

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH
G. A. Ratterree



Date and Place of Birth:

August 6, 1909, Poteau, Oklahoma

Family:

Wife: Helen Williams, married 1934

Daughter: Mrs. Dianne Dixon

Sons: Gary W.
Damon Ralph
Jonathan Paul

Conversion:

At age 11, baptized August, 1920

Ordination:

First Baptist Church, Poteau, Oklahoma, 1935

Education:

Poteau High School, Poteau, Oklahoma
Oklahoma Baptist University, Shawnee, Oklahoma, 1928-30
University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma, B.A. Degree, 1931
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas, Th.M. Degree, 1945

Former Positions:

Teacher, Cameron High School, Cameron, Oklahoma, 1931-32
Principal, Poteau High School, Poteau, Oklahoma, 1932-35
Principal, Glendale High School, Glendale, Oklahoma, 1935-37
Superintendent, Stapp-Zoe Schools, Stapp, Oklahoma, 1937-38
Student Pastorates: Oklahoma and Texas, 1935-43
Pastor, First Baptist Church, Gotebo, Oklahoma, 1944-45
Pastor, Lake Forest Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Florida, 1945-47
Pastor, First Baptist Church, Kissimmee, Florida, 1948-50
Director, Brotherhood Department, Florida Baptist Convention, 1950-74

Denominational Activities:

Vice-President, Jacksonville Baptist Pastor's Conference, 1946
President, Jacksonville Baptist Pastor's Conference, 1947
Member, State Board of Missions, Florida Baptist State Convention, 1946-47
Member, Missions Committee, Jacksonville Baptist Association, 1946-47
Moderator, Wekiwa Baptist Association, 1949-50

Florida Baptist Witness

March 25, 1999

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Retired Brotherhood director dies

G.A. Ratterree, director of the Florida Baptist Brotherhood Department from 1950 to 1974, died Thursday, March 18, in a Jacksonville nursing home where he had been a resident for the past several years. Natural causes are being cited as the cause of death. He was 89 years old.

Ratterree joined the convention staff in November 1950 as associate secretary (director) of the Brotherhood Department, and was named department director in October 1951. During his 24 years of leadership, the Brotherhood program grew to 25,000 participants from 8,157.

"G.A. Ratterree was a friend for over 30 years and was a true Barnabas for me," said Charles Ragland, who served as Ratterree's associate and later succeeded him.

"His love for the Lord was an inspiration and as state Brotherhood director

he rallied the men and boys of Florida to effective mission service."

Cecil Seagle, director of the convention's mission division, called Ratterree a "quiet but dynamic leader, a great man. His track in Florida was that he was always consistent, he understood men's work, he understood RA work and his commitment to Christ bled over to both of those works, making him a pioneer of strong men and boys work."

Prior to coming to the convention staff, Ratterree served as pastor of churches in Kissimmee and Jacksonville. In his younger days, Ratterree was a high school teacher and principal and later served as a superintendent of public schools in Stapp, Okla.

Ratterree is survived by his wife of 65 years, Helen, a married daughter, and two sons. A third son preceded him in death.

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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 2022, the LEGACY's monthly issues will feature Florida Baptists' missions' commitment as reflected in the people and events that inspired their fellow Baptists in the fulfilment of the Great Commission of Jesus Christ to faithfully, "go and make disciples of all nations."

Florida Baptists Responded to Florida's Growth

In many ways the 1950's and 1960s were likely the most fabulous periods in Florida Baptist history. During these decades, Florida Baptists shared in the economic and population growth of the state of Florida and responded rather well to the challenges provided by that growth. Convention leaders observed early in the 1950s that Florida was the fastest growing state east of the Mississippi with a growth rate three times the national average, and 1,000 new people coming into Florida each week. Florida income increased from 635 million dollars a year in 1930 to over 3 billion in 1950, an increase of 400 percent. The population increased from 2,771,305 in 1950 to 4,951,560 in 1960, an increase of 76.3 percent. The process of urbanization, expanding in the 1940's, continued to increase during the 1950's until in 1960, 65.5 percent of Florida's population was urban. Slightly over half the population was concentrated in the four metropolitan areas of Jacksonville, Miami, Orlando, and Tampa-St. Petersburg.

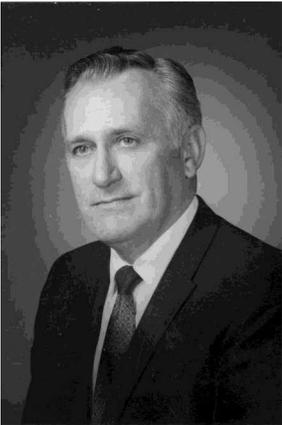
Florida Baptists not only responded to the challenge of Florida's growth, but they came to share in it as well. Church membership growth exceeded any other decade in previous Florida Baptist history as it increased from 278,668 in 1950 to 480,407 in 1960, not quite keeping pace with the population growth, but still representing remarkable growth. [Slightly more than a 70 per cent increase, compared with a population increase of 76.3 per cent] In 1957, the churches of the Florida Baptist State Convention constituted 44.8 percent of the Protestant church membership in Florida. Additionally, in 1959, a record was set in number of baptisms when 28,626 baptisms were reported. Cooperative Program receipts grew from \$821,471 in 1950 to \$1,321,380 in 1960. The total number of churches from which those gifts came grew from 911 in 1950, to 1,257 in 1960.

Under the leadership of **John H. Maguire (b. 1900; d. 1987)** who between 1945 and 1967, was the executive secretary-treasurer, Florida Baptist Convention, led the Convention to respond to the growth opportunities. Working cooperatively with the then-called SBC Home Mission Board, a jointly funded program of city and rural missions was developed and put into operation. Initially, the plan was to assign, in selected metropolitan and rural regions, district missionaries. These men were to assist churches and start new churches. Over the next two decades this program evolved into assigning missionaries to each local Baptist association to emphasize evangelism and outreach, as well as to promote the various ministry programs provided by the Convention. All of these efforts were designed to help local churches reach with the gospel people in their communities, as well as train and equip church leaders.



Beginning in the 1950s and continuing into the 1960s, messengers annually adopted convention budgets, which authorized the continued split of Cooperative Program receipts on a 50-50 basis between the Southern Baptist Convention and the state convention. With increased giving by churches, Maguire secured State Convention approval and then implemented a capital needs program to underwrite the growing facility needs of the State Convention's agencies and institutions.

State Convention President Harold Sanders presided over the 1954 annual meeting which was the **Centennial year celebration** - 100 years since the organization of the Florida Baptist State Convention - although this was only the 93rd annual meeting for the convention. On seven separate occasions the state convention did not meet due to war or other restricting conditions. The State Convention messengers learned of the significant gains made in Florida as a result of the year-long, heavily promoted, Southern Baptist Convention's Sunday School enrolment campaign of "**A Million More in 54.**" The emphasis resulted in significant increases in local church Sunday school enrolments, as well as reports of increased study course awards being earned by teachers who sought to improve the quality of their Sunday school teaching.



The 1968 annual meeting was the first for new Executive Secretary **Harold C. Bennett (b. 1924; d. 2003)** who had replaced John Maguire following his retirement. The messengers approved a 1969 convention budget, which for the first time, was identified as a "Cooperative Program" budget with an anticipated income of \$3.9 million. Also in 1968, in a historic change, the messengers approved the request of the Florida Woman's Missionary Union auxiliary to become a regular program department under the auspices of the State Board of Missions, thus ending an 87-year tradition of being an independent fraternal entity to the state convention.

Jones' Missions' Service Comes to an End

Josephine Jones, had set the tone during her 23 years (1944 – 1967) effectively leading Florida W.M.U. As noted in last month's LEGACY, Miss Jones' efforts to raise the missions' consciousness and actions by Florida Baptist women resulted in the growth of the organization to 5,500 W.M.U. units by 1967, up from 1,534 groups that existed in 1945. The number of women and girls participating in W.M.U. groups doubled to over 80,000 members, up from 28,936 in 1945. Interestingly Jones' retirement in 1967 came with the parallel retirement of John H. Maguire, who had served as the Convention's Executive Secretary-Treasurer since 1945. Maguire told the 1967 annual session of the W.M.U. that he had "gratitude for the privilege of working with Miss Jones for more than 22 years."

Carolyn Weatherford – Served 1967 to 1974

In seeking a new leader for Florida W.M.U. the organization's Executive Board assumed the task with much enthusiasm. They turned to a former director of Florida's Girl's Auxiliary (GA) program from 1961 – 1963. She was Frostproof, Florida native **Carolyn Weatherford (b. 1930; d. 2015)** who, at the time, was serving as Promotion division director for the Alabama W.M.U. Weatherford led Florida W.M.U. from 1967 to 1974.

Carolyn became a professing Christian at age 12 and was baptized in a nearby lake. By the time she was 14, she became a counselor for Girls In Action (GAs), leading those who were marginally younger. During a W.M.U. conference, at age 16, Carolyn saw there were significant women, other than her mother, leading and serving God. At the dedication service,



she pledged a lifelong commitment to Christian service, thinking she would be a missionary. Returning home, her pastor quickly enlisted her in teaching Vacation Bible School, the first ever held in Frostproof.

Majoring in library science at Florida State University, Carolyn worked for five years as a high school librarian after a heartbreaking broken marriage engagement. Following two summers as a church youth director, she remembered her early commitment to full-time Christian service and enrolled at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary (NOBTS) where she was encouraged, but not yet convinced, she needed to be involved in professional WMU work. At NOBTS, she set up the library for the Mather School of Nursing, and served as Baptist Student Union director for the nurses.

While applying for appointment as a missionary with the then called SBC Foreign Mission Board, a medical exam revealed she suffered from hypertension. She decided to continue in W.M.U. work, hoping one day to resolve her medical issue. Unfortunately, she was dropped from consideration as a missionary, and in 1961 she accepted a job in Florida to work with GA's.

Weatherford's Missions Emphasis

Several interesting aspects of Weatherford's designation as Florida's W.M.U. executive secretary which are now footnotes in Florida Baptist history. She was presented at both the November, 1967 meeting of the Florida Baptist State Convention and the April, 1968 W.M.U. annual session as the new W.M.U. executive secretary. Yet Weatherford had not been officially elected by the W.M.U. membership, as had been the practice for prior leaders. Additionally, was not officially "installed," as were other executive secretaries, but was named to the post only by the action of the organization's Executive Board. Just four weeks after her appointment, the Florida Baptist Convention, Inc., welcomed Harold Bennett as the new executive director-treasurer who served from 1967 – 1978.

During the ensuing seven years Weatherford and Bennett worked together on many missions' promotion activities. However, as noted previously, in 1968, in a historic change, the messengers to the Florida Baptist State Convention approved the request of the Florida Woman's Missionary Union auxiliary to become a regular program department under the auspices of the State Board of Missions.

The changing roles of women – moving from working in the home to working in the secular world – during the decade of the 1960s had a profound effect upon W.M.U. work. This cultural shift required a change in the W.M.U. missions' activities. Weatherford led the women to eliminate the local church "circles" organization, which was top heavy with officers and chairmen. In its place women could choose and participate in groups focused on mission action, prayer, missions' outreach, missions Bible study, among other possibilities. Women continued to set the pace in financially supporting mission projects at home and abroad. In response to an SBC Baptist Sunday School Board major emphasis upon age-group grading (preschool, children, youth and adult), Weatherford led Florida W.M.U. to re-align its various missions' groups to the new pattern.

A major component of Weatherford's strategy to grow and strengthen the W.M.U. ministry was to offer more leadership training for the local church W.M.U. leaders. She led in an effort to encourage every Florida Baptist church to have at least one W.M.U. unit. Despite the best of efforts at promotion, during the late 1960s W.M.U., all grade levels began to decline. From more than 80,000 women and girls enrolled in 1966-67, in over 5,000 organized units, enrollment dropped to nearly 60,000 by end of the of the decade.

Martha Trotter in her published history of Florida W.M.U. observed, "Carolyn Weatherford was obviously God's chosen servant to guide Florida W.M.U. through the maze of changes and challenges shaking W.M.U. structures at all levels. In the midst of the tumultuous social climate,

Weatherford had the sensitivity to meet women where they were, the enthusiasm to draw them toward where they needed to be, and the love to make them feel good about it.” In 1974 Weatherford was selected as the executive director of the SBC Woman’s Missionary Union.

Brotherhood Breaks Out on its Own

The Brotherhood program under the direction of C.A. Holcomb, beginning in 1945, sought to develop the missions’ consciousness of Baptist laymen through a variety of missions and evangelism events. These included an annual Brotherhood Convention that featured inspiration and promotion for the men and church pastors to start additional men’s groups in local churches. Men also were encouraged to attend the summer Brotherhood Week held at Ridgecrest and the Deland Assembly for training and inspiration. During the year, Laymen’s Revivals, regional Brotherhood Rallies and Laymen’s Day in churches were organized and promoted to enlist men being involved in the local church. Another program call the “Man-and-Boy Movement” challenged Baptist men to enlist boys into their respective church’s Sunday School program.



By 1950, the State Board of Missions added an associate **G.A. Ratterree (b. 1909; d. 1999)**, assigned to work primarily with the Brotherhood program. Ratterree came to the Convention post from the pastorate, having served the First Baptist Church, Kissimmee. By 1952, the Music-Brotherhood department was divided into two distinct programs. The re-organized Music Department, still led by C. A. Holcomb, was assigned the additional responsibilities of organizing camps and assemblies for all Convention program departments. Under Holcomb’s leadership the number of churches with Brotherhood units had grown to 374 with a combined membership involvement of 9,380 men.

During his tenure from 1950 to 1974 leading the Brotherhood program, which became a separate department in 1952, Ratterree placed greater emphasis upon men being involved in personal soul-winning and working to establish mission churches, in addition to the long-standing Brotherhood activities.

In 1957, the Woman’s Missionary Union asked the Brotherhood Department to assume the responsibility of promoting the Royal Ambassador missions’ education program for boys. This included the expansion of the program in local churches. This program for boys sought to involve more men in the leading of existing R.A. programs, as well as starting new chapters in more churches. During Ratterree’s 24 years of leadership, the Brotherhood program grew to 25,000 participants from 9,380.

This series on Florida Baptists’ Missions’ Commitment continues next month