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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].

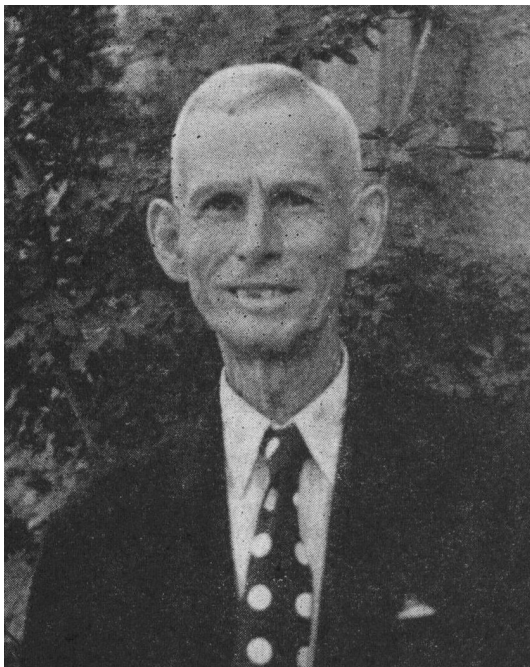
**Edward M. C. Dunklin:
"Gospel Peddler" Missionary**

He was given many nicknames by friend and foe. The more polite monikers included, "the little praying man," "sinner hunter," "Jesus' man," "Gospel peddler," and even "Brother." But for Edward Manlove Clayton Dunklin (b. 1863; d. 1952), the title "preacher of the gospel" was sufficient.

For more than 50 years Preacher Dunklin went from Florida's rural back roads to its growing towns to share the gospel of Christ with anyone who would listen. And when he wasn't preaching and baptizing people, he was giving away Bibles and gospel tracts.

The Everglades Mission Field

Dunklin's most significant ministry service occurred between 1921 and 1938 when he worked in the region around Lake Okeechobee and the Everglades. It was there the Florida Baptist State Convention's **State Board of Missions assigned E .M. C. Dunklin, to serve as the area missionary for the Indian River Baptist Association. He was the first person the State Board employed as a Florida district missionary. He reportedly baptized nearly 300 persons during those years.**



At the time the association covered seven Southeast Florida counties and extended 150 miles north to south and 60 miles east to west. To get around his sparsely populated mission field, and because he never learned to drive a vehicle, Dunklin often resorted to hitch-hiking, walking or riding a pony. Yet, he reportedly traveled an average 4,849 miles per year during his 17-years' service with the association.

Without paved roads, many times he created his own path through the glades and palmetto thickets. And whenever he needed to get around Lake Okeechobee, the short in stature Dunklin often stripped down to his BVD underwear and waded through the shallow portions of the lake. He once characterized his missionary journeys as a "fearless labor" in a "snake and fever infested swampy area to bring the Word of God to near-forgotten people."

Although he carried a Bible and preached love, Dunklin often felt his life was in danger. "But God cared for me," Dunklin often said. In his mission

field, “Bootleggers, criminals, and Indians took me for a spy, a detective, a prohibition officer or agent of some kind. Most any day I could put my hand on a murderer,” he once wrote. Those assessments, more often than not, reflected the character of the people who were the object of Dunklin’s unrelenting, Christ-preaching missionary efforts. His interest in the lawless persons was reflected in the 463 bi-weekly jail worship services he led over 17 years.

Sharing the Gospel with Seminole Indians

As he “sought to show the Jesus way to the Seminoles,” Dunklin complemented the evangelistic efforts of Southern Baptist Home Mission Board Missionary Willie King and Okeechobee Pastor H. S. Inabnit. With the tenaciousness of the Apostle Paul, Dunklin gained unparalleled access to the Seminole villages to share the gospel. He likely was the first Anglo preacher given access to the villages of the Seminole Indians who also called Dunklin “the little praying man.”

In 1940, after four years of ministerial effort, a Seminole Indian Baptist church was established with 36 members at the Seminole-dominated community of Indian Town. (This was likely the second uniquely Seminole Baptist church established in Florida, four years after a similar congregation had been organized in Dania by Willie King.) **The church was named the Dunklin Memorial Baptist Church in honor of the “Jesus’ man,” the Seminoles’ other name given to Dunklin.** This was only one of nearly 40 churches and church-type missions Dunklin organized during his lifetime.

Dunklin also conducted regular worship services in small African-American churches. His annual reports to the association noted leading between 22 and 35 services each year in African-American congregations.

Responding to the Call of Ministry

The Lowndes County, Alabama native, along with his parents, migrated to Crystal River, Florida in 1884 with the intent of growing oranges. But God had other plans for Dunklin, who in 1891 responded to the call to the ministry.

To prepare himself for ministry service, Dunklin attended and graduated in 1897 from Georgetown College (Ky.). He subsequently enrolled in The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary where he earned the Bachelor of Theology degree in 1898. Returning to Florida, in July, 1899, he was ordained by the Baptist church at Oxford (Alachua Association). He subsequently served as pastor to rural churches in Oxford, Peniel, Belleview, Apopka, Whitney, Coleman and Center Hill.

Dunklin married Pauline Gomes on June 25, 1902, at the Peniel Baptist Church. The couple became the parents of five children, three sons and two daughters.

Early Service as a Church Starter and Pastor

In 1907 Dunklin began what became a quarter century of service under the auspices of the State Board of Missions. His initial assignment as a church starter and missionary took him to Tampa (1907 – 1917) where he regularly preached at a different church each of six nights a week. “To reach his charges,” a newspaper article recounted that Dunklin usually “rode the street cars.” **One day Dunklin “approached a man and asked him if he were a**



Christian, only to receive the reply that it was none of his business.” After some thought, Dunklin responded, “Yes, that is my business – to preach Christ to everyone I can.”

He then was sent to the St. Johns River Baptist Association (1918 – 1921) where he established six rural mission congregations and regularly conducted preaching services at each: East Palatka; Orange Mills; Lake Geneva; Macedonia; Bostick; and Satsuma Heights.

Following his long tenure with the Indian River Association, at age 75, Dunklin retired from the State Board’s employment. For the next dozen-plus years, until his death in 1952, Dunklin continued to do what he loved best: preach the gospel and start churches.

[RESOURCES: Donald S. Hepburn, “E. M. C. Dunklin – A Tenacious Association Missionary,” *Favored Florida – A History of Florida Baptists*, (Gainesville: StorterChilds Printers, 2013); *Florida Baptist Witness*: January 30, 1919, p. 11; October 6, 1938, p. 14; April 4, 1940, p. 7; June 6, 1940, p. 15; August 22, 1940, p. 2; May 8, 1947, p. 7; March 20, 1952, p. 12; Estelle (Mrs. Myles M.) Meeks, daughter of E. M. C. Dunklin, in personal correspondence to E. Earl Joiner, Florida Baptist Historical Society, January, 1993; Alma Hetherington, “Reverend Dunklin was called ‘Jesus Man’ by the Seminoles,” *The Belle Glade, (FL) Herald*, September 4, 1969, pp. 10 – 11; Florida Baptist Historical Society files; and Indian River Baptist Association *Annuals*, 1922 – 1938.]