

*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 2025, the LEGACY monthly issues will feature brief personal profiles of those men who have been elected by the State Board of Missions to lead the Florida Baptist Convention. Whether designated as the Corresponding Secretary or the Executive Director-Treasurer, each of these men have left a legacy upon the corporate mission enterprise of Florida Baptists.*

## **Stuart B. Rogers** **Gifted and Visionary Missions Leader**

Within nine days of Lorenzo D. Geiger's death in April 29, 1909, Stuart Beggs Rogers (b. 1866; d. 1926), then pastor at First Baptist Church, Gainesville since 1904, was elected as the third Corresponding Secretary (1909 – 1926) by the State Board of Missions.

A native of Macon, Georgia, Rogers was born September 18, 1866. The circumstances and the date of his conversion and call to ministry apparently came before he decided to enroll at Mercer University. Although he graduated from Mercer University, he attended, but did not graduate from the University of Chicago. Rogers – as did more than a dozen pastors – twice requested and received pastoral salary assistance from the State Board Missions.

Stuart B. Rogers was the Florida Baptists' first corresponding secretary who had completed university and theological training. One history resource noted that Rogers was forced to forsake his schooling "in order to manage his father's business and save it from ruin." **Although learning and managing a farming enterprise provided valuable business skills that came to play in his later life.**

Rogers married Daisy Walker (b. 1875; d. 1925) on March 4, 1896, in the Baptist church at Vidalia, Georgia. The couple had three children: a daughter Yeteva (b. 1897); and two sons, Malbra (b. 1898) and Weiland (b. 1901).



The pastoral ministry service by Rogers began as a part-time pastor of several churches in the Panhandle. These included the Baptist Church at Greenwood (1896-1903), Marianna (1897 – 1904) and Chipley (1897 – 1904). He was then called as the full-time pastor of First Church, Gainesville (1904 – 1909).

In 1899 Rogers was elected to serve as a member of the State Board of Missions and continually participated in its decision-making and policy-setting role right up to 1909 when he was elected by the State Board to serve as its corresponding secretary. He spread the mantle of leadership when he discontinued an earlier practice of the corresponding secretary serving concurrently as the elected state convention president (a post he held only one year in 1909).

### Confronting Financial Instability

A major challenge initially confronting Rogers and the State Board of Missions was the sluggish giving by Florida Baptists. That giving, no doubt, probably mirrored their personal incomes in a struggling Florida economy at the turn of the century. Recognizing the instability of voluntary contributions, Rogers made several significant proposals to ensure financial stability for the Convention corporation.

For example, in 1910 he led the State Board to recommend to the State Convention four goals. These included the adoption of a more systematic plan of giving by the churches and the adoption of a percentage basis for all causes supported and fostered by the State Board. **This was a huge step considering that many churches at the time did not plan annual budgets but designated their gifts to specific causes, severely limiting use of convention funds.** And churches were encouraged to make a 20 percent increase in their gifts for state missions during 1910.

### Helping Churches Grow

Additionally, Rogers recommended the employment of a combination Sunday School and Baptist Young People's Union director to help churches grow through outreach. During his 17-years tenure the Convention staff was increased to over 100, many of whom were pastoral missionaries who were assigned to serve the pastor-less rural churches.

Rogers also was **credited with focusing the state convention beyond Florida's majority rural landscapes to the cities where growth and urbanization was taking place post-World War I.**

Among his most notable achievements in leading the State Convention, Rogers was a great champion of the temperance cause. He was credited also with uniting a divided State Convention. He moved the Florida Baptist offices from Gainesville to Jacksonville and led in the construction of a Convention office building, later named the Rogers Building in his memory.

Rogers was an excellent executive and businessman. His university training combined with the "daily exposure to his father's business gave Rogers a sense of ease and persistence about fiscal matters that brought him a focus of accomplishment in his pastoral work and in his work with the Florida Baptist Convention," Florida Baptist historian Jerry Windsor wrote.

### A Champion for Cooperative Giving

Rogers' unifying leadership was apparent in the Convention's participation in the Southern Baptist Convention's 75 Million Campaign which sought in 1923 to erase deficits incurred by the SBC Home and Foreign Mission boards. While other state conventions could not raise their quota, Florida Baptists, under Rogers' leadership, responded generously and met their goal. While the campaign did not meet its goal nationwide, it served as the forerunner of the Cooperative Program, which serves today as the SBC's unified budgeting plan.

**"Many of his suggestions which were carried out by the State Board and the State Convention greatly improved the administrative efficiency with which Florida Baptist did their work,"** recalled the late Florida Baptist historian Earl Joiner.

Rogers hoped to inspire Florida Baptists to create a loan fund to assist congregations construct church buildings. While the funding never reached the goals he had set, he was gifted in finding contributors to the cause. During his last year, \$47,811 [\$867,895 in 2025 dollars] was provided to churches, with 496 churches receiving such aid during his administration.

In 1924 Rogers summarized his 15 years of leadership: \$227,824 [\$4,135,604 in 2025 dollars] given for foreign missions; \$219,465 [\$3,983,866 in 2025 dollars] for home missions and \$282,645

[\$5,130,749 in 2025 dollars] for Christian education. By 1925, the value of church property grew from \$705,371 to \$14,002,872, an increase of 567 percent; and total church membership grew to 77,846 from 37,027, a net increase of 210 percent.

### Emotional and Physical Trauma Strikes

Unfortunately, nothing could prevent nor prepare Rogers for the emotional trauma that came with the untimely death on October 31, 1925, of his wife of 29 years – Daisy Walker Rogers – at age 50. Active in Florida's Woman's Missionary Union, Daisy Rogers had been the state's first volunteer Sunbeam and RA leader. And at the time of her death, Mrs. Rogers was serving as the Florida representative on the S.B.C. Woman's Missionary Union's Executive Committee, an elected post she had held since 1916.

Upon assessing his own increasing physical frailties and the emotional toll he was experiencing, Rogers announced during the January, 1926, meeting of the State Board his intention to finally retire. However, it was not to be a retirement filled with pleasant twilight years. Within a month of his announcement, the 59-year-old Rogers suffered a stroke that caused paralysis. He initially was hospitalized in Jacksonville for two months before he was transferred to Atlanta's Blackman Sanatorium where he spent another two months convalescing.

As Rogers finally began showing signs of improvement by late summer his children made plans to return their father to his Jacksonville home. But on August 13 Rogers suffered another stroke that rendered him unconscious and three days later on August 16 he died.

Wise and able, committed and cooperative, S. B. Rogers set the direction of the Convention on a new course for his successors to follow. "We can only hint at the scope of this man's program," said the late John Maguire, executive secretary-treasurer, 1945-1967.

**[RESOURCES:** E. Earl Joiner, *A History of Florida Baptists* (1972); Donald S. Hepburn and E. Earl Joiner, *Favored Florida: A History of Florida Baptists, Vol. I, 1784 – 1939*, (2013); Jerry M. Windsor, "Stuart Beggs Rogers, the Quiet Before the Storm," *The Journal of Florida Baptist Heritage*, Fall, 2004; State Board of Missions, Minutes, January 18, 1906; January 11, 1921, April 25, 1923; January, 1926; *Florida Baptist Witness*, various issues.]