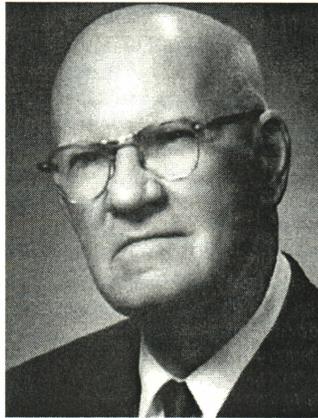


Judge O. K. Reaves West Central Florida Leviathan



The year was 1877. It had been a scant twelve years since the last shots were fired in the nation's long nightmare - the calamitous Civil War. In the spring of that year, Rutherford B. Hayes was elected President and in late April the last federal troops withdrew from the South by leaving New Orleans. Meanwhile in Florida, George F. Drew, a Democrat, was sworn in as Governor, ending the era of so-called "carpetbag" government.

It was also the year in which two later closely-connected lawyers were born. One was Giddings E. Mabry, a Mississippian, who ventured into Florida and ultimately settled in Tampa where he formed an association with Doyle Carlton for the practice of law in 1912. The other, centerpiece of this article, was O.K. Reaves, native Floridian. Biographical references and his own notes reflect his birth in Sarasota. At least one record, however, reflects he was born in Fruitville, which is more likely correct in that the founding of Sarasota reportedly did not take place until about 1884.

That O.K. Reaves lived, practiced law, became a judge, then resumed the practice, and was a pillar of his church and community leader are facts. That his professional reputation and stature made him a man apart from most of his contemporaries is the stuff that gives birth to legends. He was of the common clay no doubt but clay of a unique mold. Famed film director, John Ford, is the origin of a remark attributed to a character in one of his classic Westerns, "If a legend becomes fact, then print the legend."

Judge Reaves, as he was forever known following his judicial service, was appointed Judge of the Sixth Judicial Circuit in 1915 and held that office until 1921. That Circuit is presently comprised of Pasco and Pinellas Counties; during Reaves' tenure it encompassed Manatee, also. When the 6th Circuit was restructured in 1915 by Ch. 6975, Laws of Florida the 13th Circuit was created exclusively for Hillsborough County.

Preparing for his long career which lay ahead, Reaves attended Stetson University Law School graduating in the Class of 1903, just three years after that institution was founded. A half century later, Reaves was honored with other 50-year graduates by Stetson. Judge Reaves' law partner, former Governor Doyle Carlton was principal speaker for the occasion.

Reaves launched his law practice in Bradenton in 1903 and established himself in what must have been a highly competent fashion for the next 12 years. Attesting to that conclusion is the fact that he became judge after that relatively brief time in the profession.

In 1921 the salary of Circuit Judges was \$5000 a year. A Tampa Tribune story in the 40's featured Judge Reaves calling him one of the "Builders of Tampa" and quoted him as saying that he left the bench with a ten year old son, was prompted to resign his judgeship and resume private law practice. Perhaps it was the lure of big city life that brought him to Tampa, at that time a metropolis of 51,628 souls. However, it came about, he came and was made a partner in the firm known as Mabry, Reaves and Carlton. Governor Carlton took third position in the firm name perhaps out of deference to Reaves who was older and a former judge.

Some years ago, Reece Smith, who joined the firm early in his career in 1953, composed a splendid, in-depth profile of firm members and associates. The firm name has undergone a number of changes of the years, ultimately dropping the familiar Mabry, Reaves signature, and is presently titled Carlton, Fields, Ward, Emmanuel, Smith and Cutler.

As further evidence of his stature, Reaves was once offered but declined a seat on the Florida Supreme Court, which at one time is said to have referred to him as, "One of the two best lawyers in Florida." He served a term in the State Legislature, and later was a charter member and President of the Florida Bar Association, forerunner of The Florida Bar, in 1920.

In addition to his career in the law, Reaves had extensive business and financial interests, reportedly being a shareholder in Bradenton Bank and Trust, National Bank of Commerce, Commercial State Bank, Merchant's Mechanics Bank, Guaranty Mortgage Co., Seminole Furniture Co., Beach Park Company and others.

In 1949, O.K. Reaves attracted public attention when he took a strong stand against strikes by organized labor, calling for federal legislation outlawing strikes or requiring all labor disputes to be resolved by a three-judge panel in federal courts.

Described by Reece Smith as a "lawyer's lawyer" who never ceased to be a model of legal excellence for his firm's junior members and associates and indeed, for all who dealt with him, Judge Reaves was, perhaps surprisingly, a man with self-deprecating humor. Reece tells the story, "When he was over 90 years, judge told Broaddus (Livingston) of the firm that he was worried about the hereafter. Broaddus said he couldn't see why since Judge had been a devout Christian all his life. Judge replied, "Yes, but I voted for Franklin Roosevelt in 1932."

While Reaves was not a man of the cloth, he was an individual made of rock-ribbed, moral fabric. A stalwart Baptist, he was chosen while still in Manatee County to lead the Florida Baptist Convention. In 1962, he was recognized as a "Christian layman of unusual achievements" by Tribune Church Editor Adiel J. Moncrief in his column.

The writer met O.K. Reaves only once. In 1953, a committee to prepare a resolution honoring Judge L.L. Parks on the 30th anniversary to his 13th Circuit Judgeship was appointed by Bar Association President, William H. Gillen. It consisted of Judge Reaves, T. M. Shackelford, Jr., Esq. and a thirty-year-old fledgling lawyer out of his league. My recollection of Judge Reaves from that distant and brief association is that he was a man of commanding presence and sincerity, and possessed of a wondrous speaking voice. Lawyer/writer Louis Auchincloss once remarked of his boarding school headmaster, Endicott Peabody, "Hearing him talk was a little like listening to God." That was a feeling experienced by me after meeting and hearing Judge Reaves 45 years ago.

His long and productive life came to an end in 1970 at age 93. Survivors included his

The History of

West Park Baptist Church as seen by the records that have been kept.

The church was originally West End Baptist Church, located at the corner of Blue and Steel Streets, in Jacksonville, Fla.

The first records that we actually have to gather any information from, began in October of 1915, when this church had left the premises at Blue and Steel Streets, and had come to East Grand Park section, meeting for services in a small building at 2456 Kings Road.

We later find that this property on Blue and Steel Streets, according to the State Board of Missions minutes; on June 1, 1926, all physical properties of the church was placed in their hands, to be disposed of, at their discretion.

The church, and property, was later sold to Second Bethel Baptist Church, for the sum of \$1325.00, which was placed in the Building and Loan Account, to assist other needy churches.

We will see later where this same proposition has a bearing on the church.

Those who met to organize a church in Grand Park were: Mr. Tom Peterson, coming from Baldwin Baptist Church; Mr. & Mrs. J. S. Smith, from Live Oak Baptist Church; Mr. & Mrs. W. B. Harris, from Providence Baptist Church; Mrs. Alice Padgett, from Long Branch Baptist Church; and Mrs. Tom Peterson, by baptism. These were the charter members of the church, that on July 4, 1915, was named The Grand Park Baptist Church. Also, at this meeting, Bro. D. L. Phillips was unanimously appointed as pastor.

At a church conference meeting on August 15, 1915, the people agreed to purchase a plot of ground on which to build a place to worship. At this time a Building Committee was appointed to handle this project. Time went on and an appropriate location was found at 2424 Kings Road

At a later date in conference April 16, 1916, the church authorized the treasurer to pay off an old debt on the property purchased for the building, of \$110.00, and to make payments of \$18.80 per month on property, until paid for. (Total amount not listed.)

About this time there had been some discussion about Rev. Phillips leaving the church, so on May 7, 1916, his resignation was accepted and Rev. G. E. Jones was called.



1-1-1990

Judge O. K. Reaves, west central Florida leviathan

Morison Buck

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/flstud_pub

 Part of the [American Studies Commons](#), and the [Community-based Research Commons](#)

Scholar Commons Citation

Buck, Morison, "Judge O. K. Reaves, west central Florida leviathan" (1990). *Digital Collection - Florida Studies Center Publications*. Paper 2469.
http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/flstud_pub/2469

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Digital Collection - Florida Studies Center at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Digital Collection - Florida Studies Center Publications by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact scholarcommons@usf.edu.

money could be secured by a general subscription campaign. A fund raising organization was employed to do most of the work, but it was considered wise to have an important name as campaign chairman.¹⁷ Consequently, White wired Bryan on January 9, 1923, asking if he would serve in that capacity, and received an acceptance telegram in a matter of hours.¹⁸ Bryan wrote Murphree that he was "glad to aid in so meritorious an enterprise."¹⁹

He did much more than lend his name to the \$250,000 campaign. He travelled the state, making dozens of speeches, issuing appeals through the press, and approaching his friends for donations. He mailed out hundreds of letters asking for funds to save Florida students "from materialism," and to help consecrate their "learning to the service of God and the welfare of mankind."²⁰ He organized a one thousand dollar club and secured large donations from such men as Glenn H. Curtiss, J. C. Penny, and James Deering. Bryan himself pledged fifteen hundred dollars.

The drive opened with a large meeting in Daytona Beach, and during the next few weeks Bryan spoke over seventy times before civic, church and alumni groups. Driving his black Ford automobile across the narrow, dusty Florida roads, speaking sometimes four and five times a day, he was reminded of his old campaign days, and he seemed to thrive on excitement and a crowded schedule.²¹

Some of the meetings were elaborate affairs, such as the one staged in the flower-bedecked grand ballroom of the Royal Poinciana Hotel in Palm Beach. Samuel Untermeyer, the well-known attorney, was co-chairman with Bryan at this meeting and several thousand dollars were subscribed. In emphasizing the religious needs of college men, Bryan said: "The path of the young man . . . is continually beset by the devil and if the rest of us are as persistent in trying to protect him from the devil as the devil

17. White to Bryan, Jan. 9, 1923, in Bryan Papers, Library of Congress.

18. Bryan to White, Jan. 10, 1923, in Bryan-Murphree Correspondence, UF Archives.

19. Bryan to Murphree, Jan. 11, 1923, in Bryan-Murphree Correspondence, UF Archives.

20. Copy of letter, undated, in Miscellaneous Papers, (Letter Box, Y.M.C.A.), UF Archives.

21. *The Alligator*, March 17, 1923.

is to beset him, he will have no difficulty in treading the path right. . . ." He told his audience that colleges had a responsibility to educate not only "the mind of the young man," but "to train his heart as well." "A good heart with a good mind will make a good man," he said, "but the good mind alone will not be successful, and if the heart goes wrong it takes the mind with it."²²

Another large meeting was held in the Duval County Armory in Jacksonville and was sponsored by local civic clubs. The Gator band came from Gainesville to play for this affair. In Tampa there was some difficulty because of a conflict with a planned drive to raise \$250,000 to establish the University of Tampa. In Miami the initial attempts to secure subscriptions were so disappointing that it was decided to postpone the campaign until fall.²³ Everywhere else the drive succeeded, so far as pledges were concerned. These were "boom" days, and securing pledges was relatively easy; getting the cash was another matter. During the first ten weeks of the campaign more than \$135,000 had been subscribed, but only \$27,000 had been collected.

Bryan worked out a pattern for the meetings. The University Quartette, which included Milton Yeats, who wrote the University's "Alma Mater," James Melton, later of the Metropolitan Opera, George Anderson, and Nathan Mayo, Jr., opened with a medley of popular songs. The local chairman of the drive and Y.M.C.A. Secretary White explained the lack of religious-student activity facilities on the campus and the reasons for asking the public to support the construction of a building. If President Murphree or a faculty member was present he spoke and then a local dignitary introduced Bryan whose task it was to convince the audience of the need for generous subscriptions. Money and cards, denoting the amount of the pledge and the manner in which it was to be paid, were turned in at the close of the meeting and were then forwarded to state headquarters in the Seminole Hotel in Jacksonville.

The campaign ran into financial complications, and it was never really completed. Approximately \$179,000 was finally pledged, but by the summer of 1925 only \$79,682 had been collected. Almost all of the additional subscribers defaulted, par-

22. *Miami Daily Metropolis*, Feb. 7, 1923.

23. Murphree to Bryan, March 7, 1923, in Bryan Papers, Library of Congress.

Mrs. O. K. Reaves, Church Leader, Dies

Mrs. Minnie Kay Reaves, 83, 3605 Bayshore Blvd., died Wednesday at her residence.

A native of Greenville, S. C., Mrs. Reaves came to Tampa in 1921 from Bradenton. Mrs. Reaves, a church leader for many years, had been a member of the First Baptist Church for 45 years and was



teacher of the Mrs. Reaves Gleaners Sunday School Class of the Church for over 30 years.

She was twice president of the Women's Missionary Society and served one term as president of the Florida Women's Missionary Union. Mrs. Reaves, with other women of the First Baptist Church, established the Good Will Center in the Old

and a chairman of the Florida Chain of Missionary Assemblies. Mrs. Reaves was a member of the Salvation Army Board and one of the founders of the Lake Ellen Home of the Salvation Army.

She was a member of the Bayshore Garden Circle and was a member of the committee which staged the first flower show by the garden clubs of Tampa. She also was a member of the Women's Auxiliary of the Tampa Bar Association.

Survivors include her husband, O.K. Reaves, a former circuit judge, Tampa; a son and daughter-in-law, Charles K. and Virginia Reaves, Tampa; a brother, L. H. Kay, Birmingham; three grandchildren, Mrs. James Tamplin, Mrs. N. L. Hutchinson and Miss Kay Reaves, and one great-grandchild, Charlene Tamplin, all of Tampa.

gent of the Florida Women's
Missionary Union. Mrs. Reaves,
with other women of the First
Baptist Church, established the
Good Will Center in the Old
Clark Memorial Baptist Church
on 15th Street in Ybor City and
was active in the Missionary
Center for many years.

She was one of the founders

James Tamplin, Mrs. N. L.
Hutchinson and Miss Kay
Reaves, and one great-grand-
child, Charlene Tamplin, all of
Tampa.

Funeral services will be held
Monday at 10 a.m. at the First
Baptist Church, with Dr. Pres-
ton B. Sellers, pastor, and Dr.
Adiel J. Moncrief officiating.

The Florida Baptist Historical Society seeks to **preserve the legacy** of Florida Baptist pastoral leaders and laity, the past and present functioning Baptist churches, the State Convention's cooperating ministries and milestone events that were historically significant to Florida Baptists. The Society's mission is accomplished through a variety of ministry services provided to Florida Baptists. To underscore this emphasis the Society's monthly newsletter, LEGACY, seeks to highlight the legacy endowed by the people, churches and events in Florida Baptist history. During the next several months this newsletter will feature those persons whose legacy in Florida Baptist life was achieved in part, by their service as president of the Florida Baptist State Convention.



Erik Cummings

During the 157th annual meeting of the Florida Baptist State Convention held November 12-13, 2018, the messengers elected **Erik Cummings**, pastor, New Life Baptist Church, Carol City, as the State Convention president for the year 2018-19. Rev. Cummings holds the distinction of being the 94th person and second African-American pastor, elected as the leader of Florida Baptists. Since 1854 (excluding the seven years at various times the State Convention did not meet), the persons elected as president have included 78 pastors and 16 laypersons.

The role of State Convention president is primarily serving as the State Convention's ceremonial representative to Florida Baptists and the general public. But more importantly, the State Convention president, has the authority to appoint persons to serve on State Convention special and permanent committees, serves as an ex-officio member of the State Convention's State Board of Missions, as well as preside over the annual State Convention meeting.

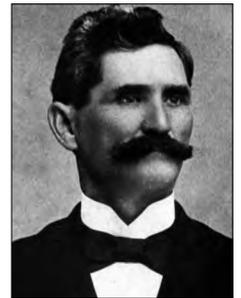
The first person to serve was **Richard Johnson Mays**, from Madison, Florida, a successful plantation owner who subsequently was ordained and served as a bi-vocational pastor and church starter. **Rev. R. Fleming**, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Thomasville, Georgia, is the only out-of-state resident to serve as State Convention president for two years, 1856 and 1857. At the time, several Georgia churches were affiliated with the Florida Convention. **W.N. Chaudoin** holds the distinction of having served the most years -- a total of 21 -- in two separate terms (1880-1885; 1889-1903), and who concurrently was employed as the first corresponding secretary for the State Board of Missions.

Although the majority of these leaders were Anglo men, the State Convention messengers have elected two African-American pastors [**Elroy Barber** (1999) and **Erik Cummings** (2018)] and one woman to lead the State Convention. **Virginia R. Parker** (Mrs. Henry A.) became president of the State Convention by default as a result of the resignations of President A.R. Fagan (who moved from the state) and First Vice President Fred H. Cooper (due to health reasons). Mrs. Parker, who was serving as Second Vice President at the time, succeeded to the presidency March 1, 1974, and presided at the 1974 annual meeting.

Several of these former 94 presidents will be featured in future issues of LEGACY. However, in the January and February issues, we are providing brief profile summaries on the 16 laypersons who served as State Convention president. An interesting historical fact is that the period from 1904 to 1920 was a "laymen's era" as four men were elected and re-elected consecutively to serve as president. This may have been a by-product of the then growing organization of Southern Baptists' "Laymen's Missionary Movement" which sought to involve local church laymen in stewardship commitment and missionary support. The first eight laymen who served as State Convention president are presented in a chronological order that follows:

C. A. Carson (1862-1920) served five consecutive terms from 1910 to 1914 as Convention president. He previously served four terms (1904 -- 1907) as second vice president. During his tenure, the State Convention appointed its first statewide worker to promote Sunday School and B.Y.P.U. work and enlisted a statewide evangelist. Prior to his State Convention involvement, Carson served between 1897-1903 as a Florida State Senator representing Osceola County. As a Kissimmee businessman and member of the First Baptist Church, Carson also served Florida Baptists as a member of the State Board of Missions and served ten years as the chairman of the Columbia College board of trustees.

Newton A. Blicht (1844-1921) served two terms from 1914 to 1916. During his terms, the State Convention adopted the so-called "efficiency plan" designed to help churches in stewardship and mission outreach. It also approved a limit of two consecutive years service as Convention president. Prior to his Baptist service, Blicht served in the Florida House of Representatives for Levy County in 1883, and from 1887-1891. He was a Florida State Senator from 1893-1903. And in 1907 and continuing until his death in 1921, Blicht was an elected member of Florida's Railroad Commission. Blicht was a member of First Baptist Church, Tallahassee.



N. A. Blicht

Frank Bentley (1864-1932) served in 1917-1918. During his two terms, the effort to establish a Convention owned and operated Florida Baptist hospital was initiated and gained momentum, but was never realized. Bentley was president of Bentley Gray Dry Goods Company in Tampa until his retirement in 1930. He helped organize the Tampa Y.M.C.A. and in October, 1931, Governor Doyle E. Carlton appointed him as the Tampa Bay harbormaster. He served as a deacon at First Baptist Church, Tampa.

O. K. Reaves (1877-1970) served in 1919-1920. Under his leadership, the State Convention closed Columbia College, after ten years of operation as a "dedicated" Florida Baptist school. In response, a renewed effort to resume and improve relations between the Convention and Stetson University was undertaken. Reaves was a lawyer, a member of the Florida State House of Representatives in 1911, and Judge of the Sixth Judicial Circuit Court from 1915 to 1921. Judge Reaves was a member of the First Baptist Church, Bradenton, at the time of his election as State Convention president.

A. A. Murphree (1870-1927) served in 1922-1923. During his tenure, the Convention learned of the official name change for the Florida Baptist Orphanage to the Florida Baptist Children's Home. And the State Convention authorized the State Board of Missions to borrow funds and construct a "headquarters" office building in Jacksonville. Murphree, as a former college professor, had the distinction of serving as the president of two state universities, Florida State College (now Florida State University) from 1897 to 1907, and the University of Florida, from 1909 to 1927. He was a member of the First Baptist Church, Gainesville, during his Convention presidency.

E. C. Collins served in 1932-1933. Reversing an action taken in 1916, the State Convention set a new limitation of only one consecutive year a person could serve as Convention President. In 1933, it approved an agreement between the Florida Convention and the Southern Baptist Convention which defined the percentage split and defined promotion expenses for the annual Cooperative Program income raised in the state. Collins was a lawyer and judge of the Criminal Court of Record for Dade County who presided over the trials of, among others, notorious gangster Alphonse Capone and accused assassin Giuseppe Zangara. He was an active member of First Baptist Church, Miami.

William Sims Allen (1888-1951) served in 1942. The State Convention, having been unable to underwrite the start of its own Florida Baptist hospital, sanctioned a Baptist Hospital planned for Pensacola and directed the State Board of Missions to provide a \$10,000 contribution to the effort. It learned several local Baptist groups in Jacksonville, Miami and Plant City were engaged in raising funds to establish local Baptist hospitals. Allen was a career educator who served as acting president of Baylor University (1931-1932) and later as president of Stetson University (1934 -1947). He was a member of the First Baptist Church, DeLand.



William Sims Allen

Doak S. Campbell (1888-1973) served in 1948. The State Convention committed to a goal for the year 1948 to perform 15,000 baptisms and organize 25 new churches. The Convention also endorsed an aggressive effort to assist local churches as they undertook ministry outreach to college and university campuses. It is probably not surprising that the commitment to campus evangelism came during the state convention presidential watch of Doak Campbell who had accepted the presidency of Florida College for Women (now Florida State University) in 1941, where he served until his retirement in 1957. He was a member of the First Baptist Church, Tallahassee.

The February issue of LEGACY will continue with the profiles of the remaining eight laypersons who served as a President, Florida Baptist State Convention.

Recognizing the LEGACY of Church Longevity of Mission and Ministry

Each year the Florida Baptist Historical Society recognizes and honors those Florida Baptist churches that have achieved a milestone anniversary in their life and ministry. This recognition is primarily through the presentation of a Certificate of Recognition. Observing anniversaries is an opportunity for the congregation to reflect upon its past and to recognize what God has accomplished through their ministry, as well to re-commit to the sharing of Jesus Christ to and through the community which they serve. The Society also assists these and any other Florida Baptist churches by providing resources and assistance in researching their respective history and/or pastoral leadership. Each church typically sets their anniversary observance during the year on a date that may coincide with the actual anniversary of being organized or tied to some other significant Sunday.

In 2019 a total of 54 churches will achieve the noted 25-year milestone anniversary as follows:

175 years/Organized 1844

Fellowship, Ocala
Sandy Creek, Ponce de Leon

150 years/Organized 1869

Barberville First
Lake Butler First
Lake Ellen, Crawfordville
Mt. Tabor, Palatka
Oviedo First
Pleasant Grove, Pensacola

125 years/Organized 1894

Corinth, Jasper
Cottondale First
Frink, Clarksville
Green Pond, Polk City
Mayo
Olive, Pensacola
Red Level, Crystal River
St. Andrew, Panama City
Tarpon Springs First

100 years/Organized 1919

Eustis First
Highland, Molino
Normandy Park, Jacksonville
Walnut Hill

75 years/Organized 1944

Arlington, Jacksonville
Grace, Starke
Kings Road, Jacksonville
Leisure Lakes First, Lake Placid
Lighthouse Community, Dania Beach
Lorida First
New Hope, Marianna
Trinity, Marianna

50 years/Organized 1969

Faith, Rockledge
Getsemani, Miami
Good News, Jacksonville
MorningStar, Fort Myers
Neptune Road, Kissimmee

50 years/Organized 1969

Pasadena, Dade City
River Road, Palatka
San Pablo, Jacksonville
Santa Rosa Shores, Gulf Breeze
Seminole First
Shiloh, Plant City
West Pensacola

25 years/Organized 1994

Bay Life, Brandon
Carrollwood, Tampa
Celebration, Lake Mary
Community, Fedhaven
Coral Gables Hispana
Cornerstone Fellowship, Sebastian
Crossroads, Fort Myers
Crossroads, Lakeland
Ethiopian Evangelical, Tampa
Faith, Lakeland
Mexico Beach First
New Hope, Valparaiso
Vision, Bonita Springs