



# Here & Now

Vol. 8

An update for Florida Baptist Historical Society Board of Directors and Friends

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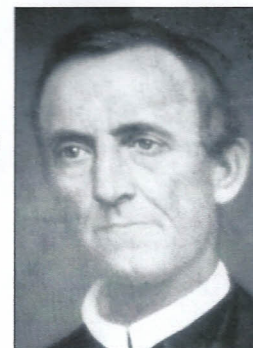


Penny Baumgardner  
Administrative Assistant

Dear Board Members and Friends of the Florida Baptist Historical Society,

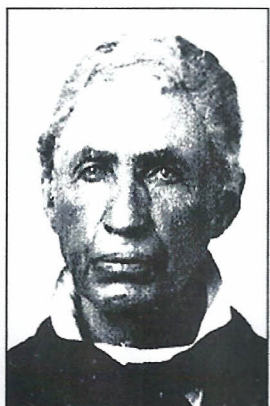
An introduction to Florida Baptists would need to start before 1854. The Florida Baptist Convention was begun in 1854, but another way to trace Baptist work in Florida is to look at its earliest associational work. The first Baptist Association of churches in Florida was the Suwannee Association in 1835, but it became extinct. The longest surviving Baptist association in Florida is the Florida Association that was begun in 1843. Two other associations were formed before the state convention (Alachua, West Florida: 1847) but for the purposes of early history emphasis let us look at some unique things about the 1843 Florida Association. We have no Florida associational minutes for 1843, 1844, 1849 and 1852, but the other pre-convention minutes 1845-1848, 1850-1851, 1853 offer some interesting early Florida Baptist history facts.

R. J. Mays was the guiding hand as moderator and Sam C. Craft served as associational clerk in the early years. In 1846, the association did the ordaining of preachers. Messengers were called delegates and members were "excommunicated" for various offences. In 1846, R. Frier was pastor of six churches in the Florida Association. This was not unusual and it was probably 1920 before we had as many Baptist pastors in Florida as we did churches.



R. J. Mays

The population of Florida in 1840 was 54,477 (Today it is 18 million plus). The population in Tallahassee was 1,616, Jacksonville had 1,045 and the population of Tampa was 974. In 1850 there were 5,550 Baptists in Madison County, Florida, where our state convention was begun. There were 2,862 white Baptists and 2,688 black Baptists in the county.



James McDonald

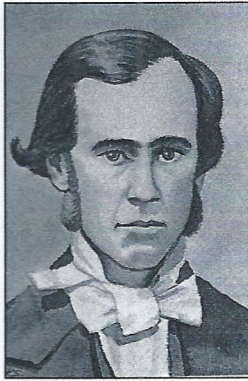
In 1846, the Florida Baptist Association began designating "white" and "black" members. This designation did not work out very long for some churches just refused to do it. Some churches reported more black members than white in this early period.

The Florida Baptist Association met three days in their fall meeting. They met on Saturday, Sunday and Monday. Technically the association adjourned on Saturday and reconvened on Monday morning. Sunday was used for preaching. In 1846 there were seven sermons on Sunday, October 11. The Florida Association met in Monticello, Florida, and Linton preached at 11am, Lacy preached at 3pm to the blacks. Fuller preached on Sunday night, McDonald preached at the Presbyterian church and McCall preached at the Methodist-Episcopal church. Blewett preached in the evening at the Presbyterian church and Joshua Mercer preached on Sunday night to the whites. There were seven sermons in one day and people could choose their speaker.

From personal research I am convinced messengers camped out in the woods, stayed in wagons and a fortunate few would have been guests in Monticello homes. Their preaching would have been wonderful. James McDonald, Joshua Mercer and T. J. Bowen were probably the most stirring speakers in the associational meetings. McDonald knew the grace and providence of God, Mercer knew the needs for education and Bowen spoke on missions and later became a missionary to Africa.

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T. J. Bowen

The preaching was primarily topical-textual and the introductory associational sermons were listed by speaker and text. John A. Broaddus did not publish the first Southern Baptist book on homiletics until 1870, but all the listed associational sermons had a text of only one verse. Expository preaching was not really used but all the messages had a text and most of them listed a title in the associational minutes. On Saturday, October 18, 1845, Joshua Mercer preached from II Corinthians 6:2 with the title "Behold now is the accepted time." In 1846, James McDonald preached from Revelation 6:2. IN 1847, N. M. Havens preached from John 12:31 and T. J. Bowen preached the missionary message "upon request." In the 1848 Florida Baptist Associational meeting W. B. Cooper preached from the text of Acts 8:25, with the title, "And preached unto him Jesus." Bro. Blewett preached at Olive Church in Thomas County, Georgia for the 1853 meeting from the text of Hebrews 10:39. Preaching was highly regarded and consistently practiced in the early meetings.

An important question is what did the early Florida Baptists believe? It was 1925 before Southern Baptists came up with the *Baptist Faith and Message*. By 1963, that SBC document had 17 different sections of confessional theology. In 1846 the Florida Baptist Association adopted a 14 section document entitled "sentiments of faith." The 14 sections of the document addressed beliefs about the Bible, God, fall, salvation, grace, perseverance, Baptism and the Lord's Supper, church, Sabbath and end times. In comparing the 1846 Florida Baptist Association document and the 1963 Southern Baptist Convention document they are much alike. The association did not have a specific section on Kingdom, evangelism, missions, education, stewardship, co-operation, social order, peace and war or religious liberty. But the Bible, God, fall, salvation, grace, perseverance, Baptism, Lord's Supper, Sabbath and end times are much the same. It appears that the Bible is the anchor, that has held Florida Baptist confessional theology and preaching, much the same as it was 170 years ago.

Honoring those who honor Christ,

Jerry M. Windsor  
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Matthew 6:33  
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