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**There Came a Man:
The Life and Influence of
Richard Johnson Mays
on the Development of
Baptist Work in Florida**

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Address Presented at the
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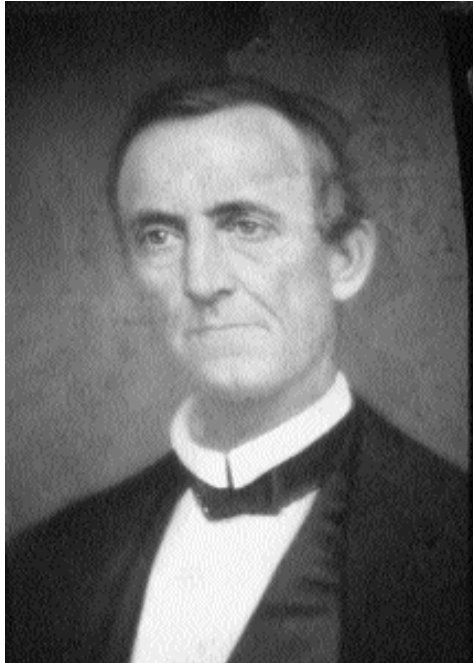
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THERE CAME A MAN:

The Life and Influence of Richard Johnson Mays

On the Development of Baptist Work in Florida



Richard Johnson Mays
1808-1864

A paper presented to a public forum during the spring meeting of the

Florida Baptist Historical Society

April 23, 2004

In the 1898 Sanctuary of the First Baptist Church of Madison

By Phil Heard

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THERE CAME A MAN

The Life and Influence of Richard Johnson Mays on the Development of Baptist Work in Florida

The Gospel of John begins with this account of the coming of John the Baptist:

“There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light”

(John 1:8, NIV).

Richard Johnson Mays was a man who came to Florida from Edgefield, South Carolina, around 1832. According to his granddaughter, Patty Mays, “the motivating force of Richard Johnson Mays’ whole life and character was his belief in God and in the revelation of God as made to mankind in the Bible.... He specially admired the courage and forthrightness of John the Baptist, and gave that name to one of his sons.” [John the Baptist Mays was the eighth child of Richard and Eliza Mays.]¹

It is appropriate, therefore, to apply the same mission statement which John the Baptist had when preaching in the wilderness to Richard J. Mays as he left the more civilized environs of South Carolina to come to the wilderness of territorial Florida. As he came, though he was of a family of means and prominence, and came to expand his family’s profession of planting, he truly seemed possessed with the concept of spreading the gospel through both his physical and spiritual labor in this new place.

The purpose of this paper is to reveal both the life and the heart of this man as he dedicated himself to the mission of spreading the Kingdom of God in the Florida of his day. We will see how he quickly found a place of prominence and dedicated service to the cause of Christ in the carrying on of the work of his plantation, the building of a new state, and the planting of new churches. In addition, his guiding hand in the founding of new denominational units formed the structure for Baptist work that has grown and thrived to this day as a result of his early labors.

Truly, as in the life of John the Baptist, the work of the kingdom was enhanced through the prophetic ministry of Richard J. Mays.

¹ Mays, Patty, *Richard Johnson Mays, Pioneer, Preacher, Patriot*, p. 26.

Chapter One: Linage and Early Life in South Carolina

Earliest members of the Mays family are traced all the way back to Holland, where the name was probably spelled “Maas,” and as early as the 1600’s the family name is prominent in England. The first representative to come to the New World was William Mays, who came to the Virginia colony in 1611. Several generations later a young man named Samuel Mays fought in three battles of the Revolutionary War before he was sixteen. Later moving to South Carolina, he became a brigadier-general during the War of 1812. “Without the advantages of much formal education or inherited property, he acquired great wealth, several plantations...numerous slaves, and a splendid plantation home on the north bank of the Saluda [River] in Newberry County.”² He married Nancy Grigsby in 1793, and the couple became the parents of ten children, two daughters and eight sons. The seventh child, Richard Johnson, was born in Edgefield, South Carolina, in 1808. Though several of the sons graduated from South Carolina College, “Richard was determined to be a preacher, and so he studied for the ministry.”³ We have no record of his having any formal higher education, but it is easy to see from his later writing and concerns that he had a keen and educated mind. Also unknown is when and how this family of English immigrants may have left the Anglican Church, but well prior to his coming to Florida Richard had developed deep roots in the Baptist faith.

In 1829 he married Eliza Anne Williams, descendant of another Virginia family who had moved to South Carolina. Richard was now twenty-one, and his bride only fourteen. A daughter, Elizabeth, was born to the young couple in 1830. Apparently the rise of “King Cotton” in Virginia and the Carolinas, and the large acreage required for its growth, had caused land to become scarce. So it was that Richard, his wife Eliza and baby Elizabeth, along with his brother James, his wife and young son, Sam III, set out in a carriage with “their slaves, household goods, tools, supplies, in covered wagons, [with] their cattle and horses,”⁴ on the long, treacherous trip to Florida. Their older brother, Rhydon G., had apparently preceded them, for he is listed as one of the earliest grantees in the area land office in 1828.⁵ Later other of his brothers came to the pioneer territory to give the Mays family name a powerful presence in the North Florida area.

Thus ends the South Carolina record of the young pioneers, and begins the Florida chapter.

² Mays, p. 32.

³ Ibid., p. 34.

⁴ Idem.

⁵ Sims, Elizabeth H., *A History of Madison County, Florida*, Madison County Historical Society, 1986, pp. 13-14.

Chapter Two: Beginning a New Life in Florida

Andrew Jackson had invaded the Spanish territory of Florida in 1818, and soon after President John Quincy Adams negotiated the ceding of Florida to the United States as a territory. The Spanish king ratified the treaty in 1821, and Florida was officially “open for business.” What was Florida like at that time? Renowned Madison author Beth Sims gives this description: “There was a settlement at Pensacola, a larger, more sophisticated town at St. Augustine, a small village at St. Marks. In between was a virtual jungle, occupied by wandering Indians, smugglers, runaway slaves, cattle thieves, and a few respectable cattle herders and settlers. The Old Spanish road from St. Augustine to St. Marks was overgrown and virtually impassable.”⁶

John Bellamy, a former member of the Legislative Council, and sometime-resident of Madison County, was given the contract to build a road basically following the Old Spanish Trail, from Pensacola to St. Augustine. The road, known variously as the Federal Road, The Bellamy Road, and the St. Augustine Road, cuts across the southern portion of Madison County, and ran just north of Lake Sampala. It was ready for travel by 1826.⁷ This was the country to which Richard and James with their families came sometime after 1830. The name of J. B. Mays appears on the voting list in Dennis Hankins’ precinct in the fall of 1831, along with that of road builder John Bellamy. Since they had come south together, it is logical to suppose that Richard was here by that time as well, though his name does not appear on the voting roll until the May of 1833. Another younger brother, D. H. (Dannitte Hill) Mays appears on the electors’ list for 1832. He is identified by Patty Mays as “highly educated, interested in literature.” She shares an account of a discussion between Richard and Dannitte, who greatly admired and often quoted Shakespeare. “Preacher Richard maintained that every worthwhile thing that Shakespeare said had already been said in the Bible. He challenged Dannitte to a quoting contest, and came out victor.”⁸

The families settled in this newly developing area along the Bellamy Road somewhere between Lake Sampala and Mosely Hall, in an area that came to be called Hickstown. An Indian chief named Tuckose Emathla, or, John Hicks as the English called him, had moved his tribe to this region when Andrew Jackson had run them out of the Tallahassee area. Greatly respected by the settlers, he had supported peaceful negotiation between the Indians and the white men. During the period called The Second Seminole War, from 1835-1842, Hicks realized that the government’s intention to move the Indians to reservations was inevitable. During this time Jacob Rhett Motte, an Army surgeon, wrote about the area: “We visited San Pedro, which is seven miles from Hicks-town. In truth the latter was nothing but an extensive field, which had once been the site of an important Indian town; but at the time we saw it presented not the least vestige of its former life and bustle or indeed of any life at all. San Pedro was a County-town [county seat], and we found it was the resort of many fugitives who had left their desolated homes to escape the rifles and scalping-knife; and were dwelling in miserable shanties that could scarcely protect them from the slightest shower. The few settlers on the road we traveled on our return, who had not deserted their clearings, were suffering very much from alarm of Indians, who were

⁶ Sims, Idem.

⁷ Ibid, p. 16.

⁸ Mays, p. 27.

known to be concealed somewhere in the vicinity....”⁹ This was the new world to which the stalwart Richard had brought his family. Little Elizabeth, who had been injured on the journey south, did not survive the privations, and her frail body was laid to rest in a tiny grave whose location is now unknown in the San Pedro area.¹⁰

The Hickstown Baptist Church

Despite the hardships of this first stop in the new life, there is evidence of the preacher fulfilling his calling. It was during this time that the Hickstown Baptist Church (or Hixtown, as it is sometimes spelled) was founded. Edwin Browning in his *Historical Sketch* of the First Baptist Church of Madison said, “The date of organization of the church is a fact submerged in history. There is good reason to believe that the organization took place around 1835, and probably as early as 1832.... We do know that many settlers, *including R. J. Mays*, [italics mine] came to this area as early as 1832. It appears logical that Hickstown church had its beginning in this earlier period around 1832, and not later than 1835.”¹¹ Given what we know later about Mays’ propensity for starting new churches, it is this writer’s belief that he was most likely involved in its origin. He was definitely living in the area at the time, and was the church clerk in June of 1841, when he and several other members of the Hickstown Church were dismissed to become charter members of the newly established Concord Church. It is unfortunate, but understandable, that better records of this event are not now available to us. We also know that Enoch G. Mays, the youngest brother of Richard, had come to Florida during this period, and was the first convert to the new Concord Church. He soon after became identified with the Hickstown Church, and is shown as a prominent member and messenger from that church to associational meetings for a number of years following. He and his family later moved to Texas.¹² In July of 1841, R. J. Mays was ordained as the first deacon of the Concord Church by the Hickstown Church, after it had moved to the village of “Madison Court House” as the town was then known. By this time the church had changed its name from Hickstown to “Madison Baptist Church” and in 1922 to the First Baptist Church of Madison. As a result of these early efforts in starting a church in “the wilderness” of Hickstown, it has made an outstanding contribution to the community and the denomination of which it has been a vital part. Let us again quote E. B. Browning’s chronicle of this historic church: “So the mantle of greatness has rested upon our church. By sound logic, it is the mother church of Baptists in this area. It helped organize the Florida Association in 1843, and the State Baptist Convention in 1854. The State Mission Board was organized under its sponsorship in 1880, and the Womans Missionary Union...in 1903. From its vitality other churches have sprung, preachers have been called, and the missionaries have been set apart.”¹³ More will be said about some of these events in a later chapter.

⁹ Ibid, p. 22.

¹⁰ Mays, p. 24.

¹¹ Browning, Edwin B., Sr., *First Baptist Church, Madison, Florida, A Historical Sketch, 1835-1956*, published by First Baptist Church, 1956, pp. 5-6.

¹² Idem.

¹³ Ibid., p. 27.

The Elizabeth Baptist Church

Another church, which goes back to this earliest period of R. J. Mays' Florida ministry is the Elizabeth Baptist Church in Jefferson County. Again, the early records are missing, and only fragmentary bits are available. However, from a historical sketch printed on September 20, 1931, on the one hundredth anniversary, we find some information which must be considered, even if it is somewhat confusing. This same information appears in *The History of Jefferson County, Florida*, which was a depression-era project of the FERA. However, because of several errors in facts in this publication, this could not be considered a reliable source.¹⁴

The church was organized in 1831, which makes it a contemporary, if not a forerunner, of the Hickstown Church. The first pastor was Reverend Jesse Goodman. Then we are told, "In 1832 Richard J. Mays was pastor of this church." If so, this would be the earliest record of Mr. Mays' involvement in Baptist work in Florida, and it would be very close to the time he is believed to have arrived here. It would also be well before he was ordained as a minister, which did not take place until 1841. That certainly is possible, as Baptist churches have from time to time had lay preachers fill in when an ordained minister was not available. It is also possible that this relationship could have been nearer 1841, for at that time Mays became the pastor of the Monticello Baptist Church, also in Jefferson County. The history and contribution of the Elizabeth Baptist Church is significant, and is worthy of its own account, but it will not be considered further here because of the uncertainty of Mays' involvement in it.

¹⁴ McRory, Mary Oakley, and Barrows, Edith Clarke, *History of Jefferson County, Florida*, Monticello Kiwanis Club, 1935.

Chapter Three: The Building Period

The period beginning around 1835 in Richard Mays life can aptly be called “The Building Period,” for it was a time of building a new home and plantation, of involvement in the building of a new community and state, of starting new churches, and promoting the founding of new denominational units. First, let us consider the new home.

Clifton

The rugged life in the Hickstown/San Pedro swampland, with its mosquitoes, malaria, and Indian raids, had become nearly unbearable. The exact time is unknown, but sometime after the death of their little girl, Richard took his wife, slaves, and household possessions and moved to a more healthy area in the northwestern part of Madison County, and established a new plantation upon which they built a beautiful and gracious home they called “Clifton.” Growth in this area is evident by the building of a new road from Madison to the Georgia town of Thomasville by the county commissioners in 1845. This road ran from Madison through the community of Carrabelle, on by the Clifton mansion and the Bond community, through Hamburg, Lovett, and into Georgia.¹⁵ This is the present State Road 146, more popularly known as “The Little Cat Road,” which today goes closest to what is now the historical site of the founding of the Florida Baptist Convention.

Browning says, “This house, the home of Richard J. Mays, was built in 1835. It stood a short distance south of the old Thomasville-Madison Road and West of the Greenville-Quitman Road near the point where both roads cross at the Old Bond Post Office. It was plainly visible from both of these roads during the period of its existence.”¹⁶ More will be shared about this home and its prominent place in Florida Baptist history in another chapter.

The Mays family was but a small contingent of families from South Carolina who began settling in the North Florida area. In fact, Madison County had come to be called “the Palmetto County,” because of the South Carolinians who dominated cotton plantation agriculture by 1850. While Richard and his family moved to the northwestern portion of the county, his brother James had bought land all around Sampala Lake by 1834. But after service in the Second Seminole War, James died of pleurisy in 1836. His older brother, Rhydon G. Mays, was the largest cotton grower in the Mays family in 1850. He had eighteen hundred acres in the Sampala Lake region. His family moved to Putnam County, Florida, to grow oranges in 1852, selling his Madison County acreage to Owen E. Sullivan and Nancy DeLaughter (who were instrumental in the founding of the Hopewell Baptist Church in that area in 1853).

The above material is from Clifton Paisley’s book, *The Red Hills of Florida, 1528-1865*.¹⁷ In it he has an interesting section concerning ministers who also owned slaves. I will quote just a brief passage from a very enlightening section: “In the Baptist Church the

¹⁵ Smith, Carlton, “*Excerpts from Writings of Carlton Smith*” as published in the 2nd Annual Down Home Days program of 1983, pp. 26-27.

¹⁶ Browning, Edwin, *Clifton*, an appendix to his *History of the Concord Baptist Church*.

¹⁷ Paisley, Clifton, *The Red Hills of Florida, 1528-1865*, The University of Alabama Press, Tuscaloosa, 1989, pp. 147-152.

Reverend Richard G. Mays and H. Z. Ardis, [later long-time pastor of the Hickstown/Madison Church] both Madison County planters as well as ministers, owned \$57,000 and \$13,500 in slave property, respectively.... Although they were friendly to slavery, all of the denominations conducted missionary work among the blacks, who also attended services [in the white churches....].”¹⁸ More will be said about Mays’ treatment of his slaves in the last chapter. It was during this period also that R. J. Mays served as postmaster at a post office called West Hill. In a letter to the *Georgia Christian Index* datelined Clifton, July 31st, 1845, Mays requests the editor to change his address to Madison Ct. House, since the post office at Gum Swamp had been discontinued.¹⁹ In February of 1837 he is listed as a Justice of the Peace, and was appointed as a state approved property appraiser for the newly organized Union Bank in Tallahassee.²⁰ That he had land interests outside his plantation is attested to in documents recording the original settlement of the new county seat town called Madison Court House. On May 2, 1838, Madison C. Livingston deeded 160 acres of land for the formation of the “County Court of the County of Madison.” Carlton Smith writes, “It is interesting to note that on June 4, 1838, the first lots were sold to R. J. Mays who purchased lots 116 and 117, the present location of the southeast corner and northwest corner of the intersection of Horry Street and Pinkney Street respectively.”²¹ In a listing of the fifteen wealthiest people in the county, he is listed third. Sims gives an interesting insight: “[Mays] became a successful planter and one of the wealthiest men in the area, owning thousands of acres of land and several hundred slaves. His proudest accomplishment, however, was being an ordained ‘Missionary Baptist Minister,’ as he listed himself in the 1860 census.”²²

The Concord Baptist Church

We should now turn to the interesting and extensive history of the Concord Baptist Church near the Georgia line in Madison County. Let us hear again from historian Browning, who wrote a definitive history of the church, published in 1976: “During the Seminole Indian War, while Florida was still four years from Statehood, Concord Missionary Baptist Church was constituted on June 20, 1841. Richard Johnson Mays by every creditable evidence was the moving spirit in the organization of the Church. The original Minute Book shows the following as charter members: Joshua W. P. McCall, Wm T. Johnson, R. J. Mays, Mary McCall, Elizabeth Johnson, Harriet A. Johnson, and Eliza A Mays, white; Elbert, Phillis, Marmadore, April, Marshall and Nancy, Negro slaves, usually referred to in the early record as, ‘servants’.”²³ As mentioned before, Mays himself was the clerk of the Hickstown Church, and duly recorded the letters of transfer for himself, his wife, and servants April and Marmadore. The way in which the church was constituted shows very clearly the experience of the founding members in the ways of Baptist life. Following receipt of the letters of membership, articles of faith were set forth, preaching was heard from Elders Moseley and Broome, and J. W. P. McCall was set apart to the work

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 173.

¹⁹ *The Christian Index*, August 22, 1845.

²⁰ Sims, pp. 28-30.

²¹ Smith, Carlton, *Excerpts from Writings of Carlton Smith*, ” Down Home Days Program,” 1983.

²² Sims, pp. 48-49.

²³ Browning, p. 9.

of the gospel ministry. They then set the time for the ordination of R. J. Mays as deacon to be held in the Hickstown Church on the second Sunday of July. The first service concluded with the observance of the Lord's Supper. The minutes of the next month's meeting confirmed that Mays was indeed ordained as a deacon on July 18, 1841. This is the earliest mention of his being anything more than an interested and involved member of a Baptist church. From that point, however, he seemed eager to plunge more fully into his godly calling. At the conference on September 18th, 1841, following a sermon by Elder Broom, newly ordained deacon R. J. Mays gave another sermon. Indication that an associational relationship already existed is shown by the fact that Mays and J. W. P. McCall were appointed as associational delegates, with two dollars appropriated for minutes. At the November 20th conference we find that the delegation that had gone to the meeting of the association had found it prudent not to hand in the letter seeking admission. This was before the founding of the Florida Association, and no indication is given as to what association it was, or what they found that caused them to hold back on participating.

It was also at this November meeting that "R. J. Mays was set apart to the full gospel ministry and arrangements made for his ordination in Monticello on Friday before the fourth Lord's day in this same month. A later entry in the minutes shows that this ceremony took place as planned." Another entry in Browning's history shows the significance of the events concluding that year: "By every standard it had been a year of glory for the new Church. Two ministers had been ordained through the efforts of this Church. The membership had grown from thirteen to seventeen. The Church had been fully constituted and staffed with proper officials. The gospel had been preached and the Lord's Supper observed. In withholding its letter at the associational meeting, the Church had shown that marked independence of thought and action that was to distinguish it throughout its long history. The dawning new year of 1842 found the Gospel standard planted firmly and the light of hope burning very brightly."²⁴

Truly "there came a man" that God was beginning to use in a mighty way. We're talking about a young man now just thirty-three years old who had left a comfortable home in South Carolina, faced the rigors of mosquitoes, malaria, and marauding Indians in the Hickstown Swamp, and had now built a beautiful plantation home and was well on his way to being used of God in the building of at least six Baptist churches, a Baptist association, and a state Baptist convention.

Because of the completeness of Browning's history of the Concord Church no more will be given here, except to say that its founding father, R. J. Mays, later served the church as pastor on two occasions: the first term was from 1843 to 1846, and the second from 1857 to 1860.

The Monticello Baptist Church

The reader might have wondered why earlier it was said that the subject of our paper was ordained at the Monticello Church. The answer may be found in a history of Jefferson County, which states that the first Baptist church in Monticello was constituted in October of 1841, with R. J. Mays and Jesse Goodman (of the Elizabeth Church) along with John Broome officiating. *The church then called Reverend Richard J. Mays to be their first pastor.* This would also have been the first church served by Mays, unless the information

²⁴ Browning, "History of the Concord Baptist Church," p. 12.

about Elizabeth is correct. It was evidently because of this that the Concord Church was asked to ordain him, and that the ordination was held at Monticello. Early services were held at the Jefferson Academy, and later in the Presbyterian Church, where monthly worship was observed.²⁵ He apparently served the church as pastor until around 1845.

The Liberty Baptist Church

It was during this same period of time that Mays also had a part in the history of the Liberty Baptist Church, just across the state line in Brooks County, Georgia. Although this is beyond the announced scope of this paper, it is included because of the proximity of the church to Florida, and because of some relationships that may have later involved the formation of the Florida Baptist Association.

An interesting (and perhaps revealing) sidelight to this topic is that the founding impetus for this church came from a woman, Sister Nancy Hagan. In 1841 the Ocklochnee Anti-Missionary Baptist Association added a statement to their original Articles of Faith in which they declared non-fellowship with any member who engaged or believed in Sunday-school work, missions, theological schools or any other “new-fangled institutions of the day.” As a result, Sister Hagan, a resident of Thomas (now Brooks) County, asked for her letter from Mount Moriah Church, and at her own request was excommunicated. This is the guiding influence from which the new Florida Association would be formed in 1843. Because she was missionary in spirit and since she could not exercise this gift in her former church, she conceived the idea of organizing a church in which she might follow her conscientious convictions on the subject of missions. The records show that the following eight people joined in organizing the Liberty Baptist Church: Elisha Peck Smith, R. T. Stanaland, James I. Baker, Mrs. Nancy Hagan, Mrs. Sarah Ann Groover, Mrs. Mary Smith, Mrs. Amanda Denmark and Sam Whitfield. Elders R. J. Mays, Jesse Goodman (who had been pastor of the Elizabeth and Monticello churches) and Thomas Long formed the Presbytery that organized the church. “The first pastor of the church was Elder R. J. May [sic] who served 1841-1845.”²⁶

It should be noted that the dates of service here overlap with the aforementioned service to the Monticello church. This was possible because few of the churches were full time in that day; in fact most met only monthly. It is interesting to speculate that, because of Mays’ involvement with this church and Sister Hagan, it could have been that the brothers from the Concord Church had visited the Ocklochnee anti-Missionary Baptist Association when they decided to withhold their credentials asking for membership! Though he has not seen it proposed, this writer thinks it highly likely. Truly the missionary cause was championed by R. J. Mays throughout his ministry, and it is certain he would have no part with those who opposed it.

The Pine Grove Baptist Church

A number of years go by during the busiest period of the life of this “Pioneer, Preacher, and Patriot,” (as his granddaughter, Patty Mays so aptly called him) before the

²⁵ McRory, and Barrows, *History of Jefferson County, Florida*, Monticello Kiwanis Club, 1935.

²⁶ Huxford, Folks, *The History of Brooks County Georgia*, compiled under the auspices of Hannah Clarke Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution, Quitman, Georgia, 1948.

founding of the last church associated with R. J. Mays. That is the Piney Grove Baptist Church (as it was called then), now known as the Pine Grove Baptist Church. “The organizing council was composed of Elders R. J. Mays, Ryan Frier, and S. C. Craft. Constituent members were Jarvis J. Frier, Nancy Frier, Hiram Roberts, Mary Warren, Sarah A. Warren, Henderson M. Frier, and Elizabeth Woodward. The first pastor was S. C. Craft, the first deacon was J. T. Frier, and the first clerk was H. M. Frier.”²⁷ The annual of the Florida Baptist association shows that “Petitionary Letters being called for, one was presented from ‘Piney Grove’ Church, and after being read, and the faith of the church approved of, her delegates were admitted as members of the body” November 14, 1856.²⁸ “The church made good progress in these early days, growing to a membership of 84 during the first four years. It early showed an interest in expanding its area of influence, and soon established a mission at a schoolhouse near the residence of Brother M. J. Williams, which in 1865 became the Macedonia Baptist Church. Brother H. M. Frier was ordained to the ministry in 1861 at the request of the Midway Baptist Church. This, of course, was the beginning year of the Civil War, and in the church conference of March 21, 1863, the clerk was directed to make a list of its members who had enlisted in the Army of the Confederacy, and to ascertain the dates, if possible, of the deaths of any who had been killed or had died. It appears that this list was kept open to the close of the war, since the statement is given that fifteen members of the newly founded church went, and only five returned. Such were the trials of those early days.”²⁹

Located on the Rocky Ford Road, four miles north of Madison, this open country church was about fourteen miles from Mays’ Clifton Mansion. It is fitting at this time that we introduce another name closely associated with that of Mays through these building years. Samuel C. Craft, a member of the organizing council, also became the first pastor of the new church. A search of the records of the Florida Baptist Association (organized in 1843) shows that the team of R. J. Mays, as Moderator, and S. C. Craft, as clerk, served as a guiding hand for many years in the work of the historic association. It appears likely that Craft, who is called “a frontier preacher who ranged far and wide over North Florida preaching the gospel and teaching school as well,”³⁰ might have had a part in the establishment and building of as many, if not more, churches than did Mays. He was a full time preacher, teacher, and colporteur, and the record shows he often moved to the different church fields where he was called to serve, as well as working with the association as clerk and area missionary. More specific information on this intriguing character will be given in the next chapter.

²⁷ Heard, Phil, *A Summary of the History of the Pine Grove Baptist Church of Madison County, Florida, 1856 to 2003*, Jan. 19, 2003

²⁸ *The Florida Baptist Association Annual Minutes*, 1856.

²⁹ Heard.

³⁰ *Madison County Carrier*, article on “Greenville’s ‘Church on the Hill,’” May 12, 1997.

Chapter Four: Laying the Foundation for the Future

Local congregations are the basis for the polity of Baptist churches. Organized from the bottom up, there is no hierarchy of authority or organization. But historically Baptist associations have been essential to uniting churches for the cause of missions, fellowship, and other common causes. In 1624 associations evolved in England during the rule of Oliver Cromwell. Both General and Particular Baptists gathered area churches in associations in order to “steady one another in doctrine and explain themselves unitedly to the world, to aid one another in time of need, and especially, to propagate their views.”³¹ The associational model was reproduced in 1707 in Philadelphia, and then spread to Sandy Creek, N. C., and Charleston, S. C., in the 1750s. From associations, state conventions were formed in the early 1800s, and the Southern Baptist Convention was established in the middle of that century.³² This brief background of Baptist organizational life is necessary to put the events of 1843-1854 in context in the life of Richard J. Mays.

The Florida Baptist Association

The unique polity of Baptist life must have been well known to this pioneer preacher, for he showed his understanding of and appreciation for these models throughout his ministry. The origins of the oldest continuously operating association in Florida are not extant in their own records, which exist only from 1845, but E. B. Browning has preserved for us this information from the records of the Concord church, which shows the leading role that R. J. Mays played in that event. Mays presented to the church in conference on Sunday, January 15th, 1843, a letter that lays the groundwork for the establishment of the new Baptist unit. We quote in full:

“In consequence of a recent separation of several of the churches from the Ocklocknee Association a meeting was held at Shiloh Church to take into consideration the propriety of forming a new Baptist Association of the churches who wish to be allowed the liberty of conscience.

“It was resolved that the new association be convened at the Indian Springs Church, Leon County, Florida, on Thursday before the first Sabbath in March next, and that a letter of invitation be given to the churches favorable to this association. The Churches will please send two delegates with a letter containing the wish of the church to become members also a statement of the number in full fellowship and the time of holding their meeting.”

It was signed by Thomas Lang, Secretary Pro Tem. The Concord Church voted to accept the invitation and elected R. J. Mays and S. Linton as the delegates to the proposed meeting. According to Browning this letter gives information not otherwise available as to the founding of the association, namely the time, March of 1843, and the place, Indian Springs Church in Leon

³¹ Whitely, W. T., *A History of British Baptists*, Charles Griffin & Company, London, 1923, as quoted by Robert Reccord, President of North American Mission Board, SBC, on the associational bulletin cover.

³² Reccord, Robert.

County.³³ The letter also shows the significance of the separation from the Ocklocknee Association mentioned in the section concerning the establishment of the Liberty Church in Brooks County (see p. 11).

The Historical Table of the Meetings of the Florida Baptist Association shows that R. J. Mays served the new association as moderator in 1844, 1845, and 1847. The aforementioned Sam C. Craft served as Clerk in 1843, 1844, 1845, and then after a break of four years, from 1849 through 1858.³⁴ It may seem a diversion from our stated purpose in following the life of R. J. Mays, but because of the close relationship of Mays and Craft as Moderator and Clerk, it certainly seems likely that our Mr. Mays was mentor and benefactor for this busy itinerate minister as an extension of his own ministry. Because of this the writer gives a brief account of his ministry in the Appendix of this paper. Especially of interest to lovers of church history will be an insightful appeal to church clerks to preserve the minutes of their fledgling churches so that they may be collected by him and preserved for history.³⁵

The Southern Baptist Convention

The year 1845 was a momentous year in the state of Florida, as well as in the lives of Baptists. In 1838 R. G. Mays had been sent as a delegate to the Constitutional Convention, which met at the town of St. Joseph.³⁶ The constitution, which was formed, was adopted in January 1839, and finally, in March 1845, Florida was admitted to the Union as a slave state. Clifton was the voting place for county precinct 5. Now the territory which had first been a home to Indians, then the property of Spain, was now one of the United States, at least for a few years before secession to become a part of the Confederacy.

Another momentous event that took place during that year was the founding of the Southern Baptist Convention at Augusta, Georgia. That this preacher in the Florida wilderness was aware of things going on upon the larger stage of history is apparent in a letter printed in the *Georgia Christian Index* of August 22, 1845. The editor introduces the letter as follows: “ ‘A Voice from Florida’ ---The following letter contains useful reflections and some important information. We publish it entire in the Index, though probably not intended for publication. --- Bro. Sands will please note for his own benefit what is said of our Southern Baptist Convention.” “---Clifton, July 31st, 1845. *Bro. Baker*...So far as I have heard any expression from the brethren, the course of the Southern Convention at Augusta is entirely approved, so far as it went, we think there should have been an entire separation, a clean sweep in all the Societies, half way work never answers well. The entire responsibility, would then have rested on the South, and I am persuaded would have been felt and responded to. As it is I am afraid our affections will be divided, and many good brethren that love their pockets well and their contents a good deal better, will find an excuse for not doing their duty. Let us hope for the best. ---R. J. Mays.”³⁷

³³ Browning, pp. 14-15.

³⁴ Campbell, Doak S., *The Florida Baptist Association, The First Hundred Years 1842-1942*, Appendix, The Executive Committee of the Florida Baptist Association, 1943.

³⁵ See Samuel C. Craft, Appendix A of this paper

³⁶ Mays, p. 26.

³⁷ *The Christian Index*, August 22, 1845.

The Florida Baptist Convention

Without a doubt the event for which Richard J. Mays is most remembered, and the event upon which he had the largest impact, was the founding of the Florida Baptist Convention. In writing the history of the Concord Church Browning introduces it in this way: "The call for the organization of the state Convention was issued by way of a resolution adopted by the Florida Association in a meeting held November 22, 1853, with Olive Church, Thomas County, Georgia. The delegates from Concord to this session were Elder R. J. Mays and Francis S. McCall, chosen by ballot of the Church with Bretheren Joseph Densler and Wm. T. Johnson as their alternates. This action was implemented by the appointment of committees to correspond with the West Florida and Alachua Associations...."³⁸ The Florida Baptist Association convened with the Concord Church on Nov. 18-21. The Association first attended to its own affairs, and elected ten delegates to cooperate with the delegates of the West Florida and Alachua Associations. The committee as appointed was composed of R. J. Mays, W. B. Cooper, B. S. Fuller, W. H. Goldwire, W. Blewett, D. G. Daniel, H. R. Ardis, S. C. Craft, John Cason and T. W. Terrell. Those appointed to the historic task then journeyed the short distance from the church to Mays' Clifton mansion.

Historian Browning says it well: "That evening the lights burned brightly in Clifton Mansion, for the committees, acting under instructions as to the object to be achieved, met in the parlor of this famous ante-bellum home. The group was called to order by Elder R. J. Mays, presumably chairman of the delegation from the Florida Association. Elder Mays was named first, as you have observed. This together with the fact that he was elected President of the Convention upon the completion of organization is indicative of his being the chairman." He then quotes Mays' granddaughter, Patty Mays: "...so numerous were the brethren and sisters who gathered from far and near for the occasion, that the accommodations of the ten bedrooms were not sufficient and mattresses had to be placed on the floor in every available space, and the guests fed in relays in both dining rooms."³⁹

Perhaps here it would be well to make an observation, for whatever value it might be. There is a well known drawing of the mansion made from an old small photo and descriptions of family members, by Seeber Fowler. The account listed in Sims' *History of Madison County*, and in other places, describes the house as having "a large two-story central section with a one-story wing on each end. From the rear extended two one-story ells, one containing two rooms, the other, four rooms. The central section had two rooms, each twenty feet square, on each floor, with a large hall/stair landing in between. There was a large, one story front porch with six columns, set on brick pillars, and banisters. On the back a latticed porch extended between the two wings which created a court enclosed on three sides. Extensive gardens covering six acres surrounded the house.... In 1931 the mansion was completely destroyed by fire, and the site is now in the middle of a field, with only an occasional piece of brick being turned up by a plow to mark its location."⁴⁰ An even more complete description appears in Browning's history of Concord, with much the same information. (It is probable that Mrs. Sims got her information from Browning, whom she honors in her dedication.) However, the description of Mays' granddaughter, Patty, is significantly different. She credits her information as coming from her father, Thomas Williams Mays, who was Richard's son and her mother, Patty Simkins Mays,

³⁸ Browning, p. 27.

³⁹ Browning, p. 28.

⁴⁰ Sims, pp. 49-50.

who went as a bride to live at Clifton during the war. Her description says that the mansion consisted of one main *three-story* building with *two-story* wings on either side, long verandas connecting them above, below, and across the front. This would make more believable her description of “*ten bedrooms*, wide hallways, and various apartments for living, dining, and carrying on the activities of a comfortable, busy, hospitable family life.”⁴¹ This is a considerably larger home than the former description, and the illustration which is based upon it. In later days sections of the old home were removed as they deteriorated, which might account for the differing descriptions. We are glad to report that today, as opposed to the time when Mrs. Sims described, there is an appropriate marker on the spot where the historic home stood, and the present owner has made the site accessible to the public. A historical marker is also planned to go on State Road 146 identifying the location of the home, in addition to the ones that are in the city park in Madison and on Base Street beside the First Baptist Church sanctuary.

Another significant item of interest is the dining table around which the framers of the new state convention sat to do their historic work. According to Patty Mays, “...the outstanding feature of the Mansion was the state dining room on the right of the entrance hall with the great circular dining table of solid mahogany base surmounted by a one piece marble top, six feet in diameter.” The table still exists and is the property of Parkhill Mays, Jr., in Lakeland Florida. In a letter to Linda Demott dated March 16, 2000, he says,

“The marble top table which measures 6 feet 2 inches across and weighs about 1,000 pounds and around which the Baptist Association [Convention] of Florida was formed, is now in my breakfast room in Lakeland.... This table which was brought to Madison County in the 1820’s or 1830’s from New York via St. Marks was moved from Madison County, probably in the late 1800’s, to Greenville, South Carolina, with a daughter, Mary Mays, who married Fox Beatty. The marble top table stayed in the old Beatty house in Greenville until about 1948, when the Beatty family passed away and the old home in the middle of Greenville, South Carolina, was relocated to the outskirts and became a home for the Garden Center.

“My father went to Greenville with a farm trailer and moved the table back to Miccosukee where we then lived and where it stayed until about 1954 when my parents moved back to the old house in Monticello that was built by D. H. Mays, son of R. J. Mays, in 1885. My parents stayed in that house until about 1975 when the house burned all around the table, but left it standing and unhurt. I went up and moved the table down to Lakeland in about 1975, where it has been since that time.”⁴² Baptists, of course, don’t put much store in relics, but if they did, this table would certainly be a high and holy tribute to a glorious past. As evidenced by the Florida Baptist Historical Society, however, Baptists do indeed honor history, and reverence the story surrounding this table, and the historic event that it represents.

The Concord Baptist Association (?)

With one other sidelight of history, which has about it the slight tinge of mystery, we will close this chapter. In the minutes of the Florida Baptist Association for 1859 there is an item stating that the association “appointed a committee consisting of Brethren S. C. Craft, W. Blewitt, O. E. McKeown, G. W. Bostick and R. Frier to take into consideration the propriety of dividing our Association and report on Monday morning.” The entry for Nov. 18, 1859 states, “Corinth, Midway, Mill Creek, Benevolence, Pickett Lake, Mt. Pleasant, Piny Grove, Nashville,

⁴¹ Mays, p. 25.

⁴² Mays, C. Parkhill, Jr., in a letter to Mrs. Linda Gramling Demott, March 16, 2000.

Madison, and Finholloway Churches petitioned for dismissal from our body to form a new association. It was ordered that “said petitions be granted; and, whereas, there is reason to think that other churches, which have not asked for letters, may wish to join the new organization contemplated, therefore, Resolved, that should any choose to do so, their action in the matter will not be regarded as discourteous but that they will have the approbation of this body for doing so. [It is expected, however, that those churches which withdraw will notify this body at our next session.]”⁴³ These churches were mostly from the northeastern portion of the association, including some from Lowndes County, Georgia. The following year the report of the association meeting at the Liberty Church in Georgia showed none of these churches on their statistical tables, including Concord, Madison, and Piny Grove. In fact, the minutes show that “Bro. Mays was received as Messenger of the Concord Association,” and they agreed to correspond with the Concord Association. One can only assume that such an association was formed with these churches being a part. Because of the Civil War there were no reports for the years 1863-1866. However, in the minutes for 1867, the first report after the war, Madison, Concord, Hopewell, and Pine Grove [no longer shown as “Piney Grove”] were once more listed in the statistical reports. Evidently the new association faltered with the onset of the war, and was no more. There are no records in either the Florida Convention or the Georgia Convention mentioning a Concord Baptist Association.

⁴³ *The Florida Baptist Association Annual Minutes*, 1859.

Chapter Five: A Life Well Lived

How do you sum up the life of a giant among men? Perhaps the words of Jesus concerning John the Baptist might be appropriate: “John was a lamp that burned and gave light, and you chose for a time to enjoy his light” (John 5:35 NIV).

We have looked mainly to his actions and his accomplishments thus far. Let us now consider some evidences of his thought, his concerns, and his heart through glimpses we have remaining in documents and letters.

Using the Association for Education and Edification

In a day when few Baptist preachers in areas such as territorial Florida had the opportunities of formal education, Richard Mays, who apparently had little formal education himself, was very keenly interested in ministering to the ministers. Patty Mays said of her grandfather, “Richard was a forth-right, honest, stern, yet kindly man. He studied his Bible unceasingly, and in the home of a granddaughter, near Greenville, is the old walnut desk, at which he would sit for long hours reading, writing, thinking, seeking for the true interpretation of the Word.”⁴⁴

He seemed to find in the association a unique opportunity to share his passion for Bible study and a correct interpretation of the Scriptures. He instituted in the annual report a “circular letter” which was usually written by the moderator for the year on a doctrinal topic of current interest. Much like the Apostle Paul, these letters were meant to be read by the churches to bring information and enlightenment. One year the subject seemed fascinatingly current---it dealt with Arminianism versus Calvinism. In it he said, “Those that are opposed to the work of benevolence, that is to missions, thinking that Missionaries are Armenians or Free Will Baptists, have taken themselves almost entirely to preaching about the fundamental truths of the Bible---neglecting practical religion. They seem to think we are unconverted, or that we are great backsliders from the gospel. That is one extreme. Missionary Baptists, ever anxious for the conversion of sinners to God, have become almost entirely practical in their preaching, and frequently neglect the inculcation of primary truth on the hearts of their brethren.” With other such practical exhortations, the associational annual report, which was duly printed professionally each year, dealt with the felt needs of the ministry.

Another way that the association sought to educate the people was through something called “the union meetings.” Typically held on fifth Sundays, these were meetings when each church would elect delegates to attend a meeting with other churches in a given area. In the report of one such series of meetings, R. J. Mays said, “...it is very desirable that there should exist among us a oneness of faith, and uniformity of practice, so far as attainable in our present state, and as those meetings are admirably adapted by essays and discussions to elicit and establish truth, we recommend at least for the present year, the abolishing of district lines and the appointment of meetings as follows.” He then suggests meetings at Elizabeth, Oak Grove, Thomasville, and Troupville, with a separate subject for discussion at each one, and a different preacher to bring the essay as a basis for the discussion. He later wrote the *Christian Index* giving the plan followed, and some of the subjects for discussion.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Mays, p. 26.

⁴⁵ *The Christian Index*, September 23, 1847.

Using State Baptist Papers for Debate on Current Issues

Speaking of the *Christian Index*, Mays himself was often chairman of the publications committee of the association, and would feature existing state Baptist Papers from Tennessee, Georgia, and other states, which he believed would be beneficial for Florida Baptists to subscribe to and read. Editors of these papers would be invited to attend the annual meetings and bring reports.

That Mays earnestly followed this practice himself is seen in several letters, and exchanges of letters, with the editor of the *Index*. Again, one is particularly relevant to the present age, and is headlined by the editor, "Discussions About Creeds." Mays begins, "I have been, for a considerable time, a careful, and I hope a prayerful reader of the *Index*. I have observed the various communications of your correspondents, your editorials, etc., on the many subjects presented.... In former times it was charged against a certain people that they were carnal, and walked as men---that there existed among them envyings, strife and divisions; one was for Paul, another for Apollos, another for Cephas, another for Christ. If then, this was charged, and truly charged, as an evidence of the predominance of the carnal affections, what shall be said in this day, when one is for the Philadelphia Confession, another for the New Hampshire, and another for none at all, but the New Testament.... I hold it to be a sinful waste of Christian energy to be disputing and controverting, falling out by the way, while sinners are perishing for lack of the bread of life.... I like that confession which results in a good profession, that makes the best Christians, the Bible being the standard by which we are to be tried. In hope of peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, I remain yours in Christ, RICHARD J. MAYS."⁴⁶ He must have touched some nerves, for editor Baker replied in that issue, and the discussion was continued in the issue for June 24 of the same year.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ *Christian Index*, Apr. 10, 1847.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, June 27, 1847.

The Treatment of Slaves

Let us touch briefly before closing on one of the critical issues of the day in which Richard Mays lived, and the place in which he lived: the plantation south. There can be no doubt that he, and the majority of his Baptist brothers, were the product of their times. Like the Apostle Paul, they didn't condemn slavery, or protest against it. Instead, as previously mentioned, Mays and his fellow planters was dependant on the unfortunate institution for their livelihood. But, again like Paul, there is some enlightenment in the relationship we see between this man and his slaves, or "servants," as they were usually called. One is that they were encouraged to become Christians, and when they were, they were welcomed into the church. Many of the churches of the Florida Association had as many black members as they did white. They were evangelized and baptized into the fellowship of the church. Though certainly not equal by today's standards, they were well treated by the standards of their day.

His feelings for his slaves are best seen in his last will and testament. In it he says,

"I would most earnestly enjoin on all as the experience of my past life, industry, honesty, temperance, and justice to everyone, a just economy that will live within ones increase with regular annual settlements with each other and everyone else. Let this be especially regarded that they may preserve their character from suspicion and do that which is right and just to all. In addition I commit my Negroes, not as property, but as human beings to be treated and cared for as such as a charge from God our Maker to them, which must not be neglected. It is duly sanctioned by your interest and their welfare. I charge you all before God. See that with kindness not foolish indulgence, and proper consideration for their circumstances and condition. This obligation is felt and discharged."

---Richard J. Mays
March 23, 1864⁴⁸

⁴⁸ *Will of Richard Johnson Mays*, transcribed and provided courtesy of Elmer's Genealogical Library. (See Appendix B for complete text; see Paisley, *The Red Hills of Florida*, for fuller treatment of the slave issue.)

Conclusion

Richard Johnson Mays died in 1864 following a long illness. His grave is appropriately marked in the cemetery of Concord Church, with which his life was so intertwined. Surely it was said of him when he went to his heavenly reward, *“Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord”* (Matthew 25:21).

Family

Because of the concentration of this paper on the involvement of R. J. Mays with the Baptist cause in Florida, little has been said about the rest of the family, especially his wife, Eliza, and their eleven children. According to granddaughter Patty, “No account of the life of Richard Johnson Mays would be complete or just that did not include a tribute to his wife, Eliza, who was an able and worthy helpmate, and in [her] own right, a very remarkable woman.” Despite the young age of fourteen when she married, she developed into an industrious, practical, woman who was an able helper for him. “She was his able assistant. She managed all the affairs of the home and children, all the activities of the premises, and as Richard’s health began to fail, a great part of the plantation responsibilities besides.”⁴⁹ Surely she was worthy of greater mention than the purpose of this paper will allow. The biography by her granddaughter will provide that for the reader who is interested in knowing more. The same must be said for the children. We will mention only those who have some bearing on the subject or in providing the information consulted.

The fifth son, Thomas Williams, graduated “with first honors” during the early years of Mercer University in Macon. He served in the Confederate army, and married Patty Simkins. They lived at Blythe Wood plantation near Greenville. It was their daughter Patty who provided such rich material about the family as has previously been referenced.

John the Baptist, mentioned in the introduction, attended Washington and Lee University during the presidency of Gen. Robert E. Lee. He married Christine Bailey of Lyndhurst Plantation in Jefferson County, and lived there the greater part of his life. They have descendants in the Madison area.

Dannitte Hill [the second son by that name, the first having died at age eight] also attended Washington and Lee with John. He became a well known resident of Monticello, was prominent in politics, served in the Florida Legislature and then two terms in the United States House of representatives. He married Emmala Bellamy Parkhill. It is their grandson, attorney Parkhill Mays Jr., who, at the time of this writing, has the historic marble top table.

Eliza remained at Clifton for eighteen years following her husband’s death. She faithfully endeavored to fulfill his hopes and dreams for family, church, and property. She left Clifton in 1883 to live with her daughter Mary Caroline in Greenville, S.C. She died in 1886.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Mays, Patty, p. 27.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p.19, 25-26. (See Appendix C for a complete list of the children).

Heritage

The great God of the Universe, Creator, Redeemer, All Wise and All Powerful, has all means by which to accomplish His purposes on earth. And yet experience and history show that He chooses to use imperfect but willing vessels to accomplish great things in the moving pageant of life.

Florida Baptists may be grateful to the Holy, righteous, and loving God that “There Came A Man” such as Richard Johnson Mays to Florida.

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APPENDIX A: Samuel C. Craft

Records show that Samuel C. Craft served as pastor at various time of churches at Concord, Monticello, Pine Grove, Hopewell, Shilo (Greenville), as well as churches outside the boundaries of the association. He also assisted in the formation of several of these churches. In addition, he served the association as Colporteur (traveling purveyor of religious books and materials) and as "Missionary Proper." As such he submitted a report to one of the annual sessions giving 2798 miles traveled, 144 sermons preached, 75 conversions, and 42 received by letter. He collected from the churches for domestic missionary operations, the sum of \$169.68. His home address was given as Clifton at times, indicating that he may have lived with the Mays family on occasion.

Another contribution of this brother, which will delight the heart of any historian, is a letter taken from one of the early annual reports, which, with profound insight as to their place in history, makes the following observations and request:

NOTICE

To the Brethren of the Churches composing the Florida Association:

By referring to our statistics, you will discover that we, the present generation, are yearly passing away, and soon, *very* soon, our successors will be called to fill our places. Our children are growing up, and now and then, the Lord is giving us one, as "alive from the dead."

Now, by and by, the enquiry will frequently arise in their minds, "*What* did our fathers do?" and "*How* did they do it?"

The means are extant, *now*, to answer the enquiries; but in a few years, more, they will have been forever lost. Now, I propose, as far as practicable, to collect these means together, by the next session of the Association, in order that some writer, in future time, may be able to give to our children, a history of the rise and progress of the Missionary Baptists, in Florida and Southern Georgia.

Upon the importance, then, of this subject, I would predicate an earnest appeal to my brethren, who may have a copy of our minutes, for the years 18-3-4-5-6-7-8 to send them to me. If desired I will return them at the next Association. Also, I would be glad to ascertain when your church was constituted, the presbytery, and the successive pastors, thence down to the present; and any other information connected with the progress and interests of your church, would be thankfully received.

Will not some competent brother, in each church, volunteer to contribute to the service of posterity, by giving the desired information.

Address me at "Clifton, Madison County, Florida."

SAM. C. CRAFT.

Clerk, Florida Baptist Association.

[Copied *verbatim* from the minutes of the Florida Baptist Association, meeting with Liberty Church in Thomas County, GA, Nov. 15, 1856]

APPENDIX B: Will of Richard Johnson Mays

As life is at best uncertain, and we should be prepared for its close by having our house “set in order.” I do hereby ordain and declare this my last will and Testament herein revoking all former wills, for the disposition of my effects.

In the first place as an humble believer in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, the saviour of sinners and as Jehovah Jesus, God manifest in the flesh---God with us---God for us, I commit myself body, soul and spirit into his care as one that is able to keep that which is committed to his trust until the great day of God Almighty.

I hereby nominate and appoint my beloved and only wife Eliza Anna Mays, the mother of my children, the executrix of this my last will and testament; and to her I give a child’s part of all my possessions, real and personal, with the addition of all the household and kitchen furniture, the carriage horses and carriage in which they work, and her share of the land to include the homestead and improvements thereon.

I give to each one of my sons in their own right and subject to their own disposition a distributive share of my estate, to be equitably assigned them as they become of age.

I also give to my daughter Mary Caroline Mays a distribution share, as to her brother, to be given her, on her marriage or becoming of age; with the condition that it belongs to her and the lawful issue of her body, her children; and dying without lawful issue, she may dispose of it by will; if not so disposed of to revert to my estate, to be equally divided among the heirs to the same. And I desire the estate kept together and divided as the child becomes entitled to it.

My wife and executrix can associate either of my sons or any friend she may please, with her in management of the estate. I would most earnestly enjoin on all, as the experience of my past life, industry, honesty, temperance, and justice to everyone, a just economy that will live within our increase with regular annual settlements with each other and every one else [underlines in original text]. Let this be especially regarded that they may preserve their character from suspicion, and do that which is right and just to all. In addition, I commit my negroes not as property but as human beings to be treated and cared for as such as a charge from God our Maker to them which must not be neglected; it is duty sanctioned by your interest, and their welfare. I charge you all before God see that with kindness, not foolish indulgence, and proper consideration for their circumstances and condition this obligation is felt and discharged.

As the last in order but first in importance so live as remembering you must die. You will be prepared for it and my God of his infinite mercy, so keep us all as to preserve as unto eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.

And finally let me enjoin upon all the tenderest affections, the amplest justice, with perfect honesty in all your dealings and relations, remembering that unity founded on justice is strength perfected.

A. H. Cole
R. G. Mays
T. S. Mays

Richard J. Mays
March 23, 1864

[The above transcribed by the writer from a true copy of the will furnished by George Cason, from: Nov. 1855 – Aug. 1915; Wills and Letters Testamentary

Madison Courthouse Apr. 20, 1992, Book B Madison Co. Fla.;
Minor corrections and additions were made in punctuation and capitalization for clarity.]

APPENDIX C: Children of Richard Johnson and Eliza Anna Mays

1. Elizabeth Williams, died in infancy
2. Sara Caroline, died at the age of 12
3. Richard Johnson II, studied medicine, served in the Confederate Army; married (1) Mary Finlayson, (2) Gussie Finlayson, sisters of Glendower Plantation, Jefferson County; lived at "Mays Island."
4. Dannitte Hill, died at 8 years of age.
5. Thomas Williams, graduated with first honors from Mercer University, 1861; volunteered immediately, and served throughout the war; was in the Battle of Olustee and the Battle of Natural Bridge; married Patty Simkins, only daughter of Col. Eldred James Simkins of Edgefield, South Carolina, and Patty Bythwood Simkins of Beaufort, South Carolina, lived at "Blythe Wood" plantation, near Greenville.
6. James Warren, volunteered, and served in the Confederate Army until the end of the war, during which time he contracted malaria and died soon after his return home.
7. Samuel Pope, served in the Confederate Army the last year of the war; married Oregon Garmany of Savannah; lived the greater part of his life on the plantation now known as the "Dewey Farm."
8. John the Baptist, attended Washington and Lee University for a year or two, during the presidency of Gen. Robert E. Lee; married Christine Bailey of "Lyndhurst Plantation," Jefferson County, lived there the greater part of his life.
9. Waddy Thompson, died at three years of age.
10. Dannitte Hill (2), attended Washington and Lee with John; very successful in business; acquired considerable wealth; prominent in politics, was in the Florida Legislature for several years, and was in the United States House of Representatives for two terms; married Emmala Bellamy Parkhill of Tuscawilla Plantation, Leon County; made his home in Monticello.
11. Mary Caroline, educated at the girls school, conducted by her aunt, Mrs. Caroline Mays Brevard at Brevard, North Carolina; married John Edgeworth Beattie of Greenville, South Carolina; she became a member of the Episcopal Church, and taught classes of boys in the Sunday School for nearly forty years. When she died in 1938, the most significant tribute to her long and useful Christian life, was the long precession of men – former Sunday School pupils – who walked in her funeral cortege.

[Patty Mays wrote the above material, along with much of the family information referenced and quoted in this paper. So significant is her contribution that the following quote from the Foreword will be of interest to the reader:

"The material for this article has been carefully checked, and is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, essentially correct.... Most of the South Carolina data I obtained personally, from family records held in that state, from old records in the State Library at Columbia, from La Borde's History of South Carolina College, McReady's History of South Carolina, and other authentic sources. The material concerning Richard, Eliza, Clifton Mansion, and Old Concord Church has been drawn from stories and descriptions given me by my father, Thomas Williams Mays, and my mother, Patty Simkins Mays (who went, as a bride, to live at Clifton during the War) and from personal recollections of visits to my grandmother when I was a child. Patty Mays, Blythe Wood Plantation, Greenville, Florida, August 7, 1941."]