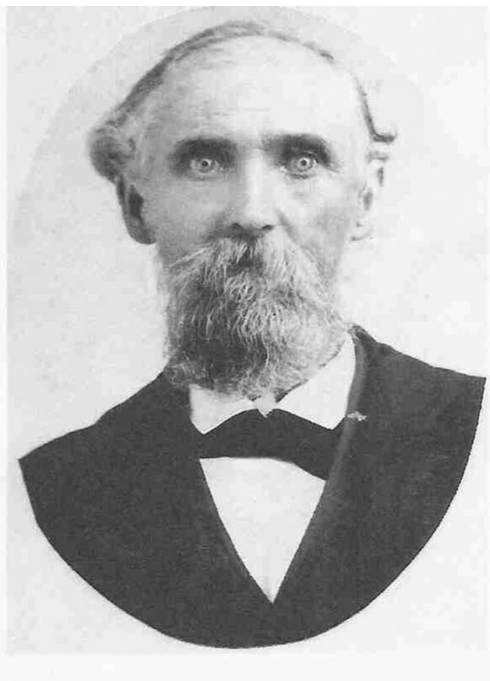


January 2023 – Volume 15, Number 1

LEGACY, as the monthly newsletter of the Florida Baptist Historical Society, has as its mission to highlight the legacy forged by the people and events in Florida Baptist history. During 2023, the LEGACY's monthly issues will feature brief personal profiles of selected Florida Baptist men and women, who through their Christian commitment, have demonstrated Legacy Leadership in their ministry service on the Florida Baptist mission field. These persons, could join with the Apostle Paul, in declaring as "God's fellow workers" they have "laid a foundation" for God's kingdom on earth and upon which "someone else is building" [II Corinthians 3:9-10NIV].

E. H. Rennolds – Florida Baptists' First Official Historian

Edwin Hansford Rennolds, Sr., (b. 1830; d. 1912) was an advocate for and collector of Florida Baptist history. As early as 1894, Rennolds, along with two other pastors, called upon the Florida Baptist State Convention to undertake the task of compiling the history of the denomination. The self-appointed delegation – Rennolds and two other pastors – stressed the need to gather and preserve historically significant resource material and “interview witnesses” that could be used in compiling a history of the State Convention. Such a recommendation came after many years of Rennolds' own research of a local association's history.



Served as a Bi-vocational-Preacher

The former Louisa County, Virginia, native migrated to Florida in 1882, after having served as a Lieutenant in a Tennessee regiment of the Confederate Army. After the war, at the age of 29, Rennolds converted to follow Jesus Christ in 1868, and within two years, responding to the call of God, was ordained as a Missionary Baptist preacher in 1870. In those years most preachers were bi-vocational and depended upon farming or a trade to provide an income. Unfortunately, farming proved unprofitable so Rennolds and his family moved to Florida in 1882.

In Florida, Rennolds at various times worked as a farmer, a salesman, an orange grower, as well as a pastor occasionally. Primarily a surveyor by trade, he served three terms as a county surveyor, (two terms in Tennessee, one in Florida). Rennolds only served as a pastor on brief occasions, including Bethany Baptist Church in Nassau County, and later at Macedonia (now Dinsmore) Baptist Church. In 1909 he concurrently served briefly as acting editor of the *Florida Baptist Witness*.

Alachua Association Historian

However, it was his service as a Sunday school leader in several churches in Sumter County, and later as clerk of the Alachua Baptist Association (from 1884 to 1889), that Rennolds later wrote, “I have found the work intended for me to do.” In his autobiography, Rennolds explained, “I became interested in the history of the Association and at the request of several brethren, I began the collection of

materials to write it up.” He soon realized that since the Alachua Association was first organized in 1847, covering all the territory east of the Suwannee River, by now (1890) as many as fifteen other associations had been established in that land area. Soon the goal to write the history of the Alachua Association “would involve a [history] record” of those other associations.

Rennolds, in discussions with Ocala pastor Daniel B. Farmer (b. 1847; d.1905) and Citra pastor Napoleon A. Bailey (b. 1833; d.1897), agreed to present a recommendation to the 1894 State Convention annual meeting held in Plant City. The three – who had a rich background of historical perspective and reading – proposed “compiling a history of our denomination in this state.” Their proposal contained five points, which included preserving resources, interviewing witnesses who were involved in the organization of the state convention 40 years earlier and compiling a written history. The concept was endorsed by the convention’s messengers.

Designated as Historical Secretary

His interest in history, as well as his ability to research and write, led to Rennolds being elected to serve as the first Historical Secretary of the Florida Baptist State Convention during the 1894 annual meeting.

As the State Convention’s historical secretary, Rennolds worked under the auspices of the State Board of Missions. He soon reported that he had collected a total of 227 association minutes including complete sets of minutes from Graves, Indian River, LaFayette, Manatee River, Marion, Pasco, and Pensacola Bay associations. Additionally, he had assembled 40 biographical sketches of ministers.

Subsequently, Rennolds researched the historical records of the Florida, South Florida, Pensacola Bay associations, and the New River Union. He also made a visit to Samuel Colgate, located in Orange, New Jersey, who had amassed a growing collection of Baptist records and resources. Discovered within the Colgate holdings were 66 Florida Baptist State Convention and Florida Baptist association minutes that had been presumed to be “lost to history.” It is presumed that those resources provided needed information for Rennolds’ history narrative.

Historical Society Created

By 1900 Rennolds had visited 18 of the state’s 20 Baptist associations to collect historical records. He became so committed to the task of writing a history of the State Convention that he announced that he was willing to spend the remainder of his life “working to that end.” The cause for historical records preservation resulted in the 1906 State Convention agreeing to create a Florida Baptist Historical Society. The new entity’s task was to raise funds to underwrite the cost of writing and publishing a history of the State Convention. Despite Rennolds’ reported continuing efforts in developing a manuscript, no published history book was ever realized.

Elected State Convention Recording Secretary

Rennolds’ history interests complemented his other official capacity as one of the State Convention’s elected recording secretaries. In such a role he was an eyewitness to the contemporary history of the state convention. Between 1893 and 1901 Rennolds served as an assistant recording secretary, first alongside N.A. Bailey and then L.D Geiger. In 1903 Rennolds was designated as the State Convention’s recording secretary, a post to which he was re-elected annually until his death in 1912.

Service as Senate Chaplain

During the organization of the Florida Legislature in April, 1903, Rennolds sought the position of chaplain of the Florida Senate. Although there were two other candidates, Rennolds was elected on the first ballot, which he attributed to “my gray hairs and my Confederate Cross of Honor” which he

wore on his coat. The Legislature, which met every other year, provided Rennolds a salary of \$100 each year in session.

He retained the Senate Chaplain designation for four terms, which he proudly said afforded him the opportunity to “represent my Master before the people’s representatives.” Rennolds later wrote in his autobiography that he much preferred the role of chaplain over the role of pastor because, “I have always preferred praying to preaching. I had rather talk to God than to people.”

By July 9, 1908, the State Board of Missions affirmed that Rennolds “be placed on the list of aged and indigent ministers.” He died November 17, 1912 at age 82 in Jacksonville.

[RESOURCES: “E. H. Rennolds – Florida Baptists’ First Historian,” *Favored Florida – A History of Florida Baptists*; Jerry M. Windsor, “A Sketch of the Florida Baptist Historical Society,” *The Journal of Florida Baptist Heritage*, Vol. 7, Fall 2005; Autobiography of Edwin Hansford Rennolds, Sr., 1896 – 1912; *Florida Baptist Convention Annual*, 1879, 1895, and 1900; State Board of Missions *Minutes*, 1895, and 1908; *Florida Baptist Witness*, February 13, 1913; Jerry M. Windsor, “The Florida Years of Edwin Hansford Rennolds, Sr.,” *The Journal of Florida Baptist Heritage*, Vol 8, Fall 2006.]