

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

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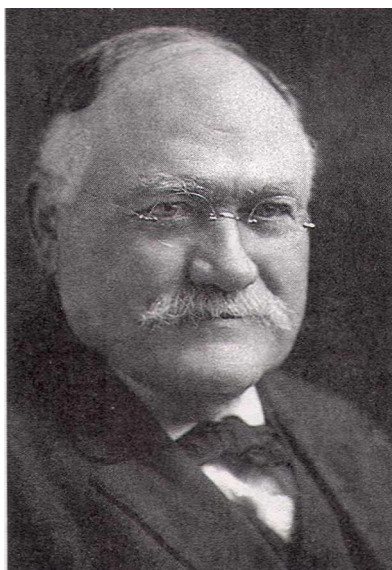
LEGACY, as the monthly newsletter of the Florida Baptist Historical Society, has as its mission to highlight the legacy forged by the people and events in Florida Baptist history. During 2024, the LEGACY's monthly issues will feature brief personal profiles of selected Florida Baptist men and women, 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].

**Adoniram Judson Holt –
Evangelistic Missionary-Editor-Pastor**

"A teeming population is predestined to fill Florida. The world is but just now discovering Florida," A. J. Holt reminded messengers to the December, 1913, meeting of the Florida Baptist State Convention.

"Sick people are coming to get well; poor people to get rich; rich people to get richer; cold people to get warm; warm people to get cool; tired people to get rested and thousands of people are coming just for fun. They are all coming. It behooves us to meet them with an open Bible." The somewhat prophetic and forthright mission challenge delineated by Holt, reflected his own lifelong commitment to sharing the gospel wherever the opportunity presented itself.

A. J. Holt (b. 1847; d. 1933) was no stranger to the missionary challenge in sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ. By the time Holt had migrated to Florida at age 60 in 1907, he already had served in what would have been considered a lifetime of ministry for any other man. **By his own example, Holt was one of the leading Baptist preachers of his day, as a result of a ministry that had run the gamut from pastor, missionary, religious publisher, to denominational servant.**



Missionary to the Western Indian Tribes

Adoniram Judson Holt bore the namesake of the prominent foreign missionary to Burma. Hence Holt embraced the personae of one who diligently proclaimed the gospel of Jesus Christ. His Christian pilgrimage had included service as a missionary among the Seminole Indians (1875-1876) and among a dozen Western Indian tribes (1877-1879) – including the Wichita, Comanche, and the Tonkawa – whom the federal government had moved to the Oklahoma Territory. **His effective preaching – although having to be translated concurrently by several different Indian tribe interpreters – still resulted in many spiritual decisions and baptisms of new believers in Christ.** Having gained the Indian's respect, he was given the names of "Father-Talker" and "Bear heart."

Preacher and News journal Editor

Subsequently, **Holt served as an itinerant preacher and pastor of fulltime congregations in Texas, Kentucky, Oklahoma, Louisiana, Tennessee and Florida.** He was the first missions' superintendent (1880-1890) for what became the Baptist General Convention of Texas and the first corresponding secretary (1890-1902) for the Tennessee Baptist Convention. At various times, Holt either founded, published or edited a religious news journal, including the *Arkansas Baptist*, *Texas Baptist and Herald*, *A Voice in the Wilderness* [Texas], *The Baptist and Reflector* [Tennessee], and the *Florida Baptist Witness*. His service with the *Witness* from 1914-1918 was as co-editor along with W. A. Hobson (b. 1862; d. 1960), C. W. Duke (b. 1865; d. 1936) and C. E. W. Dobbs (d. 1917), each of whom had the responsibility of editing one issue of the newspaper each month.

Personal Memories by Daughter Vera

“My daddy lived such a full life,” daughter Vera Holt wrote in a letter to a family friend. **“His disposition was always sunny . . . he was the soul of optimism and I never seen anyone with such power in prayer because his faith was so strong.”** In another memory, Vera recalled that while the family was living in Tennessee, her father wrote the song, “O Tennessee, Fair Tennessee,” that used the tune from “Beulah Land, Fair Beulah Land.” She noted that most people who sang the unofficial state song were unaware of its religious-based music score.

Florida Pastoral Service/Bible Expositor

Holt's pastoral service with Florida Baptist churches included, Lake City (1909-1911), Kissimmee (1911-1916), Boca Grande (1916-1918), Arcadia (1918-1924), and Punta Gorda (1924-1927). At age 85, Holt told an interviewer that the most valuable service he had rendered in his lifetime was that of “preaching.” **He claimed to have preached over 13,300 sermons and had married more than a thousand people.** In the same interview he said that he “had never used tobacco, nor liquor, nor dope of any kind.” But he did admit to having one habit. “Whenever I am alone, either in the day, or when I lie awake at night, I read Scripture or pray,” he recalled.

Longtime Florida pastor J. Dean Adcock, reflecting upon Holt's life and ministry service, noted, **“He was always a soul winner and believed in soul culture for he had divine equipment and inspiration.”** Holt was such a knowledgeable Bible scholar and effective communicator that he was a featured Bible teacher at Florida's annual summer assemblies for several decades. **Having committed to memory the entire New Testament and six books of the Old Testament, Holt rarely had to look at the Bible while he was teaching or preaching, being able to recite chapters and verses, as needed.**

Preparing for Ministry

A. J. Holt was born in Somerset, Kentucky. Because his parents separated while he was a young boy, Holt was raised by his maternal grandparents who lived in Perryville, Ky. One time his grandparents were visited by the famous Boston pastor Rev. George Lorimer. The young Holt's meeting, talking and listening to Lorimer's preaching made such an impression upon A. J. that he intellectually decided to pursue a career in the preaching ministry. **However, it was not until he was 20-years-old that Holt made his actual public profession of faith and came to sense the call of God to the preaching ministry.**

Holt, who had met Alice Markham while working in a Shreveport, La. bookstore, married soon after making his life commitment to Jesus Christ and ministry service. The couple eventually had three children before Alice died after four years of marriage. His second wife was Emma Dennis with whom he lived 58 years and had ten children. In his autobiography, *Pioneering in the Southwest*, Holt said he enrolled in McKenzie College (the Clarksville, Texas, school later merged with Baylor) and after being tested by exams, he was placed in the senior class, and within one year graduated with a B.A. degree. He later earned a M.A. degree from Baylor University, which years later awarded Holt the honorary doctor of divinity degree. By 1881 Holt was attending classes at The Southern

Baptist Theological Seminary while serving as pastor of the Portland Avenue Baptist Church in Louisville. By Holt's own testimony, Seminary President James P. Boyce (b. 1827; d. 1888) told Holt, at age 35 and with four children, that "he had enough [training] for ordinary ministry." Although as Holt's ministry life demonstrated he was anything but "ordinary."

Final Observations

No doubt Adoniram Judson Holt was a great and committed man of God, who had much integrity. Holt died on May 15, 1933, and was buried in Oak Ridge Cemetery near Arcadia, Florida. The following year, Florida Pastor Dean Adcock addressed the 1934 Southern Baptist Convention, **summarizing A. J. Holt's life and ministry by observing: "If Diogenes had met him, he would have blown out his candle; if the prophet had seen him, he would have been satisfied with the answer to his call."**

[RESOURCES: E. Earl Joiner, "A. J. Holt: Pioneer Preacher, Missionary to Western Indians, and Florida Baptist Pastor," a monograph presented to the Florida Baptist Historical Society, May 8, 1993; *Minutes*, Peace River Baptist Association *Annual*, 1933; *Annual*, Florida Baptist State Convention, 1913 (pp. 20-22); 1914; and 1933; *Florida Baptist Witness*, May 25, 1933, p. 11, a reprint of an article written by Frank H. Leavell, for *The Baptist Student*, November, 1932; June 15, 1933, p. 11; 14, a reprint of funeral eulogy made by J.E. Trice; June 14, 1934, p. 11; 14, a reprint of a tribute by J. Dean Adcock, presented to the Southern Baptist Convention; Miss Vera Holt's letter to Mrs. Emma Ryals of Brownsville, Tennessee, dated September 30, 1950; and *LEGACY* Newsletter of the Florida Baptist Historical Society, April, 2021.]

Historical Society Will Mark 130th Anniversary in 2024:

Nearly 130-years ago, during the November, 1894, Florida Baptist State Convention annual meeting held in Plant City, there was a recommendation for "compiling the history of our denomination in this state." The motion came from three men who had a rich background of historical perspective and reading. All three were pastors serving churches in the then-called Alachua Baptist Association. They were: **Daniel B. Farmer, Sr.** (b. 1847; d. 1905); **Napoleon A. Bailey** (b. 1833; d. 1897); and **E. H. Rennolds, Sr.**, (b. 1839; d. 1912).

The "Alachua Three" made five recommendations at the 1894 State Convention that were adopted by messengers. They noted that the State Convention, in its then 40th year of existence, needed to: (1) gather material; (2) protect history-related resources; (3) interview witnesses; (4) compile the history of the state convention; and (5) appoint a history committee. **That committee was the forerunner to the current Florida Baptist Historical Society.** This forward-thinking trio probably was responsible for the early emphasis by Florida Baptists on document preservation. It was more than aspirational thinking, as it became a plan of action by Rennolds.

In the following November, 1895, Florida Baptist State Convention held at Leesburg, messengers heard a report from the **then State Convention's designated Historical Secretary E. H. Rennolds, Sr.** He explained that during the prior year he had secured a total 227 files of the annual meeting minutes of Florida Baptist associations and the state convention. He further noted that he had collected 40 biographical sketches of deceased and living ministers. Rennolds concluded his report by announcing his plan to visit other associations to secure and preserve their records.

That early commitment to document preservation continues 130-years later as the Florida Baptist Historical Society. Our Mission: Researching, preserving and promoting the Legacy of Florida Baptists.

[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.]