

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

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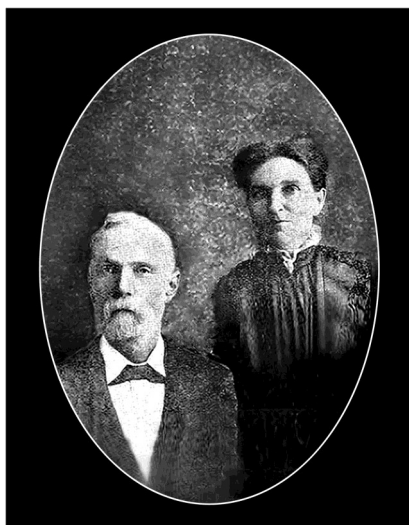
LEGACY, as the monthly newsletter of the Florida Baptist Historical Society, has as its mission to highlight the legacy forged by the people and events in Florida Baptist history. During 2024, the LEGACY's monthly issues will feature brief personal profiles of selected Florida Baptist men and women,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

Barlett and Jennie Bean's Ministry: Developing a Florida Baptist Orphanage

The Florida Baptist Orphanage, long in the planning stage between 1880 and 1900, **became a reality in 1904 – 120-years ago last month.** The perceived need for an orphanage came from a Biblical mandate and a practical societal need to provide Christian care for children without parents and homeless children.

Finally, in 1901, trustees for an orphanage were elected by the Florida Baptist State Convention. Those trustees, after considering several proposals, chose the town of Arcadia in Southwest Florida, as the location for the orphans' home. They also received an 80-acre tract of land donated by DeSoto County pioneer John L. Jones. Then the trustees enlisted W. L. C. Mahon (b. 1864; d. 1931), the pastor of the Arcadia Baptist Church, to raise funds to construct the initial facilities.

On the official opening day of February 1, 1904, with one building fully constructed, the orphanage received its first child, a teenaged Cuban girl named Juanita Martinez. There to receive that child and the 22 other children to follow that year, were Bartlett and Jennie Bean, who were the orphanage's first superintendent and matron respectively.



Planned for Children with No Parents

The trustees who legally incorporated the proposed orphanage, stated as its purpose to "maintain, support and educate indigent white orphans of the state of Florida regardless of creed or nationality; to locate them in Christian families until their majority (legal age of 21) or secure their adoption." The underlying objective was to provide a Christian home environment rather than a sterile confinement institution. **"We are using every effort to lead our children to Christ, and to develop them into the Christian life,"** the superintendent reported to State Convention messengers.

Bartlett Marion Bean (b. August 18, 1846), a pastor at Live Oak's Baptist Church, had been actively involved in the effort to establish the ministry – since the 1899 State Convention action to develop a proposed orphanage. He was elected by the orphanage trustee

board to serve as superintendent. Bean's wife, **Martha Jennie Allen Bean** (b. October 5, 1856), was designated as the orphanage matron, being responsible for daily food preparation, the teaching of an educational curriculum and the moral training of the children.

Barlett Bean's Ministry Before the Orphanage

A native of Pike, Alabama, Barlett Bean – who would be referred to as B. M. Bean throughout his adult life – was the first son born to John and Elizabeth Bean. He would later be joined by two brothers and four sisters. The Bean family were farmers and Barlett spent his youth and teen years as a farm hand.

With the coming of the Civil War, Bartlett enlisted at Troy, Ala., on April 16, 1864, at age 18, and was assigned to the infantry unit of the Alabama 63rd Regiment. In short order Bean was promoted to sergeant. However, his military service was short-lived as he was captured by Union soldiers on April 9, 1865. He was sent to a prisoner encampment in Mississippi until May 3, when he was released and re-patriated. In 1911, Bean wrote about his Civil War years on a military pension application. Bean returned to his family's farm in Bulloch County, Ala., where he remained until at least 1870.

The Unknown Call to Preach

There is an absence of a historical record for the years following 1870, when Bean apparently, responded to the call of God to the preaching ministry. Unfortunately, there is no known record on when or where he was licensed or ordained to preach the gospel. Based on U. S. Census records, by 1880, Bean was in western North Carolina serving as pastor of the Baptist Church at Brevard. Association records report Bean had departed North Carolina by 1883 and returned to Post Oaks, in Bulloch County.

Between 1884 and 1895, Bean still unmarried, served as pastor of several Alabama Baptist churches including at Pine Level and Union Springs. Newspaper accounts reported him leading revivals and Sunday school training events during this period. *The Montgomery (Ala.) Advertiser* observed that Bean, while preaching a revival at Pine Level: “The preacher, throughout the meeting has been **earnest in his efforts for the salvation of souls and devoted to his work. His sermons were fine, logical and well-rendered. Mr. Bean is not an eloquent speaker, but he is one of the best pastors in the state.**”

Moving to Florida and Marriage

Again, the specific details of his moving to Florida are not readily known, except that the Florida Baptist State Convention *Annual* records Bean serving as pastor at Anthony (1891- 1892), Whitney (1893 – 1895) and Sumterville (1895 – 1896).

On September 22, 1896, Bartlett Bean (age 50) and Martha Jennie Allen (age 40), married at the Geneva Hotel in Jacksonville, according to a report in *The Troy (Ala.) Messenger* newspaper. This was the first and only marriage for each person. Officiating the ceremony was notable Florida Baptist pastor N. A. Bailey (b. 1833; d. 1897).

Jennie Bean, a native of Alabama City, Ala., at the time of her marriage, had served four years earlier as a school teacher in Sumterville, Fla., where Barlett was serving as pastor. But more recently Jennie had re-located to Birmingham, Ala., to teach. According to the Troy newspaper account, “the bride is a highly accomplished and talented lady.”

The couple soon moved to Live Oak where Bean had been called as pastor by the Baptist church. The Beans remained there until 1903 when they were enlisted to lead the newly established Florida Baptist Orphanage. Having no children of their own, the Beans embraced the orphans under their care as their “own” children.

The Ministry of the Orphanage

When the Orphanage opened in February, 1904, being located about one mile from downtown Arcadia, it had a single two-story building and 23 children. A total of 15-acres of the 80-acre site were initially developed to provide a large vegetable garden, and groves for peaches, persimmons, grapes and oranges. Holding pens were created to raise chickens, pigs and cattle. Within the first year, two young ladies were employed to assist Jennie Bean – affectionately called “Mother Bean” – in teaching and caring for the children.

The children’s chores in the fields and in the house, not only made the orphanage self-sufficient, but it helped to instill values into the children’s lives. **These values included a sense of responsibility, personal achievement, and being a part of a family.** The morning hours were filled teaching basic reading, writing and mathematical skills. The school time and chores were combined with Bible devotions and pray times. On Sunday the children attended the Sunday school and worship services at the Baptist church in Arcadia. According to Bean in his report to the State Convention in 1905, these combined efforts were designed for “refining and molding character” of the children.

Although the orphanage did not receive much direct financial assistance from the State Convention, it benefitted from financial contributions from individuals, local churches, Sunday school classes and Woman’s Missionary Societies. Additionally, Bean developed regular solicitations for support through the use of public newspaper articles and the promotion of “Thanks-Giving Day” and Christmas gift boxes being sent to the orphanage.

Jennie Bean, [pictured] whose involvement in the Florida Woman’s Missionary Union, resulted in being elected president in 1904. Martha Trotter in her history of Florida W.M.U. wrote that Jennie Bean encouraged Baptist women to support the benevolence ministry of the orphanage, as well as their over and above financial gifts to domestic and foreign missions.

Convention Messengers Traveled to Arcadia

Following the three-day 1906 State Convention annual meeting held in Bartow, over 300 messengers boarded a train to travel to Arcadia to visit the orphanage for a dedication service. The *Fort Myers Press* newspaper reported on the event noting, “The children furnished the music, and few eyes were dry as the little orphans sang ‘Count Your Blessings.’” At the close of the service, the Baptists present were invited to make a financial pledge to the orphanage ministry. The newspaper account observed, “Then occurred a sight seldom seen anywhere,” as people lined up to sign financial pledges, which finally totaled \$1,130, which equates to \$38,963 in 2024.

Changing of the Care Givers

By 1910, Bartlett Bean became afflicted with a kidney disease, which restricted his mobility and ability to do manual labor. Within a year, Bean died from his kidney illness on October 12, 1911. At the conclusion of Bean’s service, the orphanage was financially solvent and was serving 75 children. The Orphanage trustees soon enlisted the former superintendent of the Louisiana State Orphans home James Edward Trice (b. 1872; d. 1935) and his wife Lillian Bowman Trice (b. 1871; d. 1941) to lead the Florida ministry. Jennie Bean moved back to Clay Fox, Alabama, where she lived until her death October 16, 1931.



No Longer an Orphanage

Today, 120-years after the orphanage’s founding, and which was known as the Florida Baptist Children’s Homes until 2023, now operates by the name, One More Child, Inc. The new name reflects the expanded ministry to vulnerable children beyond its

home base of Lakeland, Florida, providing ministry services in more than 60 locations across the United States and 19 countries worldwide. This ministry of healing and hope involves providing a diverse range of programs and services designed to address the unique needs of abandoned and foster children, as well as hungry children, trafficked children, single moms, and struggling families.

[RESOURCES: Donald S. Hepburn and E. Earl Joiner, *Favored Florida* (2013); Edward Earl Joiner, *A History of Florida Baptists* (1972); E. Earl Joiner, *Florida Baptist Children's Home: A History of Caring*, (1995); Martha Pope Trotter, *Faithful Servants* (1994); biographical profiles on Bartlett M. Bean and Martha Jennie Allen Bean, accessed on website *Ancestry.com*; newspaper accounts of Bartlett Bean accessed on website *Newspaper.com*; *The Montgomery (Ala.) Advertiser*, August 7, 1885; *Florida Baptist Annual*, 1891 through 1912; and Florida Baptist Historical Society files.]