

Florida Baptist Historical Society
MONOGRAPH

May, 1982

Florida Baptist Hymns

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Address Presented to the
Florida Baptist Historical Society

Stetson University,
DeLand, Florida

May 8, 1982



Published by the
Florida Baptist Historical Society
Graceville, Florida

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Florida Baptist Hymns **David F. Gross**

Florida Baptists are a singing people. Our hymns have been written by men and women who have lived around the world and throughout the ages. There are, however, hymns that we sing that were written by persons living at one time or another in Florida, both Baptists and non-Baptists. We will look at hymns written by Florida Baptists because we claim them as our own, and also at hymns written by non-Baptists, for I believe we can stake a claim on them because of their usage in Baptist Churches.

Many different hymnals have been used in Florida Baptist Churches, but there seems to have been only four that have been used widely: "The Modern Hymnal" (Robert H. Coleman and Broadman Press, 1926), "The Broadman Hymnal" (Broadman Press, 1940), "Baptist Hymnal" (Convention Press, 1956), and "Baptist Hymnal" (Convention Press, 1975). Prior to the "Modern Hymnal," our Florida Baptist Churches used a wide variety of both hardbound and paperback hymnals from a variety of publishers. However, no one hymnal was used by a large number of churches. Because of their wide usage, we will look at the hymns written by Floridians in these four hymnals, those written by Baptists first, and then, hymns written by non-Baptists.

"Jesus, Friend of Thronging Pilgrims" stands alone as a hymn written by a Florida Baptist native while he was living in Florida. Paul Langston (born Marianna, Florida, 1928) is one of only two Florida native hymnwriters covered by this paper. He resides in DeLand, having served on the faculty of Stetson University since 1960 and as Dean of the Music School of Stetson since 1963. He wrote the tune to the hymn prior to the compilation of the "Baptist Hymnal" (1975) at the request of its editor, William F. Reynolds. Dr. Reynolds wanted a new tune for a hymn text written twenty years previous by W. Nantlais Williams. The tune was written by Dr. Langston in Deland, Florida, at Stetson University.

Charles Mash (born Magnolia, Iowa, 1886) in 1932, at the age of 46, moved to Orlando, Florida, where he took a position as Professor of Organ at the Orlando College of Music. Later he became University Organist at the University of Florida, Gainesville, and Organist-choirmaster at Gainesville's First Baptist Church. In 1935 he moved to California, living there until his death in 1956. He wrote the music for "One Day" at the age of 22 while working with Dr. Wilbur Chapman, author of the text, at a Bible Conference at Stony Brook, Long Island, New York.

James Cleveland Moore (born Draketown, Georgia, 1888), as a young man, attended the University of Florida, Gainesville, and pastored the Hawthorne Baptist Church, Hawthorne, Florida. He spent most of his life pastoring Baptist Churches in south Georgia, where he died in 1962. He wrote both words and music to "If You Only Knew Him," "Thou, O Christ of Calvary," and "Where We'll Never Grow Old."

Rooks Rawls (born Lake Butler, Florida, 1916), like Paul Langston, is a native of Florida, but wrote both the words and music to "Take My Life, Lead Me Lord" in 1968 on a plane flight from Nashville, Tennessee to Dallas, Texas. He has been a leader in Southern Baptist denominational work since the age of 22. He has served as an Associate in the Church Training Department, Georgia Baptist Convention, 1938-43, State Secretary of Church Training and Student Work, Alabama 1943-44, and since 1944 has been with the Baptist Sunday School Board, Nashville, Tennessee, where he has served as Director of Young People's 1944-52, Manager of the Nashville Baptist Book Store 1952-55, Director of Associational Work, Church Training Department, 1955-64, Director of Field Services, Church Recreation Department, 1964-72, and Coordinator of Special Projects beginning in 1972.

John L. Rosser (born Rustburg, Virginia, 1875) attended Roanoke College, Roanoke, Virginia, and Southern Baptist churches in Virginia, Alabama, and Florida, pastoring the Riverside Baptist Church of Jacksonville (1932-35) and the Ancient City Baptist Church of St. Augustine (1939-48). He wrote the words of the hymn, "To Him Who Hallows All Our Days," for the dedication of a new building of the First Baptist Church of Selma, Alabama, while serving as its pastor.

Hines Sims (Born Urania, Louisiana, 1907) was a Southern Baptist musician, serving churches in Shreveport, Louisiana (1935-45), and Nashville, Tennessee (1945-46), as a Minister of Music and the Church Music Department of the Baptist Sunday School Board as Associate Secretary (1946-52) and Secretary (1952-70). Following retirement in 1970, he has lived in Shalimar, Florida, where he remains active in church music work. He wrote the tune to "Praise the Lord, the King of Glory" in 1964 while he was working for the Baptist Sunday School Board, Nashville, Tennessee.

Broadman Ware (born Dimmett, Texas, 1937) was educated at Baylor University and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and has served as Minister of Music for the First Baptist Church of Bellair, Houston, Texas; College Heights Baptist Church, Plainview Texas; First Baptist Church, Ft. Lauderdale, Florida; and Last Grand Baptist Church, Dallas, Texas. He wrote the text of the hymn, "I see the Poor, I see the Lame" in 1970 while serving as Minister of Music in Ft. Lauderdale.

Kate Wooley (born Greensboro, North Carolina, 1913) lived in Palatka, Florida, during the years 1946-53 while her husband served as pastor of the First Baptist Church there. Mrs. Woolley now lives in Nashville, Tennessee, where she writes denominational literature and is active in church work. The text to "Free to Be Me, God, I Really Am Free" was written in 1970 while Mrs. Woolley was living in Nashville.

Non-Baptists who have lived in Florida have also contributed to the body of hymns sung by our Florida Baptist Churches, even though none are native Floridians.

Oscar Clute (born Bethlehem, New York, 1837) was a math teacher, a Unitarian minister, and a college administrator. He was president of Michigan Agricultural College (1869-93), and then Florida Agricultural College (1893-1897) before he moved to California. He died there in 1902. It is not known when he wrote the text of "O Love of God Most Full," which was first published two years after his death.

Frank C. Huston (born Orange Co., Indiana, 1871) became a school teacher at the age of 20 and then, five years later, left the teaching profession to become a minister and evangelistic singer with the Disciples of Christ Church. He was a military chaplain during World War 1 and a Coast Guard recruiter in Jacksonville, Florida, during World War 2. Following World War 2, he lived at the Florida Christian Retirement Home in Jacksonville until his death in 1959. He wrote both the words and the music to "It Pays to Serve Jesus."

Daniel Iverson (born Brunswick, Georgia, 1890) served as a Presbyterian minister in Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Florida. In 1927 he organized the Shenandoah Presbyterian Church in Miami and served as its pastor until retirement in 1951. During these years he led in organizing seven additional Presbyterian Churches in the Miami area. He moved to Asheville, North Carolina, in 1962. He wrote both words and tune to "Spirit of the Living God" while visiting the George T. Stephans evangelistic team for several days while they were conducting a city-wide revival in Orlando, Florida. The song was written during the first day

of his visit after hearing a sermon on the Holy Spirit, sung that night and throughout the remainder of the crusade.

Isaac H. Meredith (born Norristown, Pennsylvania, 1872) was an evangelistic singer associated at various times with Bill Sunday and Gypsy Smith. He also owned a publishing company and was a music director in Methodist churches in New York and New Jersey. He died in 1962 in Orlando, Florida, at the age of 90. He composed over four thousand songs, including both the words and the tune of "Seal Us, O Holy Spirit."

William Reed Newell (born Savannah, Ohio, 1868) was a pastor and later a teacher affiliated with Moody Bible Institute who, in retirement, moved to Deland, Florida. He died while a resident there in 1956. He wrote the text of "At Calvary" in 1895 while on the Faculty of Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, Illinois.

Frank Mason North (born New York, New York, 1850), the author of the words of the hymn, "Where Cross the Crowded Ways of Life," was an ordained Methodist minister. He served a small Methodist parish in Florida briefly sometime during the years 1872-1879. He also pastored in New York and Connecticut and was an outstanding denominational leader. He died in 1935.

Joseph Yates Peek (born Schenectady, New York, 1843) worked as a florist, carpenter, farmer, and a druggist clerk until 1904 when at the age of 61 he became a Methodist lay preacher. Florida was one of three states in which he served until his death in 1911. He knew nothing about music, but made up the tune to "I Would Be True" in his head and whistled it to Dr. G. C. Tullar, an organist and composer who wrote it down and harmonized it. This he did in 1909 at the age of 66.

George Schuler (born New York, New York, 1882) was a member of the music faculty of Moody Bible Institute for forty years and then following his retirement served on the editorial staff of the Rodeheaver Company. He died in Sarasota, Florida, at the age of 91 in 1973. He is the composer of the tune to "Make Me a Blessing," which he wrote in 1924.

Ira Stanphill (born Bellview, New Mexico, 1914) was both an evangelist and a pastor, pastoring in West Palm Beach, Florida, as well as in Pennsylvania and Texas. He wrote both the words and tune to "The Cross Upon Which Jesus Died" in 1945 while conducting a revival in Kansas City.

Judson VanDeVenter (born Dundee, Michigan, 1855) was at first an art teacher, then Methodist evangelist who preached throughout the United States, England, and Scotland. He lived in retirement in Tampa, Florida, dying there in 1939. He wrote the words to three hymns appearing in our hymnals: "My Mother's Prayer," "Sunlight," and "I Surrender All." One interesting sidenote is that "Is Surrender All" was written about 1896 while VanDeVenter was visiting the home of George Sebring in East Palestine, Ohio. George Sebring was later the founder of Sebring, Florida.

John Freeman Young (born Pittston, Main, 1820) translated stanzas 1 and 3 of "Silent Night, Holy Night" from the original German into English. He pastored Episcopal churches in Jacksonville and Tallahassee between 1845 and 1848, then following a nineteen year absence from the state, was appointed as Bishop for the Florida Episcopal Diocese where he served until his death in 1885.