

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

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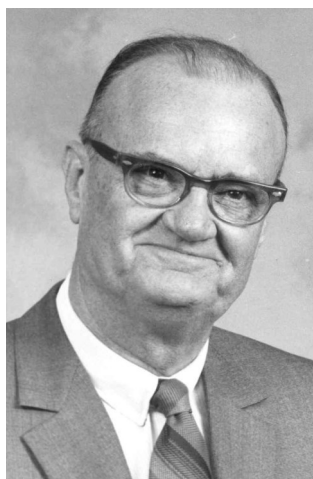
*LEGACY, as the monthly newsletter of the Florida Baptist Historical Society, has as its mission to highlight the legacy forged by the people and events in Florida Baptist history. During 2025, the LEGACY monthly issues will feature brief personal profiles of those men who have been elected by the State 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.*

## **Interim Executive Secretaries/Directors: Footnotes in Florida Baptist History**

In the twentieth century, there were several instances in which an untimely death or sudden resignation of the Florida Baptist Convention's executive secretary-treasurer (later redesignated as executive director-treasurer), required the State Board of Missions to take immediate action. Between 1880 and 1944, the State Board of Missions selected or replaced their leader from within the Board membership. **It was not until 1944 that the Board appointed its first search committee to identify and employ a new executive secretary-treasurer.**

Once setting the precedent to use a search committee process, the initial action by the Board was to appoint an interim leader "to fill the gap" until a permanent leader could be selected. In all instances these appointees were "caretakers" who provided continuity to the convention's day-to-day workflow. Those interim leaders, whose service became a footnote in Florida Baptist history, included: Homer G. Lindsay, Sr., J. Woodrow Fuller, and Glen E. Owens. Yet as the record reveals, the transition process was never exactly the same.

### **Homer G. Lindsay, Sr – 1944**



The Florida Baptist Convention's fifth executive secretary C. H. Bolton, at age 58, resigned unexpectedly from the post during the April 25, 1944, meeting of the State Board of Missions. He had accepted the call to serve as pastor of the Riverside Baptist Church, Miami.

As had been the prior 60-year practice for replacing five other former executive secretaries, the Board immediately opened the floor for nominations. The nominations were taken by secret ballot. In a runoff between two leading candidates, Thomas Hansen (b. 1897; d. 1950) pastor of Main Street Baptist Church, Jacksonville (1929 – 1950), received the most votes. But Hansen, who was the State Convention President, requested a month to pray about his decision.

The following month of May the Board convened. Hansen read a statement of appreciation concerning his election but declined the appointment. He said he felt it would be wise to nominate a committee to serve as a search committee and make a recommendation to the Board for a vote. **The initial reaction by some Board members was to nominate various other persons to be elected immediately as executive secretary.**

Finally, the Board agreed to elect five people by secret ballot to serve as the executive secretary search committee. Every member was to write a single Board member's name on a ballot and the five persons who received the most votes would be appointed to the search committee. They also agreed that automatically two additional committee members would be the State Convention president and the State Board of Missions president. **This action would mark the first time in the history of the State Board of Missions that a search committee would seek out and recommend a person for the Board's consideration as executive secretary-treasurer.**

Between May and September, a curious thing happened. The Board's Executive Committee likely informally decided that Board President Homer Lindsay should be appointed acting secretary-treasurer. However, there is no record in the Board minutes confirming that action. Remarkably, the committee's minutes only note the approval that "Brother H. G. Lindsay be authorized to borrow a Dictaphone machine that is here in the State Board office." Most likely Lindsay was provided the recording machine to respond to official correspondence coming into the executive secretary's office and to carry out actions approved by the Board.

**Homer Gentry Lindsay, Sr. (b. 1903; d. 1981) was a native of Lake City, Tennessee. He served as pastor of First Baptist Church in Jacksonville from 1940 to 1973, for a total of 33 years.** He and his son, Homer Lindsay Jr, were co-pastors of the church from 1969 to 1973, when Lindsay, Jr. became pastor. When the senior Lindsay began the Jacksonville pastorate, the church had lost its property and was bankrupt. By God's Providence and Lindsay's leadership, by 1969, the church had eliminated its debt, expanded its facilities built with an all-cash philosophy to accommodate the membership that had grown to over 12,200 members.

As a result of the work of the first formal executive secretary search committee, by late November 1944, a candidate had been identified. Then in January 1945, the committee recommended and the Board elected John H. Maguire of Birmingham, Alabama, as the sixth executive secretary. Maguire's service lasted 24 years.



### **J. Woodrow Fuller – 1979**

Harold Bennett served as executive secretary-treasurer from 1969 to 1979. He resigned to accept the position of executive secretary-treasurer of the Southern Baptist Convention's Executive Committee.

The Florida State Board of Missions appointed a search committee and decided during a called meeting March 15, 1979 to appoint J. Woodrow Fuller as the interim executive secretary-treasurer. Fuller, who had been serving as the Convention's Missions Director since 1969, at age 64 had previously announced his plans to retire December 15, 1979. However, the Board voted to extend Fuller's retirement date to a full year later.

**The Board chairman, Alton Butler, in response to a question by the editor of the *Florida Baptist Witness*, explained the Board's decision to appoint a staff person nearing retirement age. Butler noted the committee "did not wish to recommend a person as interim executive secretary treasurer who would be interested in continuing in the position."** Butler's response provided unspoken clarity to the Board's decision to pass over staff member Billy G. Hickem (b. 1928; d. 2022) who had been serving as the Florida Baptist Convention's assistant executive director since 1974.

Dr. Fuller served five months from April 1 to October 31, 1979, while a Board-appointed search committee sought and subsequently recommended the election of Dan C. Stringer who served from November 1979 to 1989. Stringer was present to observe but not participate, and was not officially presented until the closing session of the 1979 Florida Baptist State Convention meeting.

During the 1979 annual meeting Interim Executive Secretary Woodrow Fuller presented the recommendations and reports on the prior year's work of the State Board of Missions and the convention's program departments. Among the several Board recommendations presented to messengers were proposed changes to the State Convention's Constitution and Bylaws that would revise the designation of the position title of the executive secretary-treasurer to executive director-treasurer. Board Chairman Butler explained the proposed change "more adequately describes the function of the position."

**The state convention's 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary since founding was commemorated throughout the three-day 1979 annual meeting by a series of "great moments in Florida Baptist history."** And in an interesting historical footnote was the fact that one of the guest speakers for the annual meeting was a future executive director-treasurer in the person of T. G. "John" Sullivan, pastor of the Broadmoor Baptist Church, Shreveport, La.

**Fuller (b. 1914; d. 1993), was a native of Benton County, Mississippi. He previously served as pastor of churches in Kentucky and Texas before coming to Florida. In 1969 he became the first director of the Florida Baptist Convention's missions' program.** His mission administration experience in Texas helped him become a missions' giant in Florida. His most significant action as missions' director was to lead the Florida Convention to shift from convention-funded district leaders to local association-supported director of missions. He also led in the Florida-Pennsylvania-South Jersey and the Caribbean partnerships formation. Following his retirement beginning in 1980 Fuller served as director of missions for the Black Creek Baptist Association.

### **Glen E. Owens – 2015**



As reported in previous issues of LEGACY, the Florida Baptist Convention's longest serving executive director-treasurer was Dr. T. G. "John" Sullivan who served from 1989 to 2015.

When Sullivan announced his retirement plans, the State Board of Missions' Administrative/Personnel Committee recommended that the Board elect an interim executive director-treasurer until the Board-appointed search committee could complete its task. Upon the recommendation of Dr. Sullivan, the Committee recommended, and the Board affirmed, the appointment of **Glen E. Owens**, the then current assistant executive director for the prior 26 years, to be designated as the interim executive director, effective March 1, 2015. Owens held

the post three and one-half months until June 15, 2015, when John Thomas “Tommy” Green, III, assumed the EDT leadership post. Owens continued his service with the convention as a regional catalyst until he retired, at age 70, in 2017.

**Owens (b. 1947; d. 2025) was originally employed by the State Board of Missions to begin service in December 1989 as the assistant executive director. John Sullivan had handpicked Owens, in large part due to a long-standing friendship that existed between the two men since 1984 when Owens joined the staff of the Broadmoor Baptist Church, Shreveport, La., where Sullivan was pastor.** Owens served as minister of business administration at Broadmoor from 1984 – 1987. He subsequently accepted an invitation to join the staff of the Roswell Street Baptist Church, Marietta, Georgia, where he served 1987 – 1989 as minister of young adult education and director of church operations.

Owens’ interim service extended beyond leadership of the state convention as he served more than 80 pastoral interims in Florida Baptist churches, “where he ministered to and guided some of Florida Baptists’ most significant churches during a time of transition, often providing wise and healing counsel to troubled congregations,” noted a resolution approved by messengers to the 2017 Florida Baptist State Convention.

This concludes the LEGACY series on the Florida Baptist Convention’s executive leadership. Beginning in January 2026, a new series will feature “Florida Baptists’ Heroes of the Faith.”

[RESOURCES: Donald Hepburn, “Homer G. Lindsay, Sr.,” *The Journal of Florida Baptist Heritage*, Vol. 6, Fall, 2004; Belton S. Wall, Jr, *A Tale to be Told: A History of First Baptist Church, Jacksonville*; State Board of Missions *Minutes*, April, May and September, 1944, and March, 1979; *Florida Baptist Witness*, November 27, 1980 and November 11, 1993; Florida Baptist State Convention *Annual*, 1979 and *Annual*, 2017; State Board of Missions *Minutes*, November, 1989; February, 2015, May, 2015; and biographical files on Homer Lindsay, Sr., Woodrow Fuller and Glen E. Owens maintained by the Florida Baptist Historical Society.]

### **A concluding Christmas thought:**

**You Can Create Your Own  
LEGACY**  
by Financially Supporting the Ministry of the  
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