



LEGACY

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

Vol. 13

December, 2021

No. 12

As the year 2021 draws to an end, your Society staff is providing a retrospective on the past year's activities to help Society members to better understand the mission and ministry of the Society. The following are highlights of the 2021 Annual Report of the Florida Baptist Historical Society.

2021 Annual Report to Members

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

Who We Are: The Historical Society is managed by a six-member Board of Directors appointed by the State Board of Missions, Florida Baptist State Convention. Of the six, three members are appointed by the State Board of Missions and there are three permanent members who serve by virtue of their administrative position: Executive Director-Treasurer, Florida Baptist Convention, Inc (Dr. Thomas Green); the Managing Director (formerly designated as the secretary-treasurer), Florida Baptist Historical Society (Donald Hepburn); and the Curator, Florida Baptist Archives, (Dr. Roger Richards), maintained by The Baptist College of Florida. **Those persons who have been appointed to serve on the Board (and their term of service) are: Dr. Joel Breidenbaugh, Apopka (2019-2022); Ms. Arlene Vause, Sopchoppy (2022-2024); and Dr. Donald Minshew, executive director, Gulf Stream Baptist Association, Ft. Lauderdale (2021-2023).**

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

BAPTIST HISTORY COLLECTION: Since March, 2020, the Society has maintained stewardship of the Baptist History Collection. The collection, was originally established by the Society and initially maintained by Stetson University. In 1995 the Florida Baptist State Convention directed that the Collection be transferred to The Baptist College of Florida to be maintained by the college library. Last year the College requested the Society to assume stewardship of the collection to better facilitate the mission of the Society. During the 51-years the collection has existed, the Society continued to acquire books and resources that were added to the Collection. What had started as a collection of less than 1,750 volumes has grown to over 5,322 volumes.

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

Historic people information researched: The 33 former editors of the *Florida Baptist Witness*; Ryan Frier; C.J. Crafton; Joshua Mercer; Hermon Mercer; Isham Peacock; Fleming Bates; F. W. Tomberlin; James Earl Stallings; W.F. Wood; and Clifford Parker.

Church and Association history information researched or provided:

Twin Lakes, Gulf Stream Association; Greenwood Church; Harmony Church, Middle Florida Association; Casselberry Church; Pine Grove Church, Quincy; Pigeon Creek Church (Nassau County); Ebenezer Church and Greater Bethel Church, Pinellas County; First Church, Graceville; Glendale Church, DeFuniak Springs; First Church, Tarpon Springs; Buckland Ridge Church, Okeechobee; First Church, Groveland; Westside Church, Ft. Pierce; First Church, Lacochee; Ortega Church, Jacksonville; and First Church, Bartow.

Miscellaneous inquiries that resulted in historic information provided:

Minutes of the Brevard Association for 1952 to 1954; history of the former Rocky Creek Association; researched possible burial site for former Palm Beach County Deputy George Douglas; researched and provided copies of article series by S.L. Loudermilk; and provided use of selected images from the Society's Postcard Collection.

ASSISTING IN CELEBRATION OF THE 200th ANNIVERSARY — Since 2020, the Society's managing director has participated in several meetings involving the leadership of the Pigeon Creek Primitive Baptist Church, Nassau County, in preparation for the observance of the church's organization that occurred on January 7, 1821, and which has been continuously functioning during the past 200 years. Although the church subsequently affiliated with the Primitive Baptist movement in the 1830s, it still holds the distinction of being the first Baptist church established in the Florida Territory (statehood received in 1845). As noted in the following narrative, this early church was featured in the 2021 *Journal of Florida Baptist Heritage*. However, the church was missing the original Minutes' record book which contained most of its early history through 1860. The Society's managing director took upon the task of tracking down those missing Minutes. After some persistent inquiries, microfilm copies of the early Minutes were discovered in the State of Florida Archives and Library. Once copies of the microfilm were received, the Society prepared a notebook containing PDF copies of the Minutes and presented it to the church leadership. Additionally, those records became a major resource in the preparation of several articles used in the 2021 *Journal of Florida Baptist Heritage*. A surprising find of new information in those Minutes were records of the previously unknown service of itinerant Missionary Baptist preacher James McDonald (b. 1794; d. 1869). He served as part-time pastor for five years at Pigeon Creek, while concurrently serving as pastor of the Jacksonville Bethel (First)



Baptist Church. After 10 months of Covid-pandemic related delays, the anniversary observance was held November 20, 2021. The Florida Baptist Historical Society presented a special framed certificate of recognition on the 200th anniversary to church Clerk Myra Nelson Shuman and Moderator Wesley Nelson (pictured).

*The Journal of
Florida Baptist
Heritage*

Florida Baptist Historical Society



*The Legacy of "Firsts" Among
Florida Baptists*

Volume 23



2021

THE JOURNAL OF FLORIDA BAPTIST HERITAGE- 2021: During 2021, the Society staff selected and enlisted writers to produce nine articles for inclusion in this year's *Journal of Florida Baptist Heritage*. The topical articles, approved by the Society's Board of Directors, focused on the Legacy of "firsts" among Florida Baptists, which was inspired by the 200th anniversary in 2021 of the establishment of the first Baptist church in the Florida Territory. The early history of the Pigeon Creek Primitive Baptist Church (Nassau County) and the profiles of several early pastors of the church were featured, in addition to several other articles of interest to Florida Baptists. The journal was released to the Society's members in mid-October.

THE 2021 BAPTIST HERITAGE AWARD: The Society's Board of Directors, earlier in the year, authorized that the Baptist Heritage Award be conferred upon Donald S. Hepburn, who has served as the managing director of the Society since 2017. Previously Hepburn served 32 years as the director of public relations for the Florida Baptist Convention. During most of those years: he additionally served as the staff-assigned liaison to the Historical Society; wrote numerous articles for the *Journal of Florida Baptist Heritage*; and was the co-author of the book, *Favored Florida, A History of Florida Baptists, 1784 – 1939*, Vol. I. He is currently working on volume two of the Florida Baptist history book. Since 1997, the Historical Society has conferred the Baptist Heritage Award upon 25 Florida Baptists, including five laymen, three women, six pastors, and eleven Baptist college or seminary professors/administrators.



CHURCH ANNIVERSARIES: The Society staff prepared and distributed a "Certificate of Recognition" to those 80 Florida Baptist churches that were to observe 25-year milestone anniversaries in 2021. Among the 80 churches, that have continuously functioned since being organized, to observe their respective milestone this year included two churches that observed 175-years, having been established in 1847: Bethlehem Church, Cottondale, and First Church, Pensacola.

DIGITAL DOCUMENTS ON THE WEBSITE: To make the history of Florida Baptist associations accessible to interested Florida Baptists and researchers, we have continued an effort to post on the Society website PDF copies of association annuals which now includes the following early associations (and the years available): Florida (1845-1909); Alachua/Nature Coast (1848-1964); West Florida (1849-1906); Santa Fee Missionary [Santa Fe River] (1862-1964); South Florida (1867-1909); Greater Orlando [Wekiwa] (1870-1964); New River (1872-1966); Suwannee Missionary (1873-1964); St. Mary's/Jacksonville (1879-1901); Beulah (1879-1964); and Middle Florida (1900-2009). For the past year, the Society has had a volunteer worker who has been electronically transferring from microfilm to PDF formats past issues of the *Florida Baptist Witness*, dating from 1900 to 1980. We anticipate this updated format will serve the Society in responding to research requests, as well as provide adequate digital formatting for posting multi-year issues of the *Witness* on the Society's website.

BIOGRAPHICAL COLLECTION: The Society's has available on its website over 5,250 biographical profiles on Florida Baptist pastors and other church leaders. During the year, we added nearly 1,000 newly researched or recently updated biographical files. While the website entry is only a summary biographical profile, these are generally supported by other detailed information maintained in paper files.

CHURCH HISTORY COLLECTION: The Florida Baptist State Convention has over 3,100 cooperating congregations. Among these churches and some churches that were established but subsequently disbanded, the Florida Baptist Historical Society has secured and developed paper file histories on 927 active and deactivated congregations.

This concludes the summary highlights of the Society's 2021 Annual report.

As we enter this Christmas season, we are thankful for the many blessings of God that we personally, as well as the Society organization, experienced during 2021, despite the continuing challenges of a lingering pandemic. More importantly we are thankful for the gift of Jesus Christ whom God provided to us one and all. We rejoice with the scripture announcement, "And the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring to you Good News of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a savior, who is Christ the Lord.'" [Luke 2:10-11]