

Rev. Henry Green Berry Ray

Rev. Henry Green Berry Ray, known as H.G.B., Green, or Elder Ray, was a pioneer Baptist minister in Escambia County, Florida, and Escambia County, Alabama, from the late 1860s to the early 1900s. He pastored as many as four churches at one time, preaching one Sunday per month at each church. During the week he farmed the land on which he and his family lived. Homestead Certificate No. 511, signed by President Rutherford B. Hayes, was issued to him December 30, 1879. The land was located just over the Florida state line in Escambia County, Alabama.

From 1869 to 1872, Rev. Ray was recorded at Pine Barren Baptist Church in Davisville, north Escambia County, Florida, just south of Atmore, Escambia County, Alabama. He served as church clerk and was elected a delegate to the Bethlehem Baptist Association annual meeting. In the fall of 1872, he was one of four ministers who organized Elim Baptist Association, composed of churches in Escambia and Santa Rosa counties, Florida, and Escambia and Baldwin counties, Alabama. A recognized leader in Elim Association, he served on many committees through the years. He was moderator in 1881 and preached the annual sermon in 1882 when the association met at Pleasant Hill Baptist Church in Bluff Springs.

In Escambia County, Florida, Rev. Ray pastored Mitchell's Creek Baptist Church (now extinct), Union Hill Baptist Church, and Enon Baptist Church. On November 9, 1890, he organized Ray's Chapel Baptist Church at Bogia. His last Escambia County, Florida pastorate was Oak Grove Baptist Church in 1896. In addition to his work in Florida, he also pastored Traveler's Rest Baptist Church, Little Escambia Baptist Church, Magnolia Baptist Church, Blue Springs Baptist Church, and Sardis Baptist Church in Escambia County, Alabama.

Rev. Ray was born December 15, 1827, at Camden in Wilcox county, Alabama. His parents, Hall Ray (March 1, 1797-August 17, 1871) and Salina (Selina) Wilkerson Ray (April 16, 1805-February 18, 1883) married in Clarke County, Alabama on February 20, 1821. Hall Ray was the son of Henry Ray and Judith White Ray who married March 1, 1794 in Bertie County, North Carolina. Judith White Ray was the daughter of Meedy White (about 1750-1804). He served as a private in Captain Whitehall's Company of the First North Carolina Regiment of Militia during the American Revolution.

The sixteen children born to Hall and Salina Wilkerson Ray were Keziah Emily Ray, Francis Horatio Perry Ray, Henry Green Berry Ray, Matilda Ann Ray, Elizabeth Ray, Margaret Ray, Kellah Amanda Ray, John Hall Ray, James George Osborne Wilkerson Ray, Charles Campbell Ray, Malachi Brooks Ray, Mary Ray, Frances Susan Ray, Calvin Sellers Ray, and Samuel Oliver Young Ray (also an evangelist/minister).

On December 19, 1849, in Wilcox County, Alabama, Henry Green Berry Ray married Mary Susan Sturdivant, daughter of Willis and Margaret Sturdivant. Forty acres in Alabama were patented to him in Certificate No. 40980, dated December 1, 1852 and signed by President Millard Fillmore. Henry Green Berry Ray and Mary Susan

Sturdivant Ray were parents of Jinney (born about 1853), John Buchanon "Buck" Ray (September 18, 1855-July 16, 1936, buried at Canaan Freewill Baptist Church Cemetery in Canoe, Alabama), and Willis Hall "Pink" Ray (December 24, 1859-May 22, 1921, buried at Sardis Baptist Church Cemetery in Canoe, Alabama). Mary Susan Sturdivant Ray died shortly after the birth of Willis Hall Ray. Per 1860 census records, the two boys then lived in Bluff Springs, north Escambia County, Florida, and were cared for by their maternal grandparents. Per 1860 census records, H.G.B. Ray went to Choctaw County, Alabama and farmed, living near Nicholson's Store. His parents and several brothers and sisters already lived in Choctaw County. They were early members of Hurricane Baptist Church and are buried at Mt. Pisgah Baptist Church Cemetery, west of Melvin on Highway 14 in Choctaw County.

On June 1, 1861, in Quitman, Clarke County, Mississippi, H. Green B. Ray, age 35, enlisted in the Confederate Army. He served first as a private and then as a corporal in Company I, Thirteenth Mississippi Regiment. He reenlisted at Leesburg, Virginia, and served as a recruiting officer and clothing agent for the regiment. Most of his records show that he was on recruiting detail, but he was present at Manassas and later admitted to the hospital at Lynchburg, Virginia. He served until the end of the war.

On July 18, 1865, in Monroe County, Alabama, he married Eliza Sturdivant Kervin Colson, born in 1825 to Willis and Margaret Sturdivant. Eliza was the widow of John Colson (married February 26, 1853, per the *Pensacola Gazette*) and was the sister of Mary Susan Sturdivant, first wife of Henry Green Berry Ray. Rev. Ray became a father to Eliza's daughter, Alice Colson, age 10. In addition, Rev. and Mrs. Ray were parents of Eliza Ray, born in 1866.

Rev. Ray lived for many years in Escambia County, Alabama, near Canoe at Raysville. On November 14, 1881, he was appointed Justice of the Peace for District 7. He made an oath that, as Justice of the Peace, he would not initiate a duel, nor would he accept one if challenged. He remained active in Elim Baptist Association, representing the Sardis Baptist Church as an Elim Association delegate after he was no longer actively pastoring.

Newspaper articles and land records during that era referred to him as Dr. H.G.B. Ray. His two sons, Dr. John Buchanon Ray and Dr. Willis Hall Ray, were also referenced with him as doctors. The 1900 census specifically identified Rev. Ray as a cancer doctor. It is family knowledge passed down through the generations that Rev. Ray and his sons developed a treatment for skin cancer. Family members are also aware of a patent application, although no documents have been located. (On September 5, 2005, "The Green Ray Cancer Plaster" formula was discovered on a yellowed and fragile sheet of onionskin paper. It had been kept in a Pensacola attic since the 1930s as part of a collection of WPA writings.)

Rev. Henry Green Berry Ray died at his home in Canoe, Alabama in 1909. A memorial was published in the Elim Baptist Association Minutes. He and Eliza Sturdivant Kervin Colson Ray are buried in the Ray family plot on the north side of

Willis Hall Ray in the Sardis Baptist Church Cemetery in Wawbeek, just north of Highway 31 between Flomaton and Canoe, in Escambia County, Alabama.

In late 2002, a great-grandson, Henry Greenberry Ray, Jr., of Bay Minette, Alabama, who was located during this research project, placed memorials on the graves which had remained unmarked for 93 years. A separate marker to honor Rev. Ray for his many years as pastor of Sardis Baptist Church was also placed at the foot of his grave.

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Florida Baptist Historical Society
Written March 27, 2002
Revised October 18, 2007

Published in *The Heritage of Escambia County, Florida* (2004)
Published in *The Heritage of Santa Rosa County, Florida II* (2005)

Sources:

Bethlehem Baptist Association records
Elim Baptist Association records
Census, Bible, land, and vital records
Military records (CSA and American Revolution)
Atmore Spectrum