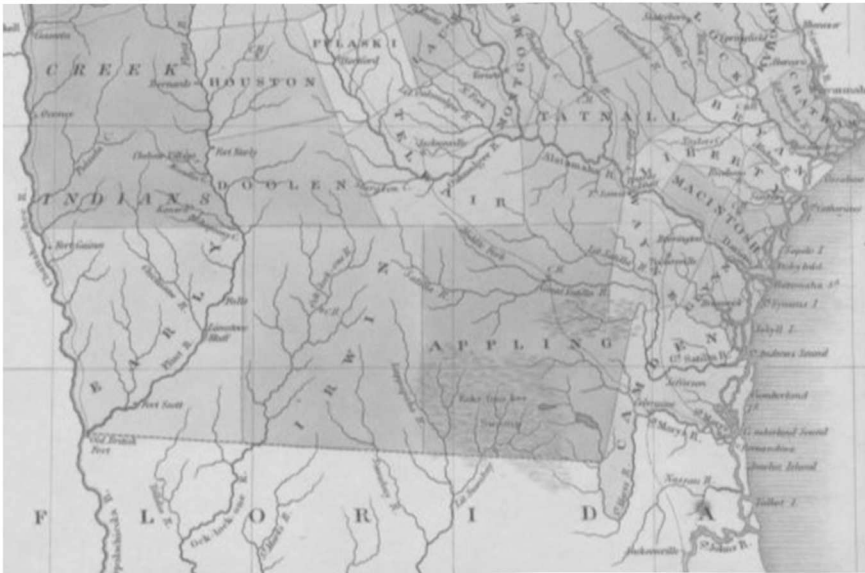
## **Introduction**

By the time the first Baptist church was organized in Florida in 1821, Baptists in Georgia had already formed dozens of churches, both Caucasian and African American, and a number of associations. In addition, they were only a year away from establishing a general body that became known as the Georgia Baptist Convention (GBC). With the strength of such organization just across Florida's northern border, it is not surprising that Florida churches found fellowship and places of service among the Georgia associations and convention.

The primary purposes of associations in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were four-fold: (1) promote fellowship among the churches; (2) maintain uniformity in faith and practice among the churches; (3) give counsel and assistance to the churches; and (4) promote an organizational structure through which churches could cooperate in their broader ministries.<sup>1</sup>

There is ample evidence of relationships between Florida churches and Baptists of Missionary, Old-Line Primitive, Progressive Primitive, Free Will, and Two-Seed-in-the-Spirit traditions in Georgia. However, the focus of this article will be limited to the cooperation between Missionary Baptists in these two states, as seen through minutes of Georgia associations and the Georgia Baptist Convention. We will look at three Georgia associations – Piedmont, Ochlocknee and Bethel – that were organized before 1843,<sup>2</sup> and provided





fellowship and ministry support to the geographically isolated Florida churches. There were several other Georgia associations – Bowen, Mercer, Southwestern and Valdosta – that organized between 1843 and 1905 that accepted Florida churches into their fellowship. Due to space limitations in this article, those later associations are not included in this narrative.

### **Piedmont Baptist Association**

(Constituted 1815, Georgia Baptist Convention affiliation 1849-present)  
Florida churches: Pigeon Creek and New River.

Of the earliest Georgia associations, Piedmont was the only one close enough in distance to accept Florida churches as contributing members. The Piedmont Association was established in 1815 with Moses Westberry as moderator and participation of half-a-dozen churches. Careful attention was given to preparation of a constitution and rules of decorum in the first two years, and Westberry was “appointed to prepare a circular address against the next sitting of [the] association” and distribute fifty copies of the

minutes.<sup>3</sup> Evidently he also was instructed to communicate with the Hephzibah Association, because the minutes of 1817 indicate that “in consequence of a fall from a horse he was unable to bear the letter of correspondence to the . . . Association.”<sup>4</sup> The next effort succeeded, and Piedmont developed relationships with a number of neighboring associations before breaking ties with those “so much engaged in the missionary concerns.”<sup>5</sup> Wilson Conner, Isham Peacock, and Fleming Bates assumed influential roles during these formative years, Conner as clerk, Peacock as moderator (1819-1824 inclusively), and Bates as preacher, advisor and elected as moderator in 1825 and 1827. Conner, who was an itinerant preacher throughout Georgia, was last mentioned in the business of the 1822 meeting when he moved that a letter from a national body related to foreign missions be read to the assembly. His motion received no second and, thus, was lost.<sup>6</sup>

**disdain for money-based mission boards, which were considered non-scriptural**

Peacock, who was considered the “father” of the Piedmont Association<sup>7</sup> was serving as moderator during the 1819 annual meeting, when the Piedmont Association, “voted unanimously that they have nothing to do with

missionaries.”<sup>8</sup> At the heart of that anti-missionary position was a disdain for money-based mission boards, which were considered non-scriptural.

On October 13, 1821, delegates from Pigeon Creek Church in the upper district of East Florida requested membership in the association. Following examination, Britain Knight and Thomas Prevatt were “received and invited to a seat.”<sup>9</sup> Of the eleven churches in the association that year, Pigeon Creek was among the smallest with fourteen members.

Delegates meeting during the 1821 annual meeting concerned themselves with: Baptists who moved with letters

of dismissal from one church and failed to request membership in another (the response: “Treat them as strangers”);<sup>10</sup> the length and subject matter of circular letters (at least one was rejected as too lengthy!); the need for strict discipline against church members who failed to lead pious lives; and the desire for greater fellowship among the member churches. In 1823 churches were encouraged to invite the “brethren and sisters of the sister churches” to attend services where they could “commune and wash feet, and address to each church a letter of correspondence.”<sup>11</sup> An offer of correspondence with the recently-formed General Baptist Association of Georgia was rejected in 1824. Churches were encouraged to relieve their pastor of his “temporary wants” so that he would have “leisure to visit” them. “If not the demands of nature will require him to stay at home and labor in his field or shop.”<sup>12</sup>

Pigeon Creek hosted the 1825 meeting of the association, and Fleming Bates was elected moderator. At this time committees were being formed to study some of the smaller churches and consider dissolving them.<sup>13</sup> Evidence of the difficulty of living in less-populated areas can be found as individuals were reminded of the “benefits of fasting,<sup>14</sup> . . . and setting aside a time of prayer to Almighty God that he would turn away his wrath from the thousands who spend the day in drinking[,] feasting[,] rioting[,] shooting[,] cursing[,] swearing[,] and blaspheming that sacred name from whom we have received all the blessings we enjoy as a nation.”<sup>15</sup>

In the mid-1840s the Piedmont Association began to take a more moderate stance related to the Georgia Baptist Convention and “the missionary doctrine.”<sup>16</sup> The body officially resolved “to avoid either extremes of missionary or anti-missionary but hold forth the hand of fellowship to all who are in good standing in their churches and make them welcome to all the privileges of the Piedmont Association.” In 1848 a decision was made to petition for membership in the state Baptist convention.<sup>17</sup>

When a call was made for petitionary letters at the 1850 Piedmont annual meeting, one was received from New River Church in East Florida. The church's delegate, Moses Dees, was received and asked to pray

during the session. A presbytery of Moses Westberry and L. W. Bryan met with Dees and another gentleman, Thomas Doyal, to consider ordaining them to the ministry. New River, one of thirteen churches in the association, claimed fifty members, Jones Creek and Bethel churches' being larger in number.<sup>18</sup>

**The body officially resolved “to avoid either extremes of missionary or anti-missionary**

By 1851 New River was still one of only thirteen churches in the association. Its membership remained at fifty, but it had baptized sixteen believers of the thirty-five reported for that year.<sup>19</sup> In 1854 the membership had dropped to thirty. The association authorized the clerk to prepare a letter of dismissal for the church, at its request, and recommended in the same resolution that churches “keep up Sabbath schools and prayer meetings.”<sup>20</sup>

### **Ochlocknee Baptist Association**

(Constituted 1827, Georgia Baptist Convention affiliation never occurred)  
Florida churches: Hephzibah, Mt. Gilead, Newington, Shiloh, New River, Old Providence, Hebron, Ebenezer, Mt. Gilead, New Providence, Myrtle Springs and Indian Spring.

On November 17, 1827, an organizational meeting was held for what was to be called the Ochlocknee Association (GA). Six churches took part in the formation of the new entity, including two Florida churches: Hephzibah in Gadsden County and Mt. Gilead in Jefferson County.<sup>21</sup> Within six years the Ochlocknee Association had grown to 35 cooperating churches with a combined membership of 1,010. This growth prompted the association to extend its boundaries to touch the Piedmont Association on the east

and the St. Johns River to its southeast and proceeded west along the Georgia-Florida territorial boundary. That area encompassed churches located in six North Florida Territorial counties that abutted South Georgia.<sup>22</sup> Those twelve churches and their location included: Columbia County's churches: Newington, Shiloh, New River, and Providence; Gadsden County's churches: Hephzibah and Hebron; Hamilton County's Concord Church; Jefferson County's: Ebenezer, Mt. Gilead and New Providence churches; and Leon County's Myrtle Springs and Indian Spring [sic] churches.<sup>23</sup>

Given the influence of anti-missionary proponents Isham Peacock, Matthew Albritton and Fleming Bates, it was only a matter of time before the Ochlocknee Association went on record opposing the "missionaries" who were considered "far from God" in doctrinal integrity.<sup>24</sup> In 1833, the association expressed concern over the growing missionary movement. They objected to societies which "the Savior never called or spoke of; it is man's plan." The association decried what the Primitive Baptists believed to be a heresy of preaching man-devised plans of "temperance and morality and call it righteousness."<sup>25</sup> By 1842, during the association's annual meeting, the delegates approved a revision to their rules of order that declared the association would not have fellowship with any church that supported missionary societies, Sunday school societies or any similar benevolent groups.<sup>26</sup>

### **Bethel Baptist Association**

(Constituted 1833, Georgia Baptist Convention affiliation 1843-present)

In 1833 a number of churches in the Columbus Association chose to form the Bethel Association, centered in southwest Georgia. Joshua Mercer was a pastor in Lee County, and in 1839 he was present when the subject of domestic missions arose. No fewer than six related resolutions were passed by the assembled body, calling for the association "to supply destitute regions within our bounds, and around us."<sup>27</sup>

Resources in the forms of ministers and funding were requested, and it was resolved that “each brother engaged to preach in destitute regions shall be required by the executive committee, to keep a diary report of all travels, sermons, success, &c., which shall be placed before this body by the committee, at each annual session.”<sup>28</sup> A missionary was employed in 1840 on the border in Alabama.<sup>29</sup>

The report in 1841 called specific attention to West Florida among a list of Georgia counties considered within the bounds of the association’s responsibilities. “There is not a Baptist preacher now living in the whole Territory of West Florida” was a footnote to the statement that there were

**“There is not a  
Baptist preacher  
now living in the  
whole Territory of  
West Florida”**

“whole neighborhoods within those limits where the Gospel has seldom, if ever, been preached.”<sup>30</sup> The committee called for prayer and for laborers who would make the necessary sacrifices and not “bury their talents.”<sup>31</sup>

As the eighth piece of business on Saturday, October 3, 1843, the association “agreed to propose correspondence with the Florida Association,” appointing seven members to attend their meeting at Liberty Church in Thomas County, Georgia, and one to write the letter.<sup>32</sup> The first two correspondents received from this association were H. S. Linton and B. S. Fuller, and over the course of the next few years, both were given opportunity to preach during the meetings.<sup>33</sup>

The order of business was suspended on Monday, November 8, 1847, for the association to hear an address from Joshua Mercer, “requesting Ministerial assistance in constituting an Association in West Florida.” All who could attend this organizational meeting were encouraged to do so.<sup>34</sup> The following year Bethel received a letter “by the hand of brother Bluett,” proposing correspondence with the West Florida Association, which was “unanimously received.”<sup>35</sup>

Within a year of the 1854 establishment of the Florida Baptist State Convention, correspondents were being received from and appointed to the Bethel Association, and a proposal was made that the association withdraw from the Georgia Baptist Convention and unite with Florida. E. W. Warren offered the following resolution: “That the churches be requested to send up to this body in their next letters their minds upon this subject, and that, if any of them should be disposed to withdraw from this body rather than submit to said change, that fact be mentioned also.” Evidence of a significant debate is obvious since the clerk reported a discussion “which occupied several hours.”<sup>36</sup>



The 1856 meeting was marked by resolutions in support of ministering to Creek Indians and “among the blacks.” The final resolution quelled the agitation from the year before: “That in consequence of the expressed wish of a majority of the churches in this Association, it is deemed inexpedient to withdraw from the Georgia Baptist Convention.”<sup>37</sup> In 1859 William N.

Chaudoin of Albany, who eventually became executive secretary of the Florida Baptist Convention, was appointed a correspondent to the Florida Baptist Association.<sup>38</sup>

### **Georgia Baptist Convention**

(Constituted 1822 as the General Baptist Association of Georgia; name changed to the Baptist Convention for the State of Georgia in 1828)

The General Baptist Association of Georgia (GBAG) was formed in 1822 at Powelton by representatives from the Georgia and Ocmulgee associations. The following year the GBAG began the practice of sending representatives to local associational meetings. J. M. Gray of the Ocmulgee Association was sent to the Piedmont Association in 1823 and 1824;<sup>39</sup> however, this did not guarantee that delegates

would, in turn, be sent to state meetings. Piedmont had resolved to have nothing to do with missionaries in 1819.<sup>40</sup> The GBAG minutes of 1825 indicate that Piedmont had not yet sent delegates, despite it having fifteen churches, eight ministers, and 700 members.<sup>41</sup> In fact, before Piedmont began an active relationship with the Convention, visitors or minutes would be received from Methodists and Presbyterians (1826), Alabama (1827), South Carolina (1828), New York (1830), North Carolina (1833), and Massachusetts (1833)!

Despite, or perhaps because of, the lack of interest in cooperation from Piedmont, the Convention rather quickly began to see possibilities of sending missionaries to the southern portion of the state. In April 1831 a messenger was elected to attend the general convention for the Burman mission in New York,<sup>42</sup> while James McDonald (who was later to work in Florida) was reported to have served as a domestic missionary for a few weeks before leaving to teach school. For his efforts he was paid \$13.42.<sup>43</sup> The following year Wilson Connor was sent as a missionary to “the lower parts of the State.”<sup>44</sup>

By 1839 Brother Joshua Mercer was “laboring in the Southern part of the State.”<sup>45</sup> Spending some of his time in Florida, he was paid \$270 for nine months of labor in 1841, and in 1842 he received \$360 for twelve months of work. His term was tenuous though: “From the reduced state of our treasury and the general scarcity of money, your committee have been constrained to notify both brother Mercer and Suggs to hold themselves in readiness to be dismissed from our service in the event it should become necessary.”<sup>46</sup> In 1843 “Bro. Joshua Mercer labored about five months in the most destitute parts of S. W. Georgia and in Florida, and closed his labors for the Convention about the last of July.”<sup>47</sup>





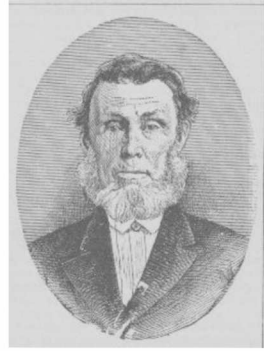
The Florida Baptist Association made application for membership in the Georgia Baptist Convention in May of 1846. Following some discussion, the matter was postponed to the following morning so that C. D. Mallary, E. H. Beall, and J. H. Campbell could bring a resolution.<sup>48</sup> In order to accept this new association, an amendment to the constitution was required:

**Florida... made application for membership in the Georgia Baptist Convention**

“The constituents of this Body, are the Baptist Associations in the State of Georgia, or as many of them as may think proper to accede to the terms of this Convention, and such Auxiliary Societies as contribute annually to our funds, whose Constitutions may be approved. Associations and Societies located out of the State may be received into the Body, when their peculiar location, and other circumstances, may, in the judgment of this Convention, render it desirable and important.”<sup>49</sup>

The “protracted debate” that followed the acceptance of the amendment was broken on adjournment in the middle of the afternoon, and the matter was raised again on the third day. Joining fourteen other GBC associations, the Florida Association was received as a constituent member, and “Bro. James McDonald, the only delegate in attendance[,] was welcomed by the Moderator to a seat among us.”<sup>50</sup> The new association claimed thirty-two churches, 1,333 members, 139 baptisms, eighteen ordained ministers, eight licentiates, and contributions of \$378.19 to missions. R. J. Mays was moderator and S. C. Craft, clerk.<sup>51</sup> By the following year, the association reported thirty-four churches and 1,630 members.<sup>52</sup>

Representation at the Georgia Convention meetings by Florida ministers appears to have been infrequent. D. P. Everett, W. Blewitt, and B. F. Fuller were seated with the other delegates between 1850 and 1854.<sup>53</sup> Florida was among a number of states reported as needing missionaries, but funding was frequently an issue.<sup>54</sup> An appeal was



made by J. S. Baker [pictured] in 1855, “soliciting contributions to aid the brethren in Jacksonville, Florida, to build a house of worship.”<sup>55</sup> A new work among Cubans in Key West, Florida was reported in 1885,<sup>56</sup> “giving promise of the entire conquest of the Island for Jesus” in 1890.<sup>57</sup> Unfortunately in 1896 the enthusiasm and hope had dampened: “Alas, poor Cuba! Now in the throes of a dire and desperate revolution . . .”<sup>58</sup> When Texas claimed 143 home missionaries in 1893, Florida was a far second with thirty-three of its own.<sup>59</sup> Two years later there was more concern:

In 1855 the Florida Baptist State Convention, which had organized in November, 1854, sent W. H. Goldwire as a correspondent, and the Georgia Convention reciprocated by appointing eight men to attend the next meeting at Union Academy in Jackson County, Florida.<sup>60</sup> The receipt and appointment of correspondents continued through 1858 and in 1860 (1856, five received, seven appointed; 1857, five, six; 1858, four, six; 1860, six, eight). The statistical table of 1857 noted: “The Florida Association is included among the constituents of the Georgia Baptist Convention, because no formal dissolution of its connection has ever taken place. It is now, however, an auxiliary of the Florida Convention.”<sup>61</sup> Thirty-five churches were reported by the Florida Baptist Convention, with 1,025 white members and 1,031 “colored” members and \$705.27 given to missions.<sup>62</sup> The Florida Baptist State Convention noted twenty-six churches and 1,874 members.<sup>63</sup> The 1858 minutes indicated that there

were fourteen Georgia churches connected with the Florida Association.<sup>64</sup>

The receipt of Florida correspondents was more erratic after 1860, a year when D. P. Everett, W. N. Chaudoin, Thomas Dyson, and Joshua Mercer attended. Joshua Mercer presented the Convention with a cane belonging to his brother, Jesse Mercer.<sup>65</sup>

## **Concluding Observations**

Until the establishment of the first Florida pro-missionary association in 1843 and the Florida Baptist State Convention in 1854, Florida's missionary churches had little choice but to develop relationships with churches along its northern state border. A similar study of Alabama's Baptist history would likely document the same spirit of cooperation. As Florida's associations and State Convention developed in strength and in services, it was less necessary for Florida churches to look to Georgia associations and state convention for leadership. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the majority of missionary churches which had formerly met with Georgia associations had changed their allegiance to Florida.

---

## **ENDNOTES**

*[Editor's Note: This article was originally presented as a longer paper by Susan G. Broome during the annual meeting of the Florida Baptist Historical Society held in Madison, Florida, April 23, 2004. The original document was nearly 15,000 words in length and has been edited to a "reader's digest" version to fit the available space in this issue of the Journal. Some additional supplemental materials, providing some clarity and continuity, were inserted by the editor.]*

<sup>1</sup> Walter B. Shurden, *Associationalism Among Baptists in America: 1707 – 1824*, (New York: Arno Press, 1980), 103.

<sup>2</sup> The year 1843 was the year that the Florida Baptist Association was organized as the first Missionary Baptist association established in Florida. The first Baptist association established in the Florida Territory was the Suwannee River Association, organized 1835. However, beginning in 1840 the association refused to permit participation by pro-

missionary churches and subsequently voted to change its name to the Suwannee River Primitive Baptist Association in 1847

<sup>3</sup> Piedmont Baptist Association, *Minutes*, 1815, 12<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> items of business; 1816, 4<sup>th</sup> item of business (hereafter association and convention minutes will be cited by an abbreviated name, followed by the year and page number[s]).

<sup>4</sup> Piedmont BA, 1817, 4<sup>th</sup> item of business.

<sup>5</sup> Piedmont BA, 1825, 8<sup>th</sup> item of business.

<sup>6</sup> Piedmont BA, 1822, 4<sup>th</sup> item of business.

<sup>7</sup> John Crowley, *Primitive Baptists of the Wiregrass South*, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998), 24.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 63, citing the Piedmont Association, *Minutes*, 1819.

<sup>9</sup> Piedmont BA, 1821, 3<sup>rd</sup> item of business.

<sup>10</sup> Piedmont BA, 1821, 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> items of business.

<sup>11</sup> Piedmont BA, 1823, 19<sup>th</sup> item of business.

<sup>12</sup> Piedmont BA, 1824, "Circular Letter."

<sup>13</sup> Piedmont BA, 1825, 20<sup>th</sup> item of business.

<sup>14</sup> Piedmont BA, 1827, "Circular Letter."

<sup>15</sup> Piedmont BA, 1828, 15<sup>th</sup> item of business.

<sup>16</sup> Piedmont BA, 1846, 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> items of business; 1847, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> items of business.

<sup>17</sup> Piedmont BA, 1848, 24<sup>th</sup> item of business.

<sup>18</sup> Piedmont BA, 1850, 1-2.

<sup>19</sup> Piedmont BA, 1851, 7.

<sup>20</sup> Piedmont BA, 1854, 4.

<sup>21</sup> Crowley, 31.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>23</sup> Broome, 1-3.

<sup>24</sup> Crowley, 55.

<sup>25</sup> Ochlocknee BA, 1833.

<sup>26</sup> Folks Huxford, *The History of Brooks County, Georgia*, (Quitman, Georgia: Daughters of the American Revolution, 1948), 289.

<sup>27</sup> Bethel BA, 1839, 3.

<sup>28</sup> Bethel BA, 1839, 4.

<sup>29</sup> Bethel BA, 1840, 14.

<sup>30</sup> Bethel BA, 1840, 13.

<sup>31</sup> Bethel BA, 1840, 14.

<sup>32</sup> Bethel BA, 1843, 3.

<sup>33</sup> Bethel BA, 1844, 2; 3; 1846, 4.

<sup>34</sup> Bethel BA, 1847, 5.

<sup>35</sup> Bethel BA, 1848, 4.

<sup>36</sup> Bethel BA, 1855, 3.

<sup>37</sup> Bethel BA, 1856, 6.

<sup>38</sup> Bethel BA, 1859, 8.

<sup>39</sup> GBC, 1823, 4; 1824, 3.

<sup>40</sup> Piedmont BA, 1819, 9<sup>th</sup> item of business.

- <sup>41</sup> Georgia Baptist Convention, hereinafter referred to as GBC, 1825, 10.
- <sup>42</sup> GBC, 1831, 5.
- <sup>43</sup> GBC, 1831, 7.
- <sup>44</sup> GBC, 1832, 5.
- <sup>45</sup> GBC, 1839, 12.
- <sup>46</sup> GBC, 1842, 17.
- <sup>47</sup> GBC, 1843, 7.
- <sup>48</sup> GBC, 1846, 3.
- <sup>49</sup> GBC, 1846, 4.
- <sup>50</sup> GBC, 1846, 4.
- <sup>51</sup> GBC, 1846, 25.
- <sup>52</sup> GBC, 1847, 69-70.
- <sup>53</sup> GBC, 1850, 5; 1851, 5; 1854, 4.
- <sup>54</sup> GBC, 1854, 9; 1857, 16; 1878, VII.
- <sup>55</sup> GBC, 1855, 8.
- <sup>56</sup> GBC, 1885, 24.
- <sup>57</sup> GBC, 1890, 37.
- <sup>58</sup> GBC, 1896, 31.
- <sup>59</sup> GBC, 1893, 24.
- <sup>60</sup> GBC, 1855, 5-6.
- <sup>61</sup> GBC, 1857, 38.
- <sup>62</sup> GBC, 1857, 36.
- <sup>63</sup> GBC, 1857, 38.
- <sup>64</sup> GBC, 1858, 48.
- <sup>65</sup> GBC, 1860, 7.

# **The First One-Hundred Years of Florida Baptists' Legacy – 1825 – 1925**

*by Rufus W. Weaver, ThD  
President, 1918 – 1927  
Mercer University  
Macon, Georgia*

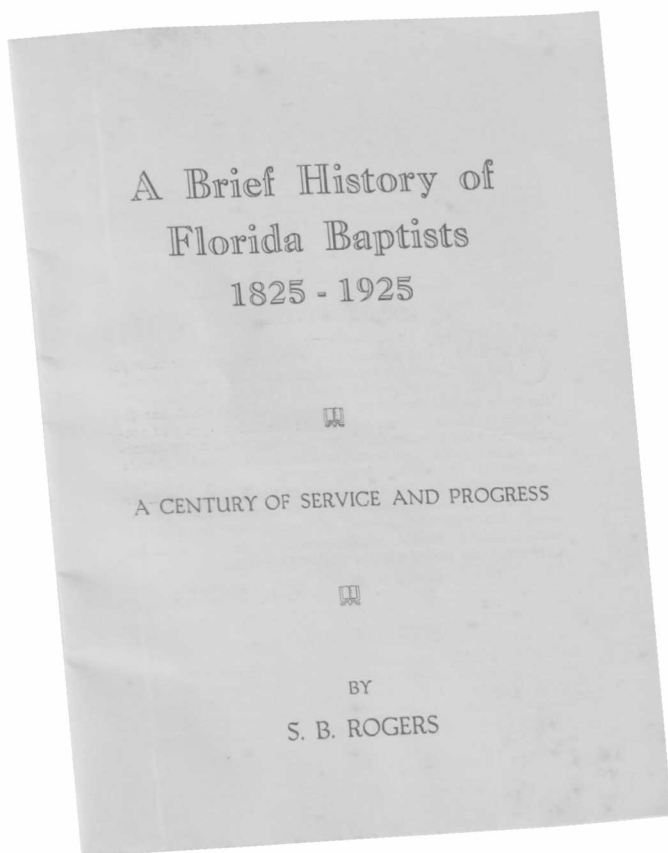


## **Introduction**

We are assembled to celebrate the one hundredth anniversary of our Baptist work in Florida. The invitation to speak on this occasion was sent to me by an honored alumnus of Mercer University, who, for a quarter of a century, has identified with the Baptists of Florida, and who had led them to notable success in the most glorious era of their history, their beloved S. B. Rogers. I promptly responded, thanking him for the honor, and accepting the gracious imitation. [See article on the *1925 Centennial Observance* on the following pages.]

It would have been an easy task to have given this hour to a review of Florida's romantic history under four flags; it would have been an inspiring and uplifting task to have devoted my time solely to a survey of your most remarkable progress during the past one hundred years; it would have been a pleasant and stimulating task to have taken as my theme the contribution which Baptists have made to the progress of our Christian Faith, dealing with our distinctive principles and showing how the application of these principles have transformed the world.

Appealing though these three themes were to my mind, I felt that I would not do justice to this occasion, and I would not pay the debt which this generation owes to the pioneers of our faith, whose ministry preceded the war between the states, if I did not devote this full hour to the recounting of



their names, giving a brief record of their faithful ministry, and thus inspire the ministry and the laity of Florida Baptists today to seek to be worthy of their glorious heritage. This historical survey, therefore, covers the period between 1825 and 1860.

Baptists have contributed their full share to the history of the development of the Christian faith, but each Baptist generation has been so negligent in the preservation of that record that few have any acquaintance with the importance of the work which our forefathers performed.

## **Centennial Observance Held in 1925**

In 1925, the Florida Baptist State Convention observed the 100th anniversary since the founding of the first missionary Baptist church in Florida. The benchmark for the Centennial was the organization of the Bethlehem Baptist Church, Jackson County, on March 13, 1825.

To commemorate the occasion messengers to the 1924 State Convention annual meeting approved several recommendations by the State Board of Missions. These included the creation of a Centennial fund to underwrite the starting of new churches and a series of Centennial celebrations across the state during 1925.

The Centennial year celebrations began just as Corresponding Secretary S. B. Rogers' wife Daisy was experiencing health problems. Rogers requested and the State Board agreed to employ J. J. Bullen as a contract worker. Bullen was assigned to assist in the promotion and arrangement of Centennial activities, as well as solicit churches to contribute to the Centennial church starting fund.

Rogers managed to write a 24-page pamphlet titled, "*A Brief History of Florida Baptists, 1825 – 1925, A Century of Service and Progress.*" The booklet measured approximately five inches wide by seven inches deep. In the preface, Rogers dedicated the narrative, "To the sacred memory of our Baptist dead who through sacrifice, hardships, privations, and faith laid the foundations of early Baptist work in Florida."

The pamphlet, which was widely distributed to all Florida Baptist churches, did not attempt to provide an exhaustive and annotated historical narrative. Rather it highlighted the key people, events, agencies and developments in the life and work of Florida Baptists during the past 100 years. Later Rogers reported to the State Convention that, "time forbade the accumulation of the accurate data" to produce a more extensive history book.



The kick-off to the Centennial celebration was held March 12, 1925, in Jackson County at the Campbellton Baptist Church (formerly called the Bethlehem Church). The program featured keynote speaker Dr. R. W. Weaver, president, Mercer University. His message, "Florida During One Hundred Years," was subsequently re-printed in two installments in the *Florida Baptist Witness*.

Other featured speakers included then president of the Florida Baptist State Convention J. L. White of Miami, and Corresponding Secretary Rogers. The Florida W.M.U. produced and presented a pageant called, "Baptist Faith in the Flowery Commonwealth." The dramatization – written by Mrs. C. M. Brittain and Mrs. G. H. Durham – was presented in other cities during the year-long observance.

Recognizing that the average Florida Baptist would not travel to rural Campbellton to participate in the Centennial program, four regional celebration events were planned and held in Jacksonville, Orlando, Miami and Tampa.

Bullen and Rogers worked diligently to promote and raise \$100,000 for the Centennial Memorial church starting fund. Unfortunately, the task proved daunting coming on the heels of two other fund solicitation emphases: the Seventy-five Million Campaign and the Hundred Thousand Club. After the year-long effort only \$12,353 had been contributed by the churches to the Centennial fund. Rogers later told State Convention messengers attending the 1925 annual meeting that, "Many of our brethren evidently did not then, and perhaps do not now, understand the real purpose of the Centennial movement, nor the plan of work."

**ENDNOTES:**

CENTENNIAL OBSERVANCE HELD IN 1925

*Sources:*

*Florida Baptist Annual*, 1924 – 25, pp. 28 – 29, 65 – 66.

*Florida Baptist Annual*, 1925 – 26, pp. 35 – 37, 60.

J.J. Bullen, "Centennial Memorial," *Florida Baptist Witness*, August 13, 1925, p. 29; S. B. Rogers, "Jacksonville Centennial meeting," *Florida Baptist Witness*, March 12, 1925, p. 23.

"Great Centennial Celebration at Campbellton...", *Florida Baptist Witness*, March 19, 1925, pp. 8 – 9,

March 26, 1925, pp. 8 – 9.

S. B. Rogers, *A Brief History of Florida Baptists, 1825 – 1925, A Century of Service and Progress*,

(Jacksonville: Florida Baptist Convention, 1925).

## The Early History of Florida

Time will not permit even a review of the romantic history of Florida from the days of Ponce de Leon, searching for the fountain of eternal youth, to the 1845 admission of this territory as a sovereign state into our national union. Suffice it to say that Florida was, in the beginning, a Spanish colony, dominated religiously by the Roman Catholic Church, and that the waters of the St. Johns were reddened by the blood of our fellow evangelical Christians, the Huguenots, when Menendez massacred hundreds of them because they were heretics. In 1763 Florida became an English colony, and remained loyal to the English crown during the American Revolution, until 1783.

This fair land, first from 1564 to 1763 and again from 1783 to 1821, a period of more than one-third of a millennium, was a colony of Spain. It also served as a field of missionary endeavor for the Roman Catholics. The prime purpose of the Spaniard in coming to the coast of the Americas was the quest for gold, and the record he left in the realm of religion is the most horrible and the most disgraceful within the confines of the United States.

## Baptist Pioneers

The brief history of Florida Baptists [*"A Brief History of Florida Baptists, 1825 – 1925, A Century of Service and Progress."*] written by Dr. S. B. Rogers, gives a full account of the founding of the Church of Christ at Bethlehem, now Campbellton Baptist Church, on March 12, 1825, a date [*that incorrectly was believed to be*] the beginning of our organized Baptist life in this state. [*See Editor's Note at the end of this article.*]



I am able to give only the names of those who left some record in our Georgia Baptist life before coming to you. It is highly probable that this furnishes only a part of the list of Georgia Baptist ministers who laid the foundation of our

work in Florida. Those who labored in Florida during the twenty years preceding the Civil War: Herman Mercer, Joshua Mercer, Stephen Rowe, W. W. Maund, James McDonald, D. G. Daniel, Thomas Muse, J. D. Taylor, John H. Tucker, A. B. Campbell, Kinsey Chambers, Lewis Price, G. D. Campbell, and Dr. J. S. Baker.

Permit me to say that my study of Florida Baptist history leads me to the conviction that in constructive leadership during the past century four men merit the highest honor: Joshua Mercer, James McDonald, W. N. Chaudoin, and S. B. Rogers. In the interest of time, I will limit my discussion to the work of Joshua Mercer, David P. Everett, Hermon Mercer, James McDonald and their faithful associates.

### **The Florida Baptist Association**

In the *Christian Index* of February 3, 1843, there appears a letter signed by Thomas Muse, Secretary Pro-Tem, which indicates that in the Ochlocknee Baptist Association, whose territory included Florida and part of Georgia, anti-missionary sentiments had completely gained in ascendancy. The following is an extract from this letter:

**Several of the  
churches... united in  
the determination to  
form a new  
association**

“Dear Brother: In consequence of a certain article (the 19<sup>th</sup>) introduced into the Decorum of the Ochlocknee Association, several of the churches that belong to this Association withdrew, as

that article non-fellowshipped all the benevolent institutions of the day. . .Several of the churches in this section have held meetings, and united in the determination to form a new association, and for this purpose have appointed Thursday, the second of March, 1843, to meet at Indian Springs, Leon County, Florida, and it is the wish of the churches that we invite the aid of our brethren in the ministry in

Georgia that they will come down to our help and constitute us into an associated body.”

The Article 19 of the Ochlocknee Association, which led to the withdrawal of the Missionary Baptist churches that formed the Florida Association, is of interest because it sets forth the issue which led to the establishment of our Missionary Baptist churches in Florida. The article stated:

“It is the duty of this Association to provide for the general union of the churches, and therefore will not fellowship any church or churches that support any modern missionary, Bible, tract, or Sunday School Union, Societies or Theological schools, either in themselves or in any other person or persons, or any other society that now is or may hereafter be constituted under a pretense of circulating the Gospel of Christ. Nor will we correspond with any Association that support and fellowship any of the above-named societies.”

Later in the year, December 1, 1843, in a letter to the *Christian Index*, the correspondent who signs his name “A Florida Missionary,” whose name I believe to have been John Tucker, who went to Florida from Thomaston, Ga., gives a further account of the work of grace following the organization of the Florida Association. He reports that there were only seven ministers holding to missionary views then laboring within the bounds of this association, so vast in its territory.

### **The Ministry of Joshua Mercer**

Joshua Mercer became the leader among the Baptist pioneers in Florida, and we are gathered here today to commemorate the faithful and devoted service of him and his colleagues of nearly a century ago. Joshua Mercer remained a missionary of the Georgia Baptist Convention until 1843, when the Executive Committee reported as follows:



“Brother Joshua Mercer labored about five months in the most destitute parts of Southwest Georgia and in Florida, and closed his labor for the Convention about the last of July.”

In 1854 Florida was visited by a Baptist brother who sent to *The Southwestern Baptist [Alabama's state Baptist newspaper at the time]* some interesting facts concerning our Baptist cause in Florida. The following are extracts from his article:

“The most interesting fact in the history of this section is that pertaining to the interests of the Baptist denomination. Prior to thirteen years past (1841), the Baptist cause existed in no regularly organized form. Several missionaries had preached before that time, among them Brother T. J. Bowen, our present missionary to Africa. One church, I believe the Campbellton Church, had been constituted, but for the want of regular preaching, it had become pretty much disbanded. About this time Elder Joshua Mercer came to Florida and commenced his labors, and to his indefatigable efforts we must attribute in a great measure the prosperity of our denomination.

“Brother Joshua Mercer is a man of a powerful and vigorous intellect, though he did not enjoy all the advantages of a finished education. His eloquence is of a superior order, and when he pours forth his meek and burning thoughts, clad in forcible language, one feels as though he was carried along on the bosom of a rapid but gentle stream. We had the pleasure of participating in several of Brother Mercer's meetings. I heard him preach on one occasion and was reminded very forcibly of the distinguished Andre Broaddus, whom I heard in my native state.”

Brother Joshua Mercer was a brother of the renowned Jesse Mercer, who labored very successfully for several years as a missionary in Georgia, under the direction of the State

Convention. He was also a soldier in the Indian War, and fought bravely in the Battle of Calabee, where he, with five others out of seven who constituted a mess, received a severe wound in the thickest of the fight. For twenty-five years he has been proclaiming the truths of the Gospel, and according to the testimony of his works as well as of his brethren, “he has used faithfully the sword of the spirit in fighting the battles of His Master.” He was chiefly instrumental in forming the West Florida Association, and has been its moderator at every meeting “except one or two he was not present.”

In 1872 “Father Mercer,” as he was lovingly called in Florida, passed away. Joshua Mercer was born June 10, 1788. He entered into his final rest January 5, 1869, aged 80 years, 6 months, 25 days.

**For twenty-five years  
he has been  
proclaiming the  
truths of the Gospel**

### **The Ministry of David P. Everett**

Elder D. P. Everett is another Baptist to whom the denomination owes much. Brother Everett had been preaching nearly ten years, and during that time had contributed as much perhaps as anyone to the building up of the Baptist cause. He has literally gone like Apostle Paul among the gentiles and preached in the highways and hedges. His time, his talents, his health, and nearly all of his yearly income has been given as his sacrifice to his God, and in such an unostentatious way that none but those who know him well can testify to his actual merits. Brother Everett resided at Orange Hill, Washington County. In a printed report on the conditions of the Baptist movement within Florida, Everett said,

“There are three associations in this state; one in each division—East, Middle, and West, and I suppose all are in a tolerably prosperous condition, considering their age and the general sparseness of the

population. No State General Association has been formed yet, but I learned that an effort would be made to organize such a body this fall. There are two missionaries within the bounds of this association but their labors are not confined altogether to it. Brother R. Webb labors in Jackson County and in a portion of Alabama's Henry and perhaps Dale also. Brother C. Thornton of Russell, Alabama, is in Holmes and Walton counties, Florida, and also in a portion of Dale and Coffee counties, Alabama. Those brethren are both active and intelligent and seem to have their hearts fully engaged in the missionary cause.

"The West Florida Association consists of nineteen churches, with an average of 566 members. Eleven of the churches report additions by baptism, 87, and by letter, 60. The contributions for various purposes compared favorably with the amounts furnished by other similar bodies."

### **The Ministry of Hermon Mercer**

Reverend Hermon Mercer, born in 1764, was the sixth child of Reverend Silas Mercer, Jesse Mercer being the oldest and Joshua Mercer the youngest. Writing from Orange Hill, Florida in 1854, Rev. Hermon Mercer, then greatly afflicted and advanced in years, gives the following account regarding the Baptist ministers in Florida. He said:

"There are but few Baptist ministers, and they generally poor, and live in the West Florida Association. Beginning on the east and near the great Apalachee River, there is a brother, Lundy Hansford, a young man of some promise, but too poor to extend his visit far from home. There is Brother Stephen Rowe, lately moved on this side of the river, a very good, but not great minister of the Gospel. There is Brother Minchen, lately ordained, and Brother Westmoreland, a fine minister, now settled at Marianna, where there was one much wanted.

“Then there is at this lovely hill of giants and good health, my worthy brother, David Porter Everett, a man of good circumstances and standing, of great promise in former days, but, alas, his lungs have failed him in his youth, and his is almost laid by until his heavenly Father recruits his lungs, for he has too much energy for his strength.

“Here, too, we have the learned Joseph Wombwell, lately from the far west, but he is so much engaged in the [*Baptist*] high school [*located in*] Orange Hill, justly celebrated for good health and now for a good education so far at least as will prepare for a collegiate course, that he does but little preaching.

“Then, there is my dear brother, Joshua Mercer. My brother, according to the flesh, who is justly esteemed a great and good minister of the Gospel, and is, and ever has been the moderator of the West Florida Association; and last and not least, myself, both of us sons of the departed Silas Mercer, and brothers of the well-known Jesse Mercer, so well-remembered by my brethren throughout all Georgia and the adjoining states.

“Besides these, I do not know of any other ordained minister of our order, except some Anties [*anti-missionary*], who belong exclusively to my Lord’s third lot, to whom He gave but one talent, for He knew full well that they would not use that portion. Such are the hard-shells in West Florida, and in this wide field not one revival at any church is spoken of, from the Apalachee to the Chattahoochee Bay, nearly 100 miles long and 60 wide.”



## **James McDonald founded Florida's First Baptist Newspaper**

Itinerant preacher James McDonald was born in Limerick, Ireland, in 1798. He was educated for the priesthood. When

**he covenanted with  
God to make the  
Bible the man of his  
counsel**

twenty years of age he migrated to America. After settling in Burke County, Georgia, a strong desire to read the scriptures took possession of his soul. This he had been trained to regard as a

mortal sin. The story of the struggles of his soul and his wanderings into other lands is one of the most interesting spiritual biographies I have ever read. While in a Cuban prison, he covenanted with God to make the Bible the man of his counsel, and to walk in the ways of God's revealed truth. He labored in lower Georgia and Florida from 1834 to 1855. He founded the first Baptist church in Jacksonville in 1838. He led in the organization of the Alachua Baptist Association in 1847 and became its first moderator.

He founded in 1848 the first Baptist paper which he named the *Baptist Telegraph and Florida Emigrant*, published in the town of Jacksonville. In his advertisement of the paper, he says:

"The paper will advocate the faith and practice of the Baptist denomination in the United States, and shall be particularly devoted to the interests of the southern and southwestern states. The secular and religious improvement of the people of Florida it shall consider as its paramount obligation. To reprove vice and promote virtue, to elevate the mind to the worship of the true God, and to improve the worldly conditions of mankind will be its leading features."

I regret to report that a few years later, when this laudable enterprise failed, the editor of the *Christian Index* wrote an editorial in which apparently there was no sorrow over the

decease of the paper. Through it there ran a smugness of spirit which indicated that the editor of the *Christian Index* thought it would have been much better had the Florida Baptists chosen the *Index* as its organ and had furnished a long list of subscribers to our Georgia Baptist periodical.

I am inserting for the benefit of our Baptist editors today, Brother McDonald's final message in the last issue that concluded, "that editors are not angels, neither are they marble pillars. Pay and patronize, pardon and pray for them, and the Lord will measure to you as you have been measured, for 'With what measure ye meet, it shall be measured again.'"

### **The Ministry of James McDonald**

The Rev. James McDonald, the occasion being his removal in 1853 from Florida to Atlanta, Georgia, wrote in the *Christian Index*, his recollections of his ministry in Florida, which is summarized:

"In 1835 when our first sermon was preached in East Florida, we found about 60 whites and blacks in three churches, in three churches from 20 to 80 miles distant from each other. Sinners were exceedingly wicked. Ignorance of the Baptists and the Bible was matchless.



"The Indian War was in progress, and continued until '43. The righteous and the wicked, the aged and the young were murdered. It seemed as though the phials of Divine wrath, were unleashed and emptied on the people of Florida. In the midst of all this vengeance, and their merited tribulations, the Gospel was preached to wit the most glorious effect. 'I will sing of mercy and judgement,' was the language of David. Such was the sentiment of the converted in Florida. They prayed near the graves of their wives and

children; they rejoiced over the sepulchers of those whom they lamented. Never were the promises of God better verified. For five years and six months, the revival of grace went on, gathering celebrity and affliction, and reaping reward from the most hateful persecutions. Amidst savage yells and the cries of the wounded and dying, were heard the songs of the redeemed.”

James McDonald left a lasting impression upon our Baptist life in this state.

### **West Florida Association Organized**

Our work progressed so rapidly in West Florida, under the leadership of Joshua Mercer, Stephen Rowe, D. P. Everett, and other men of lesser note, that on November 13, 1847, the West Florida Association was organized at the Bethlehem Church, now Campbellton. Rev. E. Vining acted as its secretary. Rev. Joshua Mercer was elected moderator, and D. P. Everett, who was ordained to the ministry during its session, was selected as clerk.



Twelve churches, with a membership of 301, participated in the organization. Eight ministers participated, who reported during the preceding year 109 baptisms. Rev. D. P. Everett (who came to Florida in 1825) and R. L. Tippins were appointed agents to explain the nature of missionary operations to all the churches within the bounds of the association, and to collect funds to be placed in the hands of the Executive Committee.

It is an interesting fact that when the West Florida Association was organized, the brethren used the adopted statement of the Georgia Baptist Association, as their statement of faith.

Brother Hermon Mercer, then residing in Ochuse, Florida, reported a successful revival in the church there which would have continued longer, but Brother Stephen Rowe had to go over into Gadsden County, where he was teaching school, and Brother Hermon could not carry on the meeting by himself. He said: "I am naught but a poor old cripple, and was broke down already, and there were none others to help."

Every Baptist preacher during this period who went from Georgia to Florida became at once a booster for the section in which he was located. Rev. Kinsey Chambers in 1854, writing from East Florida regarding his work at Alligator, Fort Clarke, and other country churches, closes his letter by stating, "If we had more of the right sort of ministers, we would soon have large churches and growing institutions of learning."

**"If we had more of  
the right sort of  
ministers..."**

### **State Convention Organized**

The Florida Baptist State Convention was organized on November 20, 1854 in the parlor of Rev. R. J. Mays, in Madison County, who was elected President of the State Convention. Rev. D. G. Daniel, who was one of the foremost missionaries in our Georgia Baptist history was named Secretary of the Convention. The convention met in 1855 at the Concord Church (Madison); 1856 in the Greenwood Church; and the 1857 meeting was held at the First Baptist Church, Thomason, Georgia. Unfortunately, the Civil War disrupted meetings of churches, associations and the state convention, as well as slowed the progress of Kingdom work in the state.

At the close of the Civil War, the white Baptists had five associations: West Florida, Florida, Santa Fe River, Alachua, and South Florida. The Negroes had one association. The

total number of white Baptists was estimated at 5000 and the negro Baptist nearly the same. There were 120 white churches in the state with not over 40 white pastors altogether. During this period there was a warm discussion as to the desirability of accepting the aid of the American Baptist Home Mission Society. The Board of Domestic Missions of the Southern Baptist Convention was seeking also to assist in missionary work, but the funds coming into this Board did not provide a sufficient amount to aid Florida to the degree they needed.

During this period, between 1854 and 1880, the Rev. W. N. Chaudoin had been visiting the state regularly as District Secretary for Georgia, Alabama, and Florida, appointed by the Board of Domestic Missions of the Southern Baptist Convention. This noble man, born in Tennessee, came to Georgia in 1857, serving for a while as Principal of the Academy for the Blind in Macon. Later, he was pastor of several churches in southwestern Georgia. He was known and trusted by the Florida Baptist brethren. In 1880 he served as President of the Florida Baptist State Convention, and was elected at the session as the corresponding secretary of the State Board of Missions.



The history of Florida Baptists from this time is a record of steady progress, marked by the development of strong churches, well organized association, and ever-enlarging constituency. Additionally, the establishment of a splendid institution of higher education, Stetson University, in 1887; the issuing of an able publication, *The Florida Baptist Witness* beginning in 1884, never so excellent in content and appearance as today; and the promotion of a strong missionary policy under the leadership of the far-seeing Baptist statesman, S. B. Rogers.

Florida Baptists, I salute you. Your heritage is most inspiring; your future was never so promising. Florida Baptists, there comes from the headquarters of triumphant hosts that make up the church militant, the call of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, Florida Baptists, “Go Forward.”

---

## ENDNOTES

**[Editor’s Note:** *In 1925 the Florida Baptist State Convention celebrated the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of what was believed at the time to be the first Baptist church organized in Florida. Although, we now know that the actual first Baptist church organized was the Pigeon Creek Baptist Church in Nassau County, established January 7, 1821. However, as a part of the centennial observance a special service was held at the First Baptist Church of Campbellton, Jackson County – established March 13, 1825 – which holds the distinction of being the oldest Missionary Baptist church in Florida that continues to function into the present day. The preceding excerpts are taken from the “Florida Baptist Centennial Address, 1825 – 1925,” delivered by Dr. Rufus W. Weaver (b. 1870; d. 1947), then president of Georgia Baptists’ Mercer University. His message, without source footnotes, provided an overview of the historical development of the first one hundred years of the Baptist movement in South Georgia and Florida in the early nineteenth century. The original message was nearly 10,000 words in length and has been edited to a “reader’s digest” version to fit the available space in this issue of the Journal.*

## **Our Mission:**

---



## **Serving Churches**

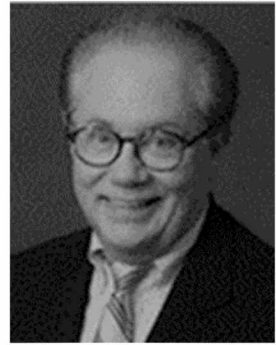
---

In fulfilment of our Mission to research, preserve and promote the Legacy of Florida Baptists, the Society assists leadership of Florida Baptist churches and associations in a variety of ways:

- ◆ the research of local church and association histories;
- ◆ the research of pastoral leader biography;
- ◆ provide resources for publishing a history; and
- ◆ encourage and assist churches and associations to celebrate their respective heritage and anniversaries.

# South Carolina's Rebellious Slaves Became Florida's First Anabaptists

by Donald S. Hepburn  
Managing Director  
Florida Baptist Historical Society



Buried in a two-volume compendium diary written by a German medical doctor and naturalist who was traveling through the area outside St. Augustine, Florida, in 1784, recorded the following eyewitness account: *“Not far off an association of negroes have a cabin, in which one of their own countrymen, who has set himself up to be their teacher, holds services. They are of the sect of the Anabaptists.”*<sup>1</sup>

This eyewitness account, originally published in 1788, provides a record of the first Baptist meetings in the Florida Territory. However, we quickly note that this observation is but a marker, not a direct linkage, to the Missionary Baptist movement that began to take hold in the Florida Territory nearly sixty years later. However, the documented account does raise questions: by whom and how this account came to be recorded; how did these African-descendants come to be in St. Augustine; and how is it these people could practice their Baptist faith in a territory where the Spanish government demanded allegiance to the Catholic faith. By means of this article, these and other questions will be addressed.

## The Eyewitness Record

The aforementioned account was recorded by Johann David Schoepf (b. 1752; d. 1800), a German physician and naturalist, who voluntarily requested to accompany a regiment of Hessian troops who were sent to the American colonies to assist the English Crown in the American





REDEEMED RECAPTIVE OUT OF SLAVERY—Engraved by A. B. WOOD—(See Page 94.)

Revolution. For six years (1777 – 1783), Schoepf served as the chief surgeon and doctor to the German garrison which traveled to New York, Long Island, and Philadelphia. According to a translator of Schoepf's book, "After peace was declared, he traveled for two years throughout the eastern and southeastern United States."<sup>2</sup>

During his southern travels, Schoepf [pictured] kept a diary on the animals, botany, geology, and meteorology he observed in the various states abutting the Atlantic Ocean coast, as well as the ethnology of the people he encountered.



Between February-March, 1784, he sailed from Charleston, S.C. to St. Augustine enroute to the West Indies. This trip was on the eve of the 1784 transfer of control of the Florida Territory from England to the second ruling period of Spain as a result of the Treaty of Versailles.<sup>3</sup> However this transfer of power took over a year to

complete given that the treaty specified that the Spanish governor was to assume certain authorities upon his arrival by June, 1784. However, the departure of the former English governor was not scheduled to be completed until November 1785, to ensure protection of English citizens and their rights during their exodus.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, given the civil unrest during this transition of power, Johann Schoepf decided, “to confine his visit to St. Augustine in March 1784 as the outlying area was reported unsafe for travel.”<sup>5</sup>

His account included the weather, tide and harbor conditions along the northeast Florida coast as his ship approached St. Augustine. Once landed, he described the Spanish Catholic cathedral that was being used as the English army’s garrison. From his exploration of the town, he described the architecture and the various foreign nationals living and working within the walled settlement. While exploring Schoepf came upon the Negroes’ congregation and its leader, from whom he apparently was able to learn that the group were Anabaptists.<sup>6</sup> No further explanation was made of the group, as he moved on to record other people groups and landscape.

**Anabaptists, who  
practiced  
regenerate  
believer’s baptism,  
evolved from the  
Free Church**

It is worth noting that Schoepf’s description of the group as being “Anabaptist” may well have been a polemic characterization. Needless to say, Schoepf’s training was not in theology, but being from Germany he may have been aware of the European Protestant Reformation. Out

of that sixteenth century upheaval developed the Reformed Church traditions known as Lutherans, Presbyterians and the Anglican, but not the Anabaptists. In fact, in the sixteenth century the Anabaptists, who practiced regenerate believer’s baptism, evolved from the Free Church movement that was instituted in Zurich in 1525.<sup>7</sup> While other Reformed

Church traditions conducted baptism by means of pouring water on the head of the kneeling believer, Anabaptists emphasized the scriptural model of a person being immersed completely in water.<sup>8</sup> As a consequence, it was the African-descendant's practice of baptism by immersion that may have caused Schoepf to identify the group as Anabaptists. Or possibly, the Anabaptist leader simply identified his group as such. The faith practices of Anabaptists were simply based upon scriptures and not human creedal declarations. "The primacy of the scriptures in Anabaptist life discouraged the formulation of creeds that would tend to take precedence over the Bible,"<sup>9</sup> an Anabaptist historian wrote.

Another scholar noted that the Negro teacher-preacher, "had to be one of the first of his kind in North America. Just before the Revolution, Baptists had made numerous converts among Southerners, black and white alike. Negro churches at Savannah, Georgia, Silver Bluff, South Carolina, and at Williamsburg, Virginia, were all founded in the mid-1770s."<sup>10</sup> All of these were led by African-descendant pastors who had been converted and partially trained by Anglo missionaries who were ministering in the Carolina and Georgia colonies prior to the Revolutionary War.

### **Bringing Christianity to the Carolinas' Slave Community**

Anabaptists, General Baptists, Particular Baptists, Scottish Presbyterians and Quakers, among others, were among the dissenters who left England in search of finding religious freedom of thought and practice in the English colonies of America. And in keeping with their respective understanding of the scriptural mandate, some were committed to sharing the gospel with the sinners and natives they found in the colonies.

In the Carolinas, after 1670, religious dissenters, “could find peace in Carolina, where, in matters of religion, toleration was the attitude of the provincial government toward all sects (except Roman Catholic) dissenting from the Anglican Church.”<sup>11</sup> However, in 1704 the South Carolina Common House of Assembly passed the Church Act, “that proclaimed the Church of England as ‘settled and established’ in the colony.” Additionally, the law created six Anglican parishes and imposed a tax to provide funds for Anglican ministers’ salaries, construction of parish rectors, acquisition of land and the construction of other needed facilities.<sup>12</sup> This meant that all residents – Anglican and non-Anglican – were to bear this financial burden of a singular faith group.

**the Church of  
England  
(Anglican) sent  
missionary  
personnel to  
Carolina**

Partly as a result of this special treatment, the Church of England (Anglican) sent missionary personnel to Carolina under the banner of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (referred to herein as the S.P.G.). The founding purpose of the Society, “was initially organized for the benefit of white individuals, [yet] launched a major program to Christianize slaves in response to the explosive growth of the peculiar institution in colonial British America.”<sup>13</sup>

“The correspondence of the S.P.G. ministers is a rich and underutilized resource for the history of the early colony,” explains Peter Wood in a history on the life and work of Negro slaves in South Carolina in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.<sup>14</sup> And although the focus of their reports on their respective ministries sent to their presiding bishop in London, that regular correspondence surprisingly provides an on-going report on the efforts by other religious groups, particularly Baptists and Anabaptists.

One of their earliest S.P.G. missionaries to arrive in the Carolinas, Rev. Samuel Thomas, reported in 1702, that he found, “many Anabaptists on the Eastern Branch of the Cooper” River. Three years later, Thomas wrote, “there were about thirty Anabaptist families” in that same area. “He found many Anabaptists also on the Ashley and Stono” rivers near Charleston.<sup>15</sup> In the Purrysburgh settlement (founded in 1732 as a Swiss Anabaptist colony), Anglican missionary Oliver Hart, in his diary recorded in 1769 his assessment of the spiritual status of the settlers by noting, “Some have but little religion, some none at all, the most part are what is called Anabaptists.”<sup>16</sup> And yet another S.P. G. missionary serving in the Pee Dee River basin reported encountering, “an ignorant set of Anabaptists” in the Cheraws settlement, who, in 1745, were, “so possessed of the spirit of enthusiasm that there are about as many ignorant preachers as there were in Oliver’s Camp.”<sup>17</sup> These were but just a sampling of the multiple reports sent to their London supervising bishop. These third-party reports by the Anglicans provide evidence of the widespread presence of and the apparent effective ministry of the Anabaptists during the 1700s, particularly in the larger populated settlements near plantations.

Decades earlier, the noted Baptist minister William Screven in 1682 or 1683, sent and subsequently followed his Baptist followers from Kittery, Maine, to settle in Charleston, where he established the First Baptist Church.<sup>18</sup> “The Charleston Church adopted the London or Philadelphia Confession of Faith . . . the adoption of these decidedly Calvinistic articles prove that the majority of the Charleston group were Particular Baptists,”<sup>19</sup> Townsend declared in her history on South Carolina Baptists. But by 1699 these Baptists were made the object of derision being “vulgarly called Anabaptists,”<sup>20</sup> in part due to their practice of baptism by immersion.

Successive pastors who followed Screven, including a Rev. Thomas Simmons who, beginning in 1725, began establishing extension mission churches, “near the Ashley

River, on Edisto Island, and near the Stono [River] sixteen miles from Charleston.”<sup>21</sup> The selection of these settlements was likely based on the presence of sufficient numbers of people and plantations that offered prospective church members and new converts to the Christian gospel, whether Anglo or African-descendant.

Those S.P.G. records demonstrate that Particular Baptists, General Baptists and Anabaptists were present in and around Charleston – the largest coastal city in the colony. Although, to the average person, these several varieties of “Baptist” groups likely were considered one and the same. Nonetheless, the “proportion of Anabaptists to the whole [Carolina] population of whites in 1710 was said to be one in ten.” Within a few years another S.P.G. missionary reported to his bishop that, “next to the Presbyterians, the Anabaptists are most numerous.”<sup>22</sup> The success to their growth was their simple Biblical message that attracted planter and laborer alike.

“The undergirding motive of life for the Anabaptists was

**Anabaptist...  
were not shy  
about fulfilling  
their biblical  
mandate.**

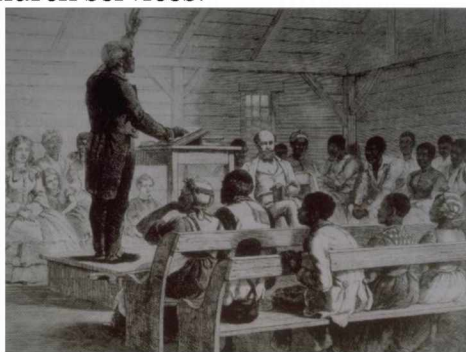
love. It dictated their view of Christian discipleship, the basis of fellowship in the church, and the missionary vision,”<sup>23</sup> stresses Anabaptist Historian William Estep. He further stressed, “The Anabaptists took the Great Commission seriously.”<sup>24</sup>

Although the Anabaptist commitment to scripture may have caused them to flee to the American colonies in search of religious freedom, they were not shy about fulfilling their biblical mandate. It is reasonable to conclude that the leadership of several Anabaptists’ settlements viewed their God-mandated responsibility to share the gospel with both the Anglo plantation owners and their African-descendant indentured servants as well.

Townsend's history of Baptist churches in South Carolina noted that most Christian-oriented churches of the period, "had negro members." She explained that,

"the slave code of South Carolina, though stringent, early provided that slaves should not be made to do any but necessary work on Sunday, and a later law advised instructing them in the principles of Christianity and having them baptized with the distinct understanding that becoming Christians did not make them free. . . The chief recourse, then, of those masters and ministers who truly desired the conversion of the blacks to Christianity and their continuance in its principles lay in having them attend or become members of the meetings of the whites. The churches provided galleries or set aside a certain portion of the buildings for the slaves, and many took advantage of the opportunity thus afforded them."<sup>25</sup>

The effectiveness of the ministry to the slave population was noted by one Baptist minister who wrote in an article carried in a news magazine of the period, saying, "I am very fond of teaching them." He went on to described his experience in the church services:



"They sing delightfully; and those who are truly religious, in general far exceed the whites in love to each other, and in most other duties. Many of them can read, and are remarkably fond

of hymns. We have several in our church who go to the plantations, and preach to their own color on Lord's-day evenings, and at other times when we have no services in the meeting house."<sup>26</sup>

Complementing the report from South Carolina on the pastoral leadership of some slaves, a similar report occurred in neighboring Georgia. Baptist missionaries who were involved in converting slaves to Christianity during the colonial period tell of one man who became a preacher among slaves. The young slave, George Liele (ca. 1750 – 1828) [pictured] was converted and baptized in 1774 by Baptist minister Matthew Moore.

“Liele was later ordained as a minister and because of his religious work among the slaves, is acknowledged to be the first black Baptist missionary in Georgia. He had great oratorical skill and preached to slaves on the rice and indigo plantations along the Savannah River.”<sup>27</sup>



While the previous two descriptions were only representative examples, they do provide credence to the possibilities that there were African-descendant slaves who learned scripture and a few may have had the ability to effectively preach and perform other pastoral duties such as baptisms, particularly in light of the later discovery of the Negro Anabaptists in St. Augustine.

Given the various examples of evangelization among the slave population, it should be noted that such efforts were not without challenges. “During the early eighteenth century, Anglican missionaries attempting to bring Christianity to slaves in the Southern colonies often found themselves butting up against not only uncooperative masters, but also resistant slaves,” explains a narrative on religion and the slave experience. Kimberly Sambol-Tosco went on to comment that, “An unquestionable obstacle to the acceptance of Christianity among slaves was their desire to continue to adhere as much as possible to the religious beliefs and rituals of their African ancestors.”<sup>28</sup>



The various reports of S.P.G. missionaries could be considered a commentary on the experience of all the gospel-proclaiming groups. “While various Negroes and Indians

**baptism  
contained no  
implication of  
earthly freedom**

expressed interest in the activities of the S.P.G., the attitudes of their white owners were problematic at best,” observed Peter Wood. “The ministers assured slaves and owners alike that baptism contained no implication of

earthly freedom, and they went out of their way to accommodate the practical concerns of parishioners short on labor.”<sup>29</sup> Missionary Francis Le Jau, who served in the Carolina’s Goose Creek area, wrote that he, “took considerable pains to see that any slaves he baptized maintained the most abject and servile humility.” He continued by noting that such emphasis was necessary because the slave owners contended the teaching of scripture and doctrine resulted in slaves with, “knowledge [that] makes them worse.”<sup>30</sup>

**African-descendant Slaves Found  
Freedom in St. Augustine**

The first recorded arrival of runaway slaves seeking freedom in the Florida Territory from Charleston, S.C. occurred in 1687 (during the first Spanish period), “after a dramatic escape by canoe, eight men, two women and a nursing child appeared in Florida. The fugitive slaves requested religious sanctuary in St. Augustine, and, despite an early ambiguity about their legal condition . . . [they] were sheltered in St. Augustine, instructed and baptized in the Catholic faith. . . .”<sup>31</sup> It took the Spanish government six years to make a final decision on a policy toward runaway slaves who entered the Territory. In 1693 Charles II granted runaway slaves, both men and women, “freedom on the basis of religious conversion . . . ,”<sup>32</sup> meaning acceptance of the Catholic faith. It was forty years before a broader, more defining, proclamation of freedom for runaway slaves was issued.

Based upon her extensive research at Fort Mose [pictured], Historian Jane Landers reports, during the next five decades more fugitives from Carolina flowed into St. Augustine, and



in 1738 the Spanish governor established the freemen and women in the town of Gracia Real de Santa Teresa de Mose, about two miles north of St.

Augustine.”<sup>33</sup> This newly formed settlement, “where men of color were free to carry arms,”<sup>34</sup> thrived and grew despite

occasional British naval attacks on St. Augustine. “While conditions at Mose were rugged, the homesteaders were at least free to farm their own lands, build their own homes, and live them with their families.” A 1759 census recorded 52 adults and 15 children in this racially diverse and cohesive community.<sup>35</sup>

### **The Stage was Set for the Stono Rebellion**

Against the backdrop of the international power struggle between England and Spain, it was no coincidence that Spain sought ways to irritate the English. “Late in 1733 the Spanish king issued a royal decree granting liberty to Negro fugitives reaching St. Augustine from the English colonies.”<sup>36</sup>

One scholar affirms, “There is some evidence that the Spanish authorities in the colony were actively inciting slave unrest,”<sup>37</sup> and perhaps assisting some slaves in their escape to Florida.

**Spain sought  
ways to irritate  
the English**

There was a growing awareness in South Carolina (which had become a separate Crown colony in 1720), particularly among the slave communities, of the developing situation and opportunities for freedom in the Florida Territory. As a result, “every rumor about possible freedom seemed to reach

the remotest slave cabin,” observed Historian Sally Hadden.<sup>38</sup> Needless to say, it is difficult to identify exactly which fugitive slaves between 1733 and 1739 may have brought their Anabaptist faith practice to establish a brush arbor. However, the Stono rebellion was the largest and likely last single effort by runaway slaves to achieve freedom – religious and otherwise – in the protected Spanish territory.

There were several factors that were contributing to a growing restlessness and resentment by slaves which already had plenty of reasons to be angry. The growing number of imported slaves was setting the stage for a potential challenge to maintaining a planter-dominated way of life. “Blacks outnumbered whites in South Carolina by the early eighteenth century, that was widely understood and consistently reported,” Historian Donald Wax explained. He further noted, “White Carolinians were faced with a dilemma in that additional African immigrants contributed to the minority status of Whites, yet the continued prosperity of the colony seemed to hinge on African laborers.”<sup>39</sup> As a consequence, “White Carolinians saw themselves as more and more vulnerable to attack and acts of resistance by slaves. Acts perpetrated by individuals, such as murder, poisoning, and arson, were ominous enough, but they paled before organized group responses to slavery. Planned uprisings were discovered in 1714 and 1720.”<sup>40</sup> The *South Carolina Gazette* – available in Charleston and selected settlements – published regular reports of slave rebellions in the Caribbean islands, acts of Negro of theft and murder as well as slave-initiated mutinies aboard English ships, which combined stoked feelings of uneasiness and fear among the Anglo population.<sup>41</sup>

As early as 1724, the South Carolina Common House Assembly attempted to restrict the importations of slaves by approving a Negro duty law which levied higher duties on each slave brought into the colony. It was anticipated the tax would raise government revenue as well as reduce the

number of Negroes entering the colony. "This same motive operated when later duty statutes were passed, even though the flow of incoming slaves was not." Records reveal that between 1706 and 1739, a total 4,843 slave ships had delivered 32,233 slaves through the port of Charleston.<sup>42</sup> This resulted, by 1740, with an estimated free White population of 20,000 versus 39,155 indentured servants.<sup>43</sup> That growth in the slave population was necessitated by the increased need for field hands to plant and harvest rice, which surpassed South Carolina's mixed farming and cattle raising, as a lucrative and exportable cash crop.

With that growing imbalance in the population ratio, a sense of insecurity was ever present in the minds of most free citizens. Unfortunately, "exercising constant supervision of slaves" was not a viable option, inasmuch as, "Whites could not readily observe activities within the slave quarters or monitor the social intercourse that was a part of plantation life." As a result, the Whites sought to encourage and enlist selected slaves to serve as informers. It was believed that, "A divided black community was a goal worth pursuing."<sup>44</sup> This practice only contributed to the growing anger among the slave population.

Space in this article does not permit a full discussion of the legislated efforts by the Common House Assembly, between 1720 and 1740, to restrict the social standing and the activities in which slaves could be engaged during times other than their assigned duties. These restrictions, according to Wood, ranged from: prohibition in the use of firearms (for hunting); a defined dress code that required the use of "materials suitable for slave clothing;" rationing of food; prohibitions against slaves working in skilled trades; and the various prohibitions of being involved in entertainment activities, except Sunday church activities.<sup>45</sup> With each new restriction the average slave could only bow in silence and conform under threat of penalties.

“The tipping point – the big change – comes when enough little changes have occurred to tip the balance, and trigger a big change,” explained Peter Hoffer.<sup>46</sup> For one group of slaves, that tipping point came on Sunday, September 9, 1739, when they assembled near the western branch of the Stono River, within twenty miles of Charleston, and proceeded to run for freedom and sanctuary in Spanish-controlled Florida.

“After acquiring other weapons and fortifying themselves with liquor, about sixty slaves marched toward St. Augustine, Florida,” summarized Donald Wax. “As they proceeded along the main road leading south, the slaves broke into several houses killing the inhabitants, as a later report put it, in a ‘most cruel and barbarous manner.’” Through the night and into the early morning of the next day, from the Stono River the group travelled about 15 miles along the Pon Pon Road (now US 17) which is the road from Georgia to St. Augustine. Along the way they quickly recruited additional slave rebels which increased their number to about one hundred. Historian Wax further explained, “Taken with their initial successes, their spirits buoyed by drink, the slaves had paused and begun singing and dancing.”<sup>47</sup> Another report indicated that, “By about four in the afternoon a contingent of armed and mounted planters, variously numbered from twenty to one hundred, moved in upon the rebels.”<sup>48</sup> While about 40 slaves were captured or killed, the remaining group of rebelling slaves managed to escape and likely made their way to Florida.

The Stono slave rebellion produced a significant increase in South Carolina’s legal restraints upon the slave community with the passage of 1740 Negro Act. “This elaborate statute which would serve as the core of South Carolina’s slave code for more than a century to come” was built upon prior legislation to restrict the activities of slaves. The legislation has been assailed as having done, more than any one act “to curtail *de facto* personal liberties, which slaves had been able to cling to against formidable odds during the first three

generations of settlement. Freedom of movement and freedom of assembly, freedom to raise food, to earn money, to learn to read English – none of these rights had ever been assured to Negroes and most had already been legislated against, but always open conditions of life in a young and struggling colony had kept the vestiges of liberties alive.”<sup>49</sup>

In the on-going struggle between the two international powers, resulted in additional armed conflict beginning in 1740. “Britain declared war on Spain in what became known as the War of Jenkins’ Ear.” Although the “war grew out of trade rivalries in the Americas, . . .by 1742 it had evolved into a wider European conflict.”<sup>50</sup> However, earlier in 1740, English forces, led by James Edward Oglethorpe, of Georgia,

**Oglethorpe’s  
goals were to  
punish the  
Spanish for their  
slave sanctuary**

attacked Spanish forces along the northeast Florida coastline.

Oglethorpe’s goals were to punish the Spanish for their slave sanctuary and capturing the walled city of St. Augustine. Unfortunately, his troops got no further than Garcia Real de Santa Teresa de Mose, from

which the residents had been evacuated into the walled city. That made the vacated Fort Mose open to a group of Scottish Highlanders who made it into a temporary garrison.

Subsequently, the Spanish governor sent a Negro militia supported by Spanish troops, to attack the Scottish forces, and reclaim the fort, which they did.<sup>51</sup> The Oglethorpe campaign subsequently failed. The fort was severely damaged, but by 1752, it had been rebuilt and the Negro residents returned.

As a result of the Treaty of Paris in 1763, England was given control of the Florida Territory. An immediate consequence of English rule was that some of the African inhabitants of Fort Mose, as well as the entire Spanish population of St. Augustine, were evacuated to Cuba.<sup>52</sup> The British are believed to have destroyed Fort Mose. Their twenty-year

reign concluded in 1783 when the Spanish regained control of the Territory. Based upon Johann Schoepf's report, the Negro Anabaptist group was functioning in a cabin within the walled city in 1784, which suggests the Anabaptist remanent were permitted to worship freely during the English era.

## **Concluding Observations**

There is no available record about those 1739 Stono rebellion slaves or any other runaways who may have made it safely into the Florida Territory and their possible establishment of an Anabaptist community. However, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that among the runaway slaves fleeing to Florida, there likely were some who had embraced the Anabaptist faith which they practiced in St. Augustine. As noted earlier in this article, as early as the first period of Spanish rule, runaway slaves were granted freedom on the basis of religious conversion to Catholicism and allegiance to Spain. However, by the second Spanish reign beginning in 1783, the Spanish were even more desirous of settlers moving into the Florida Territory. As a result, Spain loosened their Catholic-only requirement and welcomed, "Lutherans and other Protestant sects."<sup>53</sup>

There are several other factors that may or may not had a bearing on the formation and existence of a small Anabaptist community within the Gracia Real de Santa Teresa de Mose.

The first consideration was the fact that the Spanish viewed these able-bodied men and women runaway slaves as much needed labor. "Labor shortages often had to be made up by utilizing soldiers. With such a scarcity of labor, there was a strong possibility that Africans and their descendants would have been valued more in St. Augustine than in other Spanish holdings."<sup>54</sup> Given such a priority, it is quite possible that the Spanish did not ensure every runaway was in fact baptized and trained in Catholicism.

Secondly, for the former slaves, the Catholic baptism may have been a small concession of conscience, if it mattered, to be ensured freedom. For those who actually went through the process of Catholic baptism by water being poured over their head, may not have been concerned if previously immersed in water. And certainly, for those who had spent years acquiescing to their master's demands, submitting to a mandated "baptism" may have been a minor inconvenience.

**Catholic baptism  
may have been a  
small concession  
of conscience**

A related consideration, raised by Christopher Beats was, "How much Africans and their descendants accepted Catholicism is a question that can probably never be answered. What can be certain, however, is that Catholicism acted both as a draw for English slaves and an integrating mechanism for slaves and freed-people . . ." Unfortunately, as Beats explains, "The level of integration is difficult to discern, given the sparse primary source documentation of everyday life in Spanish Florida."<sup>55</sup>

Finally, researcher Jane Landers, has noted, "that Gracia Real would have offered a way for Spain to use the refugee slaves as a buffer against the English while simultaneously keeping them out of the regular population."<sup>56</sup> That Spanish-imposed segregation may have diminished the necessity for the Negroes to embrace Catholicism. And with the fort being located two miles from the walled city of St. Augustine, it likely would have been a challenge to monitor the religious activities on a day-to-day basis, although there was a priest assigned to handle religious education.

It is likely the Negro Anabaptists in St. Augustine may have continued their worship practices until the conclusion of Spanish rule over the Florida Territory, which was acquired by the United States effective February 22, 1821. What



happened to this religious community? We do not know for certain. We can only speculate that some of the African inhabitants of Fort Mose, as well as many of the Spanish population of St. Augustine, may have again evacuated to Cuba. However, inasmuch as there were other nationalities whom Spain had imported as settlers and laborers, they along with some of the Negro and Spanish residents, may have remained behind to live and work. Before long, there was an onslaught of American settlers entering and moving across the Territory.

---

## ENDNOTES

[**Editor's Note:** All photographs used in this article are in the public domain.]

<sup>1</sup> Johann David Schoepf, *Travels in the Confederation, 1783 – 1784*, Vol. 2, translated and edited by Alfred J. Morrison. (Philadelphia: William J. Campbell Co., 1911), 230.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 38-39.

<sup>3</sup> Susan Richbourg Parker and William S. Coker, "The Second Spanish Period in the Two Floridas," edited by Michael Gannon, *The History of Florida*, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996), 162.

<sup>4</sup> J. E. Dovell, *Florida: Historic, Dramatic, Contemporary*. (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, Inc., 1952), 123.

<sup>5</sup> Schoepf, 239.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 229-230.

<sup>7</sup> Franklin H. Littell, "Anabaptists," *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists*, Vol. 1, (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1958), 47

<sup>8</sup> William R. Estep, *The Anabaptist Story*. (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1963; Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), 177, note 58.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>10</sup> J. Leitch Wright, Jr., "Blacks in British East Florida," *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, April, 1976, Vol. 54, #4, 439.

<sup>11</sup> Leah Townsend, *South Carolina Baptists: 1670 – 1805*. (Salem, Massachusetts: Higginson Book Company, 1938), 3.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas J. Little, *The Origins of Southern Evangelicalism Religious Revivalism in the South Carolina Lowcountry: 1670 – 1760*, (Columbia, S.C.: The University of South Carolina Press, 2013), 59.

<sup>13</sup> Little, 72.

<sup>14</sup> Peter H. Wood, *Black Majority*. (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1974), 133.

<sup>15</sup> Townsend, 8.

- 
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.  
<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.  
<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-9.  
<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.  
<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.  
<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.  
<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 271.  
<sup>23</sup> Estep, 191.  
<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.  
<sup>25</sup> Townsend, 255.  
<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 256.  
<sup>27</sup> Julia Floyd Smith, "Marching to Zion: The Religion of Black Baptists in Coastal Georgia Prior to 1865," *Viewpoints: Georgia Baptist History*, (Atlanta: Georgia Baptist Historical Society, 1978), 47.  
<sup>28</sup> Kimberly Sambol-Tosco, "The Slave Experience: Religion," at website <https://www.thirteen.org/wnet/slavery/experience/religion/history.html>; accessed February 23, 2021.  
<sup>29</sup> Wood, 134.  
<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.  
<sup>31</sup> Jane Landers, "Free and Slave," edited by Michael Gannon, *The New History of Florida*. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996), 172.  
<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*  
<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*  
<sup>34</sup> Peter C. Hoffer, *Cry Liberty: The Great Stono River Slave Rebellion of 1739*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), Hoffer, 54.  
<sup>35</sup> Landers, 172.  
<sup>36</sup> Wood, 306, citing Wilber H. Siebert, "Slavery and White Servitude in East Florida, 1726 – 1776," *Florida Historical Society Quarterly*, Vol. 10 (1931), 3-4.  
<sup>37</sup> Hoffer, 54.  
<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, citing Hadden's *Slave Patrols*, 152, 153.  
<sup>39</sup> Donald D. Wax, "The Great Risque We Run: The Aftermath of Slave Rebellion at Stono, South Carolina, 1739-1745," *The Journal of Negro History*, Summer, 1982, Vol. 67, No. 2, 137.  
<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.  
<sup>41</sup> Wood, 223-ff, provides multiple examples of news carried by the *South Carolina Gazette*.  
<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 151, citing a report published in the *Gentleman's Magazine* of 1755, Vol. 25, 344.  
<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.  
<sup>44</sup> Wax, 141.  
<sup>45</sup> Wood, 229-234, provides detailed descriptions of the several restrictions placed upon slaves.  
<sup>46</sup> Hoffer, 77.  
<sup>47</sup> Wax, 136.  
  
<sup>48</sup> Wood, 319.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 324.

<sup>50</sup> Daniel L. Schafer, "Raids, Sieges and International Wars," edited by Michael Gannon, *The New History of Florida*. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996), 121.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>52</sup> Sid Smith, "Historical Perspectives on Florida African-American Southern Baptists," n.d., unpublished manuscript, 67; copy held by the author.

<sup>53</sup> Rembert W. Patrick and Allen Morris, *Florida Under Five Flags*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1967), 24.

<sup>54</sup> Christopher P. Beats, "African Religious Integration in Florida During the First Spanish Period," an M.A. thesis for the University of Central Florida, Summer, 2007, 48.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.



# FLORIDA BAPTIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## **Life Members Provide a Kingdom-Honoring Legacy**

**The Florida Baptist Historical Society is honored to have a group of Life Members who have made a financial LEGACY commitment to the mission and ministry of the Society.** The Society's ministries include researching, collecting, preserving, and publishing Florida Southern Baptist historical materials. The Society also assists local churches in preserving their respective Legacy history by offering assistance in research, writing and publication of local church documentaries and histories.

**The Life Membership, as a Kingdom-honoring organization, is a means to ensure for perpetuity the mission and ministry of the Florida Baptist Historical Society.** The fees received from a Life Member are invested in the Society's endowment fund managed by the Florida Baptist Financial Services. The Fund's annual earnings are re-invested into the fund corpus. However, this fund is available as a reserve for use in underwriting the future mission and ministry of the Society, as determined by the Society's Board of Directors.

---

These Life Members have created a **LEGACY for themselves**, as well as providing an on-going LEGACY for the Florida Baptist Historical Society. These **LEGACY Life Memberships** are open to individuals, churches and associations by a one-time investment of \$500.

**WE SALUTE THOSE INDIVIDUALS, CHURCHES  
and ORGANIZATIONS  
WHO ARE COMMITTED TO THE  
MISSION AND MINISTRY OF THE FLORIDA BAPTIST  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY.**

Baldwin, Vanita	Green, Elouise
Baumgardner, Penny	Greenwood BC
Breidenbaugh, Joel	Hackney, Gary
Browning, Edwin, Jr.	Hecht, David
Browning, Faye T.	Hecht, Maxie
Butler, Joe	Hepburn, Donald
Carlton, Fran	Jolly, Judith
Clevenger, Toni	Kinchen, Thomas
Coats, Elaine	Kohly, Fred
Cornerstone BC,	Kohly, Lucy
Panama City	Lake Mystic BC, Bristol
DeMott, Linda	Laseter, Sue
Dowdy, Roy	Mays, C. Parkhill, Jr.
Ducanis, Jean	McRae, Martha Kay
Dunaway, Robert	Melton, Carolyne
Elder, David	Millette, Caroline W.
FBC, Bonifay	Mt. Olive BC, Bascom
FBC, Bradenton	Murrell, Phoebe
FBC, Lynn Haven	Owens, Glen
FBC, Madison	Richards, Roger
FBC of Sweetwater	Shaw, Frances
FBC, Tallahassee	Sullivan, John
Flegle, Larry	Talley, Charles
Florida Baptist Financial	Windsor, Jerry
Services	Windsor, Jerry Mae
Godwin, Rachel	Windsor, John Mark
Greatrex, Dana	

Act today by contacting us at [Society2@FloridaBaptistHistory.org](mailto:Society2@FloridaBaptistHistory.org)

## INDEX

- Abbeokuta, Nigeria, 67
- Albritton, Matthew, 92, 106
- Alien immersion, 41
- American Baptist Home
  - Missions Society, 69
- American Revolutionary, 84,
  - revolution, 119, 133-134
  - Revolutionary War, 30, 80, 83-84, 136
- Anabaptists, 135-139, 144, 148
- Andes Mountains, South America, 76
- Anglican, 135, 137-138, 141
- Anti-Effort Baptists, 22, 24
- Anti-mission Baptists, 24, 28
- Anti-missionary, 13-14, 22, 79, 93, 103-104
  - Anti-missionary position, 94
  - Anti-Missionaries, 28
  - Anti-missions, 14, 22, 24, 26-27, 32, 65
- Argentina, South America, 73-75
- Arminian doctrine, 37
- Arminianism, 40, 52
- Bagby, Anne Luther, 68
  - William B., 68
- Baker, J. S., 111, 120
- Baptism, 6, 9, 35, 41-42, 149
  - believer's baptism, 43-44
- Baptist Associations, 13
- Florida Associations
  - Alachua, 126,
  - Florida, 14, 32, 66, 107-108, 110-111, 120-121, 129
  - Jacksonville, 14
  - Little Manatee, 72
  - Santa Fee Missionary (later called the Santa Fe River), 74, 129
  - South Florida, 72, 129
  - St. Marys River 14, 58, 60
  - St. Marys River
    - Primitive, 14, 60
  - Suwannee River, 14, 54-55, 94
  - West Florida, 107, 123-125, 128-129
- Georgia Associations
  - Alabama River, 14, 49, 51, 53, 60, 62, 94
  - Crawfordite Alabama, 50, 61
  - Bethel, 101, 106, 108
  - Bowen, 102
  - Columbus, 106
  - Georgia, 52, 108, 128
  - Hephzibah, 94, 103
  - Mercer, 102
  - Ochlocknee, 31-32, 92, 94, 101, 105-106, 120-121
  - Ocmulgee, 108-109, 129
  - Piedmont, 13, 31, 57, 92-93, 101-102, 104-106
  - Pulasiki, 55
  - Southwestern, 102
  - Union, 55
  - Upatoie, 56
  - Upper Canoochee, 55, 94
  - Valdosta, 102
- Maryland Association
  - Baltimore, 25

- North Carolina Association
  - Kehukee 24-25, 40, 43, 82-83, 93-94
- Primitive Baptist
  - Associations, 50
- Baptist Churches,
  - Florida Baptist churches
    - Bethel, Duval County, 69, 105
    - Bethlehem, Jackson County, 117-118, 128
    - Campbellton, 122
    - Church of Christ at Bethlehem, now Campbellton, 119
  - Concord, Hamilton County, 106
  - Concord, Madison County, 129
  - Ebenezer, Jefferson County, 105-106
  - Fernandina, Nassau County, 72
  - Greenwood, Madison County, 129
  - Hebron, Gadsden County, 66, 105-106
  - Hephzibah, Gadsden County, 105-106
  - Hiberia, Clay County, 68
  - Hopewell, Hillsborough County, 72
  - Indian Spring, Leon County, 105-106, 120
  - Jones Creek, Duval County, 105
  - LaCrosse, Alachua County, 74
  - Lake Butler, Union County, 74
  - Lake Jackson, Leon County, 66
  - Liberty, Gadsden County, 66
  - Mt. Gilead, Jefferson County, 105-106
  - Myrtle Springs, Leon County, 105-106
  - New Hope, Bradford County, 74
  - New Providence, Jefferson County, 105-106
  - New River, Brooker, Bradford County, 95, 102, 105-106
  - New Zion, Alachua County, 95
  - Newington, Columbia County, 105-106
  - Old Providence, Union County, 105-106
  - Pigeon Creek (see separate entry Pigeon Creek Baptist Church)
  - Providence, Gadsden County, 66,
  - Shiloh, Columbia County, 105-106
  - Starke, Bradford County, 74
  - Tabernacle (now called First Baptist Church), Duval County, 69, 126
  - Waldo, Bradford County, 74

Georgia Baptist churches  
     Beard's Creek, Tallnall  
         County, 88, 94  
     Big Briar Creek, Warren  
         County, 88  
     Big Creek, Appling  
         County, 58  
     Cat Creek, Lowndes  
         County, 56  
     Friendship, Hahira, 92,  
         94  
     First, Thomas County,  
         129  
     High Bluff, Brantley  
         County, 90  
     Liberty, Thomas  
         County, 107  
     Lott's Creek, Bulloch  
         County, 87  
     Macedonia Primitive,  
         Wayne County,  
         15  
     Mount Pleasant,  
         Appling County,  
         54  
     Providence (also Camp  
         Creek), Ware  
         County, 96  
     Salem, Tallnall  
         County/Liberty  
         County, 88, 93  
     Sardis, Camden County  
         1, 4, 91  
     Shiloh Primitive, Pierce  
         County, 57-58,  
         96  
     Union, Irwin County, 92  
     Upper Black Creek,  
         Savannah, 87  
     Wesley Creek, McIntosh  
         County, 57  
     Williams Creek, Warren  
         County, 88  
 North Carolina Baptist  
 church  
     Rocky River, Anson  
         County, 86

South Carolina Baptist  
 churches  
     Bear Creek, Dobbs  
         County, 81  
     Great Contentnea,  
         Dobbs County,  
         81  
     Southwest, Dobbs  
         County, 81  
 Tennessee Baptist church  
     Trenton Street,  
         Harriman, 74  
*Baptist Telegraph and*  
*Florida Emigrant*, 126  
 Baptists, 40, 80  
 Bates, Fleming, Sr., 4-5, 10,  
     14, 30-31, 58, 79, 83-84,  
     88-96, 103-104, 106  
     James Maston, 95  
     Margaret "Peggy"  
         Milner, 83-84  
     Matthew, 84  
 Beall, E. H., 110  
 Beats, Christopher, 149  
 Bennett, Richard, 49-50, 58  
     59  
 Bennettsites, 59-60, 62  
 Black Rock Address, 26  
 Black Rock meeting, 25  
 Blewitt, W. (also spelled  
     Bluett, 108) 111  
 Bowen, Thomas Jefferson,  
     65-68, 122  
     Lurena Henrietta  
         Davis, 67-68  
 Branch, L. M., 43  
 Brazil, South America, 65, 68  
 Breidenbaugh, Joel, 35  
 Brittain, C. M., Mrs., 118  
 Broome, Susan G., 101  
 Bryon, L. W., 105  
 Buenos Aires, 76  
 Bullen, J. J., 117



- Calvinism, 29, 37
  - Hyper-Calvinism, 6, 27, 52, 82, 91
  - Hyper-Calvinists, 28, 83
  - Calvinist, 29, 37, 52, 54, 88
- Campbell, A. B., 120
  - G. D., 120
  - J. H., 110
- Carey, William, 21-22
- Catholics, 2, 37, 71, 133, 135, 137, 142, 148-149
  - Baptism, 149
  - Roman Catholics, 119
  - Catholicism, 148-149
- Centennial observance, FBSC, 117-118
- Chambers, Kinsey, 120, 129
- Charleston, SC, 134, 138, 142, 146
- Chaudoin, William N., 72-73, 108, 112, 120, 130
- Christian Index, The*, 72, 120-121, 126-127
- Closed Communion, 42
- Colerane, Georgia, 11
- Colson, John B., 95
- Congo (known today as Zaire), 69
- Connor, Wilson, 103, 109
- Cook, Henry, 87
- Cooperative mission, 21-22, 28, 31-32
- Craft, S. C., 110
- Crawford, Rueben, 10, 14, 49, 57-58, 61
- Crawfordites, 50-51, 54-55, 58-61
  - churches, 53
- Cread, Ellender, 5
- Crowley, John, vi, 6, 25, 51, 87, 89, 91
- Cuba for Christ, 70, 72-73
- Cuba, 71, 111, 147, 149
- Cuban, 126
- Cubans in Key West, 111
- Daniel, D. G., 120, 129
- Dees, Moses, 105
- Diaz, Alberto, 73
  - Minnie, 73
- Dixon, Edward, 5
  - John B., 3-4
  - Sopia "Sarah" Knight, 5
  - Susannah "Nancy", 5
- Doctrine of election, 28
- Douglass, Tasset, 92
- Doyal, Thomas, 105
- Drawdy, Daniel, 62
- Durham, G. H., Mrs., 118
- Dyson, Thomas, 112
- Ecclesiological, 27
- Effectual Calling, 40
- English Lord Granville, 79
- Estep, William, 139
- Everett, David P., 111-112, 123, 125, 128
- Fales, Adela, 72-73
- First Church Buenos Aires, 75
- Fleming, Louise (Lulu)
  - Cecilia, 68-69
- Florida Baptist State
  - Convention, 74, 108, 111-112, 118, 129-131
- Florida Baptist Witness*, 118, 130
- Florida Baptists, vii, 35, 65, 119, 130
- Foot-washing, 6, 9, 35, 43, 104
- Foreign Mission Board (now the International Missions Board) SBC, 67, 74-75, 77
- Fowler, Daisy Cate, 73-76
  - Don Francisco, Apostle of Love, 75
- Dorcas Hauk, 76
- Frank, 73, 75
- Franklin, Jr., 76
- James, 76
- Mattie Aiken, 74
- Margaret, 76

- Free Church movement, 135
- Free Will Baptists, 101
- Fuller, Andrew, 44
  - B. F., 111
  - B. S., 107
- Furman, Richard, 23
- Gardner, B. G., 37
- General Baptist Association of Georgia, 104, 108-109
- General Baptists, 136, 139
- General Convention of the Baptist Denomination in the United States for Foreign Missions (known as Triennial Convention), 22-23, 28
- Georgia Baptist State Convention, 73, 101, 104-106, 108, 110-111, 121
- Georgia Homestead Act, 56
- Georgia Temperance Society, 94
- Goldwire, John, 87
  - W. H., 111
- Goodale, Henry, 67
- Governor Tryon, William, 80
- Gracia Real de Santa Teresa de Mose, (also known as Fort Mose), 143, 147-149
- Gray, J. M. 109
- Great Commission, 25, 36, 42, 65, 139
- Guess, Zack M., 40
- Hadden, Sally, 144
- Haddock, H. L., 13
- Hansford, Lundy, 124
- Hardshell Baptists, 22, 24, 36, 125
- Hart, Oliver, 138
- Hassell, Sylvester, 28-29, 38
- Hepburn, Donald S., viii, 1, 79, 133
- Hill, Robert F., 67
- Hoffer, Peter, 146
- Holcombe, Henry, 87-88
- Holt, Michael O., 49
- Home Mission Board (now called the North American Mission Board) SBC, 73
- Board of Domestic Missions, SBC, 130
- Ijaye, Nigeria 67
- Judson, Adoniram, 44
- Kehukee Declaration, 24-26
- Key West, FL, 71-72, 111
- King, H. M., 74
- King's Highway, 1, 11-12, 86
- Knight, Britton, 1, 3-5, 15, 103
  - Chloe, 4
  - Elias, 5, 10
  - Bisken, Hudnell, "Polly", 4
  - William A., 95
- Landers, Jane, 143, 149
- Landmark Baptists, 36, 45
- Landmark movement, 24
- Le Jau, Francis, 142
- Liberia, 67
- Liele, George, 141
- Linton, H. S., 107
- Lloyd, Benjamin, 54
  - Thomas, 13
- London (Philadelphia) Confession of 1689, 52, 138
- Lopers, Abel G., 10
- Lord's Supper, 6, 9, 35, 42-43
- Lutherans, 2, 135, 148
- Mallory, C. D., 110
- Maund, W. W., 120
- Mayport Mills, 96
- Mays, R. J., 110, 129
- McBeth, Leon, 21, 37
- McDonald, James, 10, 69, 109-110, 120, 126-128
- Means doctrine, 54-55

- Mercer, Herman, 120, 124,  
     129  
     Jesse, 83, 94, 112, 122,  
         124-125  
     Joshua, 106-107, 109,  
         112, 120-122,  
         124-125, 128  
     Silas, 83, 124-125  
 Minchen, 124  
 Missionary, 31, 104  
 Missionary Baptists, vii, 28  
     30, 35-45, 95, 101, 121,  
     131, 133  
 Missionary doctrine, 104  
 Missionary movement, 106  
 Missionary supporting  
     Baptists, 31-32  
 Mizell, Jesse, 10  
 Moore, Matthew, 141  
 Muse, Thomas, 120  
 Nelson, Isaac, 15  
     William, 15  
 Nettles, Tom, 29  
 New School Baptists, 25, 36  
 North Carolina, 69  
 Ogbomosho, Nigeria, 67  
 Oglethorpe, James Edward,  
     147-148  
 Old Line Primitive Baptists,  
     101  
 Old School Baptists, 13, 22,  
     25, 28, 36, 93  
 Open Communion, 42  
 Opposing the "missionaries,  
     106  
 Original Baptists, 24  
 Paraguay, South America, 77  
 Parker, Daniel, 28  
 Particular Baptist Society for  
     the Propagation of the  
     Gospel, 21  
 Particular Baptists, vi, 22,  
     25, 51-52, 54, 79, 82,  
     136, 138-139  
 Peacock, Isham, 4-6, 10, 13,  
     30-31, 58, 79-91, 94,  
     96, 103, 106  
     John, 85,  
     Lydia Bennett, 96  
     Martha Easterling, 85,  
         96  
     Matilda "Cicily" Tilsey,  
         79  
     Samuel Peacock II, 79  
     Sarah, 85, 96  
 Perritt, R. T., 37  
 Philadelphia Baptist  
     Convention, 29  
 Pigeon Creek Baptist  
     Church, vi-vii, xii, 1, 5-  
     16, 31, 49, 58, 60, 91-92,  
     95, 102-104, 131  
 Pigeon Creek Road, 12  
 Predestination, 35, 39-40,  
     44, 90  
 Presbyterians, 40, 135, 139  
     Scottish, 136  
 Prevatt, Joseph R., 4  
     Mary "Polly" Studstill, 4  
     Susannah, 4  
     Thomas B., 3-5, 10, 103  
 Price, Lewis, 120  
*Primitive Baptist*,  
     publication, 25-26  
 Primitive Baptists, vi-vii, 9,  
     13-14, 22, 24-27, 29-30,  
     35, 38-39, 41-45, 49, 51,  
     53, 60-61, 79, 89, 106  
*Primitive Hymns*, 54  
*Primitive, The*, publication,  
     94  
 Pro-missions, 65  
 Progressive Primitive  
     Baptists, 101  
     movement, 49, 60,  
 Provence, Elizabeth, 76  
 Quakers, 80, 136  
 Radcliff, C. W., 38-39, 41  
 Rathel, Mark A., 21  
 Regular Baptists, vi, 51-52,  
     82

- Regulators, 80
- Rice, Luther, 22, 44
- Rogers, S. B., 115, 118-120, 130
- Ross, Martin, 25
- Rowe, Stephen, 120, 124, 128-129
- Sacred Harp sings, 60-61
- Sambol-Tosco, Kimberly, 141
  
- Schoepf, Johann David, 133-136, 148
- Screven, William, 138
- Second Great Awakening, 23, 25, 30
- Separate Baptists, vi, 52, 54
- Shuman, Myra Nelson, 5, 16
- Shurden, Walter, 26
- Sikes, Lou, 15
  - Elder T. J., 15
- Simmons, Thomas, 138
- Slaves/Slavery, 3, 137, 140-141, 143-146, 149
  - African-descendant slaves, 9-10, 133, 136, 139, 141-142
  - fugitive slaves, 142-143
  - indentured servants, 145
  - indentured servant Peter, 10
  - Negro Anabaptists in St. Augustine, 141, 149
  - runaway slaves, 142-143, 148
  - slave code of South Carolina, 140
  - slave labor, 89
  - slave owners, 142
  - slaveholders, 28
- Smith, E. W., 55
  
- Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (also referred to as S.P. G.), 137-139, 142
- Soteriological, 27-28
- South Carolina Gazette*, 144
- Southwestern Baptist, The*, 122
- Sparkman, T. J., 72
- St. Augustine, Florida, 11, 133-135, 142-143, 146-149
- St. Mary's River, 3-4, 9, 11, 15, 90
- Stallings, C. W., 56
- State Board of Missions, Florida, 72-73, 117, 130
- Stono Rebellion, 143-144, 146, 148
- Stono river, 138-139, 146
- Taylor, J. D., 120
- Temperance societies, 27, 31
- Temperance, 93, 106
- Thomas, Samuel, 138
- Thornton, C., 124
- Tippins, R. L., 128
- Torbert, Robert, 27
- Townsend, Leah, 138, 140
- Tucker, John, 95, 120-121
- Two-Seed-in-the-Spirit Predestinarian Baptists, 28, 101
- Union Academy, 111
- Upper Congo, 70
- Vining, E., 128
- Walker, Samuel, 10
- Warren County, GA, 80, 86, 88
- Warren, E. W. 108
- Wax, Donald, 144, 146
- Weaver, Rufus W., 115, 118, 131
- Webb, R., 124
- Westberry, Moses, 102, 105

Western Argentina  
    Mendoza, 75-76  
    Rosario, 75  
    Santa Fe, 75  
White, J. L., 118  
Wombwell, Joseph, 125  
Women's American Baptist  
    Foreign Missionaries  
    Society, 69-70  
Wood, Peter, 137, 145  
    William F., 70-73  
Woodmason, Charles, 52  
Yoruba, Central Africa, 65,67