

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

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As the year 2023 draws to an end, your Society staff is providing a retrospective on the past year’s activities to help Society members to better understand the mission and ministry of the Society. The following are highlights of the 2023 Annual Report of the Florida Baptist Historical Society.

2023 Annual Report to Members

THE SOCIETY’S MISSION AND MINISTRY: The primary mission and ministry of the Florida Baptist Historical Society is **the researching, preserving and promoting the Legacy of Florida Baptists**. These tasks are accomplished through assisting churches and individuals seeking historical information on Florida Baptist churches, individuals and events. Additionally, in addition to on-going research of churches and persons, the staff produces a monthly newsletter, *LEGACY*, and the annual *Journal of Florida Baptist Heritage*, which are provided to Society members and interested Baptists.

The Journal of Florida Baptist Heritage

Florida Baptist Historical Society



THE JOURNAL OF FLORIDA BAPTIST HERITAGE-2023: During 2023, the Society staff selected and enlisted writers to produce several extended articles for inclusion in this year’s *Journal of Florida Baptist Heritage*. The theme emphasis, approved by the Society’s Board of Directors, focused on the “Legacy of the Baptist Association Movement in Florida.” This topic represented one of the most significantly and extensively researched topics ever undertaken by the Historical Society staff.

Both the managing director and the administrative ministry assistant were involved in an unusually “deep dive” into the respective histories of Florida’s Baptist associations. Never before had the Society undertaken such intensive research of the early histories of EVERY one of the former and current associations. In the course of doing that research, we came across some unusual and surprising historical information on several of those associations’ annual meetings. We are sharing a few of those “interesting” association actions:

- During the 1932 **Pinellas Association** annual meeting, messengers voted for the association to purchase and give a cow to the Arcadia Children’s Home and call it Lady Pinellas. A layman also committed to donate a second cow to the Children’s Home;

- The 1922 **Indian River Association** considered and approved a motion to furnish Rev. E. M. C. Dunklin, the associational missionary, a “better means of conveyance on his field.” As a result, the messengers authorized \$125.00 to purchase a horse;
- During the October 31, 1889, annual meeting of **Pensacola Bay Association**, “The brethren were asked to put five cents in the Lord’s treasury every time they smoked a cigar. Some made the sacrifice right then, and \$1.10 was raised. What a sacrifice and what a sum,” the clerk reported.

LEGACY NEWSLETTER-2023: During the year, the Society produced a monthly newsletter that was distributed to the membership. During 2023, the LEGACY’s monthly issues featured brief personal profiles of selected Florida Baptist men and women, who through their Christian commitment, 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].

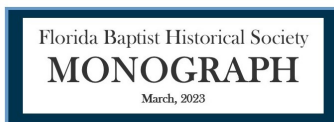
RESPONDING TO INQUIRIES from individuals continued to be an on-going task of the administrative ministry assistant. Most of these requests were for information about church histories or information on a church’s prior pastors. To respond to these inquiries requires manually reviewing association annuals and back issues of the *Florida Baptist Witness*. We also access information from the on-line resources of Ancestry.com, Newspapers.com, and Find-A-Grave.com. One of the most significant projects in which the Society assisted was to the Elizabeth Baptist Church, Monticello, in their development and publication of a hard-bound history book. [See the following report on the Baptist Heritage Award recipient.]

THE 2023 BAPTIST HERITAGE AWARD: The Society’s Board of Directors, earlier in the year, authorized that the 2023 Baptist Heritage Award be conferred upon Linda Gramling Demott a life-long member of the Elizabeth Baptist Church, Monticello. Mrs. Demott, at age 84 this year, was the church-designated historian since the 1950s, prepared church anniversary observance material each year including the development of skits to “bring to life” the church’s historical leaders and events. Additionally, Mrs. Demott worked diligently since the early 1990s to collect, organize and develop material for a church history book. Those efforts bore fruit in 2023 with the publication of the book, *Elizabeth Baptist Church: The Story of a Pioneer Baptist Church on Mission: 1831 – 2023*.



Since 1997, the Historical Society has conferred the Baptist Heritage Award upon 26 Florida Baptists, including five laymen, four women, six pastors, and eleven Baptist college or seminary professors/administrators.

CHURCH ANNIVERSARIES: The Society staff prepared and distributed a “Certificate of Recognition” to those 71 Florida Baptist churches that observed 25-year milestone anniversaries in 2023. Among the 71 churches, that have continuously functioned since being organized: eight observed their 150th year of ministry; six marked their 125th year of functioning; five achieved their 100th anniversary; sixteen observed their 75th year since organizing; ten marked their 50th year; and twenty-six marked their 25th year of ministry. A Society Certificate of Recognition was prepared and sent to each church during January.



George W. Truett:
Christ or Chaos

By
Dr. David T. Crum

MONOGRAPHS ADDED TO THE WEBSITE: The Society has a website page featuring 35 monographs. These well-researched papers highlight historically significant people and events, primarily in Florida Baptist life. These narratives represent either transcribed oral presentations made at a meeting of the Historical Society or written exclusively for the Society's monograph collection. During 2023, two special monographs were added to the collection: (1) "George W. Truett: Christ or Chaos;" and (2) "Southern Baptist Convention's Message After World War II." Here is the link (you can copy and paste into your browser to reach that website page): <https://FloridaBaptistHistory.org/monographs-2/>

BIOGRAPHICAL COLLECTION: The Society has available on its website over 6,000 biographical profiles on Florida Baptist pastors and other church leaders. During the year, we added nearly 250 newly researched or recently updated biographical files. While the website entry is only a summary biographical profile, these are generally supported by other detailed information maintained in paper files.

CHURCH HISTORY COLLECTION: The Florida Baptist State Convention has over 3,100 cooperating congregations. Among these churches and some churches that were established but subsequently disbanded, the Florida Baptist Historical Society has secured and developed paper file histories on 1,100 active and deactivated congregations. These included over 200 church history files added during the past year.

BAPTIST HISTORY COLLECTION: Since, 2020, the Society has maintained stewardship and maintenance of the Baptist History Collection. The collection of historically significant, unique and specialized books on Baptist history, was originally established by the Society. The collection initially was maintained by Stetson University. In 1995 the Florida Baptist State Convention directed that the Collection be transferred to The Baptist College of Florida to be maintained by the college library. In 2020 the College requested the Society to resume direct oversight and stewardship of the collection to better facilitate the mission of the Society. During the existence of the Collection, the Society continued to acquire books and resources that were added to the Collection. What had started as a collection of less than 1,750 volumes had grown to over 5,322 volumes.

WHO WE ARE: The Historical Society is managed by a six-member Board of Directors appointed by the State Board of Missions, Florida Baptist State Convention. Of the six, three members are appointed by the State Board of Missions and there are three permanent members who serve by virtue of their administrative position: Executive Director-Treasurer, Florida Baptist Convention, Inc (Dr. Thomas Green); the Managing Director (formerly designated as the secretary-treasurer), Florida Baptist Historical Society (Donald Hepburn); and the representative of the Florida Baptist Archives, (Dr. Mark Rathel), maintained by The Baptist College of Florida. **Those persons who have been appointed to serve on the Board (and their term of service) are: Dr. Joel Breidenbaugh, Apopka (2023-2025); Ms. Arlene Vause, Sopchoppy (2022-2024); and beginning in January, 2024, Dr. Maxie Miller, a pastor and moderator of the Shiloh Baptist Association, Plant City (2024-2026).**

FUNDING SUPPORT: The Historical Society received a \$20,000 Cooperative Program allocation, from the Florida Baptist Convention, which is the primary source of the Society's total annual operating budget. A third-party entity provides the Society's the use of a rent-free office building, in addition to the related utilities and maintenance costs, the combined value of which, equals the Convention's support. Two staff persons serve the Society including Donald Hepburn, who as the non-compensated managing director, has served since 2016; and the part-time employee, Administrative Ministry Assistant Penny Baumgardner, who has served since 2007.

This concludes the summary highlights of the Society's 2023 Annual report.

As we enter this Christmas season, we are thankful for the many blessings of God that we personally, as well as the Society organization, experienced during 2023. But most importantly we are thankful for the gift of Jesus Christ which God provided to us one and all. We rejoice with the scripture, *“And suddenly there was with the angel, a multitude of heavenly hosts praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, and good will toward men”* and women. [Luke 2:13-14]