

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].

Charlotte Atlee White Rowe: Baptists' First Woman Missionary

In 1815, the recently organized Baptist Board of Foreign Missions appointed Mrs. Charlotte A. White to join their first commissioned missionary couple – Adoniram and Ann Judson – at the mission station in Burma. **Charlotte Atlee White (b. 1782; d.1863) was the first unmarried American woman appointed by any missionary sending body to serve in an international, cross-cultural mission**, according to a Charlotte White Rowe biography by Reid Trulson.

Baptists' Foreign Missions Development

In the early eighteenth century Baptists in America were not organized nationally along denominational lines, although there was a growing desire by the diverse regional missionary societies and religious bodies to cooperate in fulfilling the Great Commission. However, before Baptists could mobilize their missionary hopes, a series of events provided fresh motivation. In February, 1812, a Congregational body, called the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, appointed the first American foreign missionaries, named Luther Rice (b. 1783; d. 1836) and Adoniram Judson (b.1788; d.1850), and their wives, who were sent to India to share the gospel.



The well-known story – at least within Baptist circles – is that while sailing to India **Rice and Judson, upon a closer examination of the Scriptures, became convinced of the authenticity of believer's baptism by immersion as preached and taught by Baptists.** Soon after their August arrival in Calcutta, India, Judson and his wife Ann Hasseltine were baptized by immersion. Later in November, Rice and his wife Ann were baptized by immersion.

The two men felt compelled to resign as Congregational missionaries. Since they were left without financial support, they decided that Judson should remain in India to preach the gospel, while Rice returned to the United States. From India the Judsons travelled to Burma where they set up a mission station. Meanwhile, having returned to America, Rice travelled extensively among Baptists in

America to tell of the spiritual awakening by he and Judson. He also extolled the great evangelistic needs and opportunities in India.

The awareness efforts by Rice, combined with the eagerness of the several Baptist bodies to fulfill the Great Commission, were factors that led Baptists on May 18, 1814, to organize The General Missionary Convention of the Baptist Denomination in the United States of America for Foreign Missions. It became popularly known as the Triennial Convention, because it met once every three years. [It would be three more decades before the Southern Baptist Convention and its foreign missions' enterprise were established in 1845.]

Once organized the Triennial Convention's leadership approved the formation of an auxiliary, the Baptist Board of Foreign Missions for the United States. **Rice was chosen by the Board to continue his work of missions' promotion in the states, while only Judson was appointed as the first foreign missionary of the new organization.** Reflecting a cultural norm, the Board considered the wives of missionary personnel (and those spouses that would follow) to be volunteer "assistant missionaries" helping their husbands.

Charlotte Atlee White's Early Life

Charlotte Hazen Atlee, the eleventh child of Esther (Bowes Sayre) and William Augustus Atlee, was born in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, on July 13, 1782. Unfortunately, by age eleven, both her parents had died. Charlotte was taken to central Massachusetts to live with her older sister Elizabeth and her husband Maj. Moses White. While living there she met Maj. White's brother Nathaniel Hazen White. Once Charlotte reached the age of 21, she married Nathaniel on November 17, 1803. Within one year, the couple had a son who was named after his father.

A series of tragic events soon overcame Charlotte beginning with the Christmas Day, 1804, death of her husband. Five months later the death of their nine-month-old baby occurred. To be closer to her extended family, Charlotte moved to Haverhill, Mass., where she attended the only Baptist church. As a result of the evangelistic preaching of Pastor William Batchelder a spiritual awakening occurred in Charlotte White.

She later wrote, "I was led to search the Scriptures in order to find assurance that Jesus Christ is the son of God; in doing which, I was blessed with a desire to be converted from darkness to light; the Holy Spirit rousing me to repent, and enabling me to confess Christ as my Lord and Saviour."

The Influence of British Baptist Missionaries

Concurrent with the recent events in Charlotte's life, the Baptists in Boston in 1802 formed the Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Society. Haverhill Pastor William Batchelder later served as a trustee of the Society. The pastor also served as president of the "India and Foreign Missionary Society of Haverhill and Vicinity," which became an auxiliary society to the Baptist Board of Foreign Missions for the United States.

The missionary society involvements by Pastor Batchelder were likely shared with Charlotte and the other members of the Haverhill Baptist Church. Those members also were provided copies of *The Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Magazine*, which carried the regular correspondence from British Particular Baptist Missionary William Carey (b. 1761; d. 1834) who told of the mission work in India. Then there were the first-hand meetings with and sermons by British Baptist missionaries who, while awaiting the next available ship going from Boston to England, would visit the area Baptist churches to share their testimonies.

Those combined experiences caused Charlotte White to recognize that God was calling her into missions. She decided to move from Haverhill to Philadelphia, where she soon joined the Samson Street Baptist Church. There Charlotte and several other

women organized the “Samson Street Baptist Female Society for Promoting Evangelical Missions.”

As God’s Spirit was moving in Charlotte’s life, other events during 1815 were unfolding. Adoniram and Ann Judson, both gifted linguists, had been translating Scripture and writing religious tracts in Burmese. Needing a means to circulate their writings to the Burmese people, the Judsons had asked the Baptist Board of Foreign Missions to appoint a missionary with the skills of a printer. Providentially, a New Hampshire pastor and former printer – George Hough – applied for missionary appointment and moved to Philadelphia to await the decision by the Baptist Board of Foreign Missions. In April the missionary appointment of George and Phebe Hough was approved by the Board and the following month a commissioning service was held at the Samson Street Baptist Church.

During conversations with the Houghs, Charlotte White developed a growing desire to travel with the couple to India. Soon, Charlotte wrote a letter of missionary application to the Board. She told of meeting and talking with George and Phebe Hough and how her commitment to missionary service had been re-awakened with a desire to accompany the Houghs to Burma to work alongside the Judsons.

Appointment of an Unmarried Female was Questioned

Charlotte’s application to serve as a missionary in Burma was initially approved by a quorum of seven Baptist board members. However, some board members believed the appointment was illegal because of her gender. To better gauge the board’s sentiment, the full board was polled by letter. Although many members opposed her appointment, the majority agreed the appointment was legal because the Board’s bylaws did not specify that a missionary had to be male.

In a subsequent attempt to nullify her appointment, the board declared it had no money to send her to Burma. But Charlotte had a modest estate, which she contributed to the board to self-fund her missionary trip, according to Earle Cornelius, who wrote an on-line article about the Lancaster native.

In December 1815, Charlotte White sailed to Kolkata, India, with the Houghs. The couple planned to obtain a printing press in India to present to the Judsons. During the two months it took to arrange shipping for the printing press, **Charlotte met and married in 1816 British Baptist missionary Joshua Rowe, a widower with three sons. She went with him to Digah, India, more than 360 miles north of Kolkata (Calcutta), where he had been serving since 1811.** Charlotte learned the Hindi language and began translating the Book of John to share the gospel with the locals. She subsequently organized several schools providing basic education and which the couple viewed as “an excellent method of spreading divine truth.”

She had three children by him, twin daughters – Charlotte Elizabeth and Esther Anna – and a son, Judson Ward.

Appointment Status in Limbo

Unfortunately, her status as a missionary at that time came into question. Because she had married a British Baptist missionary, the American board removed her name from its missionary rolls, claiming incorrectly she had resigned her post and had left the board.

Charlotte wrote to the British Baptist Missionary Society, stating her desire to be recognized as a missionary by both the American and British mission groups. Her request was rejected.

She worked with Rowe until his death in 1823. Although she was not recognized by either missionary board, she continued to serve as the sole missionary in that region of India with oversight of 10 schools and a Hindi-speaking congregation, the couple

had shepherded. She performed this work without any financial aid from either the American or British missionary organizations.

In 1826, Charlotte, her twin daughters and son moved to London — the three sons from Rowe’s previous marriage were old enough to stay in India — where she personally appealed to the British Baptist Missionary Society to appoint her as a missionary so she could return to India. “But that was too scandalous,” Reid Trulson wrote in his book about Charlotte White Rowe. The British board also refused to appoint women as missionaries.

In December 1829, Charlotte White Rowe returned to the United States where she started a school for girls in Philadelphia. She also wrote for the *Columbian Star* newspaper under the pseudonym “Honestia,” in which she described her experiences as a female missionary.

In the 1830s, she moved to Lowndesboro, Alabama, where she taught English, music and drawing at a girl’s academy. By 1850, she had returned to Lancaster County, Penn., where she served as principal of a young ladies finishing school called the Strasburg Female Seminary.

Her two daughters died within 18 months of each other in 1851-1852 and Charlotte returned to Philadelphia where she lived until her death on Christmas Day 1863.

[**RESOURCES:** Raymond A. Parker, “Triennial Convention,” *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists, Vol 2*, (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1958); 1427 – 1428; Reid S. Trulson, *Charlotte Atlee White Rowe: The Story of America’s First Appointed Missionary*, Mercer Press, Macon, GA., 2021; Earle Cornelius, “Researcher finds that Lancaster native Charlotte Atlee Rowe was America’s first female missionary,” Life & Culture/lancasteronline.com, posted March 13, 2020.]

Historical Society Designates Penny Baumgardner the 2024 Recipient of the Baptist Heritage Award

The Florida Baptist Historical Society, for the past 28 years, annually has recognized an individual for their effective preservation and promotion of Florida Baptist history. The Society’s Board of Directors is pleased to announce that their selection as the **recipient of the 2024 Baptist Heritage Award is Brenda “Penny” Baumgardner of Graceville, Florida.**

The Baptist Heritage Award seeks to recognize and honor those Florida Baptists who have exhibited rare and unusual dedication to the cause of Florida Southern Baptist history by having made a significant impact through such means as researching and writing Baptist history, teaching Baptist history, preserving Baptist history, and/or promoting the importance of Florida Southern Baptist history. Twenty-seven individuals, since 1997, have been conferred the Baptist Heritage Award by the Florida Baptist Historical Society.

Brenda “Penny” (Mrs. Rob) Baumgardner has served as a part-time administrative ministry assistant for the Florida Baptist Historical Society from 2007 to the present.



Baumgardner’s passion for Florida Baptist history has led her to endeavor to improve the quality of the Florida Baptist Historical Society’s holdings by digitizing many of the Society’s resources. Additionally, as a result of her research, Mrs. Baumgardner has added new and enhanced history information to existing Florida Baptist church histories. Through her research efforts, she developed new and additional biographical information on Florida Baptist pastors and laypersons. As a writer, she used sound academic research to produce five articles for the *Journal of Florida Baptist Heritage*, as well as a monograph on Florida Baptist State Convention presidents.

Additionally, Mrs. Baumgardner has researched and written narratives for three Society newsletters that included: a profile of Albert A. Murphree, a Baptist layman who served two Florida universities and as president 1922-1923 of the Florida Baptist State Convention; as essay on Florida cities named by Florida Baptist pastors; and a profile on laymen who served as Florida Baptist State Convention presidents. **She regularly responds to research requests received from individuals and churches seeking historical information on Florida churches and pastors. This time-consuming and detailed research involved the review of published documents as well as specialty on-line history resources.** Much of her research for churches is foundational to the development of a church's permanent historical record.

Before coming to the Florida Baptist Historical Society, her professional career included working as a public service assistant for the Baptist College (now University) of Florida library. She previously worked as a floral designer for over 10 years, a retail clothing store manager, and as a manager and buyer for an antique business. In 1980 she attended Pasco Hernando Community College and received a certificate in Floral Design. Later she attended the Baptist Bible Institute (now Baptist University of Florida), Graceville, Florida, where she studied teaching and psychology.

Mrs. Baumgardner, born in 1961, having made a profession of faith in Christ at age 10, has faithfully served in a variety of volunteer positions in various local Baptist churches. Those service positions have included: a Sunday School and Discipleship Training teacher of various age groups over the years; Acteens leader; Awana secretary; as well as having worked on several church committees. She now attends New Teamon Baptist Church, Slocomb, Alabama. She is married to Robert G. Baumgardner and has two sons.