

ally, he sold the building to the Baptists. Possibly, he rented it to them for the first year and a half to allow the school to gain its footing.

J. H. Richardson was the first president of the school. He was born in 1853, in Murfreesboro, to Robert and Mary Richardson. While living there, [James?] H[all?] Richardson attended Union University and was ordained in July 1873 by First Baptist, Murfreesboro. In 1876 Richardson married Fannie C. McCrea (1854-97), and they had two children: Michael (1878-86), and Mary Nell (1883-?). He was principal of the Mulberry Academy in Lincoln County for five years before becoming pastor of the First Baptist Church of Cleveland in 1884. His son died shortly after Richardson had begun his duties as president of the new Sweetwater Seminary and was buried at Fort Hill Cemetery in Cleveland. J. H. Richardson would later serve as president of East Texas Baptist Institute at Rusk and of Franklin College in Kentucky. He pastored churches in Tennessee, Texas, Mississippi, and Florida, before becoming an agent for Stetson Baptist University in Florida.<sup>8</sup>



Courtesy Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives

**Seminary President  
J. H. Richardson**

At the 1889 commencement, the public was invited to witness the final examination exercises, the Baccalaureate sermon by Edgar E. Folk of First Baptist Church in Chattanooga, an exhibition of the art classes, a Kappa Nu Literary Society entertainment, a musical concert led by the students, and the graduation ceremony, which included a speech by Colonel J. H. Barnum.<sup>9</sup>

On 8 January 1890, Seminary, President J. H. Richardson posted the following advertisement in the *Monroe County Democrat*. The school was "offering the best advantages in English, History, Mathematics, Latin, Greek, German, French, Elocution, Natural Sciences and Moral Philosophy." There were special schools available for art, music, and pedagogy, which he defined as preparing teachers to teach. He promised that the young ladies' "health and morals [would be] well guarded." In February Richardson reported almost forty boarders, and "all departments full." He believed in the seminary's

high and holy calling to shape and build the characters of those committed to our charge, to open up before them the great possibilities of life, and then develop their capacities to reach these high and noble ends. Not failing to impress the idea that this life is not all.<sup>10</sup>

The 1891 commencement featured C. E. W. Dobbs of Cartersville, Georgia, and G. S. Williams of Bristol. J. H. Richardson

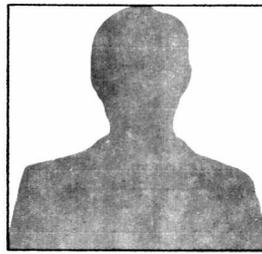
## Winter Garden's First Baptist Church

### Pastors

*The Spirit of the Lord God is on Me, because the Lord has anointed Me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captive, and freedom to the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of our God's vengeance, to comfort all who mourn.*

Isaiah 61:1-2

In the early years the pastors divided their time among multiple churches. Services were held at our church on only one Sunday a month ... and the monthly business meetings were conducted the day before. It wasn't until 1921 when services began to be held every week. In the early days, whenever a man was called to be the pastor of the church, his call was for one year only ... and then he would either be approved to stay for another year or he would move on and the church would begin searching for new pastor. In 1930, when John Evans was called as pastor, he came with the understanding that his call would be indefinite. So began the practice we enjoy today of our pastors staying as long as they feel God is leading them to remain with our congregation.



**Images Not  
Available**

#### **J. A. Richardson (1888-1889 / 1891-1895)**

Served as the first settled pastor of Oakland Baptist Church (1887-1888, 1891-1895) and the First Baptist Church, Oviedo (1891-1892).

#### **T. J. Bell (1895-1897)**

Served for 30 years as a pastor in Florida. In addition to Winter Garden, he also pastored churches in Kissimmee and Barberville. He and his wife had been married 51 years at the time of his death.

#### **L. Doury (1889-1890)**

Lived in Apopka.

#### **J. S. Geiger (1897-1899)**

Lived in Owanita. Also pastored Albion Baptist Church in Archer, Florida, Eau Gallie Baptist Church, Oakland Baptist Church, and Williston Baptist Church.

#### **D. B. Farmer (1900-1901)**

Was born in Maine and died in Massachusetts in 1905. He worked in Florida for 25 years as a pastor and evangelist. Farmer also pastored churches in Blue River, Parkersburg, Olivet Baptist Church in Ocala, and Anthony.

He had an extensive library and was known for his great doctrinal preaching.

#### **J. H. Richardson (1905-1906)**

**Rev. J. H. Richardson.**

On Wednesday morning, Nov. 11, at his rooms in Orlando, Fla., death came to relieve the long struggle which Rev. J. H. Richardson had made against odds, for he had not been a strong man for a number of years.

His remains were sent to Sweetwater, Tenn., for interment, after a beautiful and impressive service had been held at Orlando.

Brother Richardson was once president of Sweetwater Female College. He also did much college work in Texas and Kentucky, in all spending about seventeen years of his life as a college president and teacher. Some eleven years ago he came to Florida, thinking its balmy climate would reinvigorate his weakening frame, and thereby extend his years of usefulness and service. He served while here quite a number of churches, among them Bronson, Campville, Apopka, Mulberry, Winter Garden, Fort Meade and Lake Helen. When physical strength was no longer sufficient for the demands of service, he retired to Orlando where he battled against the grim reaper until his Lord said it was enough. Yielding up his spirit he calmly, yet in triumphant faith, died as he had lived. His wife, broken down by continued watching at his bedside for many months, was not able to accompany his body to the old burial

ground; was forced to commit it to the hands of friends, and she herself remained behind.

Brother Richardson was a hard worker, strong advocate of temperance, cultured, energetic, and to be trusted under all conditions. He did what his hands found to do, the best, under the circumstances, he could. His record is not only indelibly stamped upon men and time, but written in eternity. He died as he had lived, submissive, and asked that the will of God be done.

The deepest sympathy of the entire denomination will go out to sister Richardson, her sad home and her children. May the blessings of God dwell as abundantly upon them as his blessed peace has and father.—S. B. Rogers.