

Florida Baptist Historical Society Biography Collection

This link provides the specific resource information which documents and undergirds the biographical resource information on a specific Florida Baptist pastors, church staff or significant laity leaders.

The link you have chosen connects to the specific individual's resource files that provide the basis for information which the Historical Society has used to develop the respective biographical profile. The sources attached may include copies of articles gleaned from back issues of the *Florida Baptist Witness* and other news publications. Other resources include books, historical journal articles and church histories that are cited as documentation for the biography.

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Sims, G. M. served as pastor of Yellow River Baptist Church, Oak Grove Community.

PIONEER FLORIDA

By D. B. McKay



Yellow River Church, Founded In 1840, To Be Honored At Florida Baptist Centennial Next Month

This interesting history of the Okaloosa County Baptist Church, organized 114 years ago, was written by Coater Douglass:

"Baptists attending the annual convention of Florida Baptist Association in Daytona Beach in November will pay tribute to an Okaloosa County Baptist Church established 114 years ago on June 14, 1840.

"The Yellow River Church, located in the Oak Grove Community, was established 20 years before the Civil War with three male and six female members.

"When the church was organized on 'abstract of Faith,' known as the Yellow River Baptist Church, the members were: John Robertson, James Barrow and David Girtman, the male members.

"Female members were Elizabeth Stegall, Margaret Weeks, Elizabeth Wood, Mary Wood, Mary Senterfitt and Nancy Busby.

"THE CHURCH was a member of the Bethel Baptist Association at the time it was organized.

"The name of the first minister was not recorded, but older residents of the Oak Grove Community, in North Okaloosa County, where the old church was founded, say their ancestors told them it was Rev.

signed at the bottom of the white sheet, still well preserved. Listed as donors to the purchase of the church record book were: J. W. Baggett, Jr., 25 cents, Bartlett Peaden, 50 cents, Joe Cushing, 25 cents, and S. F. McCarty, 25 cents.

"Although the church was founded 20 years before the Civil War, there is not a single reference to the Civil War recorded in any of the records. Services were held regularly during the conflict.

"THE NAMES of the colored members, (slaves), were kept on separate pages in the record books. Some of the colored members were: Harry Thompson, Harriet Hart, Hannah Stokes, who were received into the church, 'by baptism on September 22, 1859.' One slave, Isaac McCaskill, died July 16, 1859. Lottie Spears was made a member of the church on February 22, 1856, and Luke Hart and Lucy Cawthon, were received 'into the church by baptism, on April 25, 1855.'

"Many of the names of slaves recorded in the church books are still prevalent in the northern part of Okaloosa County. Some of the descendants now own homes and farms in the community of Oak Grove.

"Church letters from other churches, transferring mem-

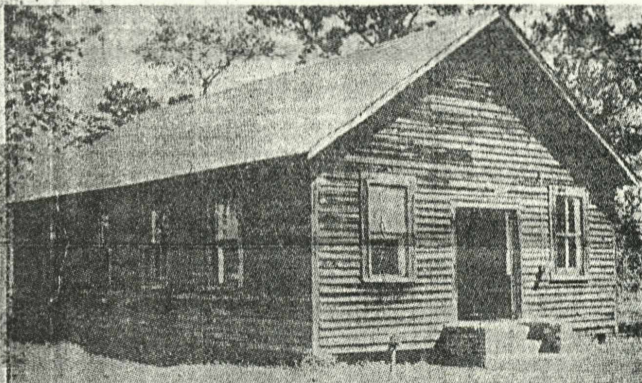
A Baptist Page

The Pioneer Florida page is largely filled today with the history of two historic Florida Baptist churches. This is deemed appropriate because at the Florida Baptist convention to be held in November in Daytona Beach the 100th anniversary of the organization of the Florida Baptist convention will be celebrated.

weeks ago. No grass grows inside that fence, Parker said.

"One marker, a white stone, carries the name of William Hart, a 'member of the Indian War of 1836.' Another monument, recently broken when a large red oak tree fell on it, has this inscription, 'Littleton Hart, March 31, 1833. Died December 23, 1867. Margaret Moore Hart. Born July 5, 1833. Died August 3, 1870.' The stone bears a Masonic emblem. Hart was the father of the late R. J. Hart, Sr., who was the first agricultural agent in Okaloosa County.

"THE PRESENT membership of the church is 43. The pastor at the present time is the Rev. Francis James, of Fort Walton



YELLOW RIVER CHURCH ESTABLISHED JUNE 14, 1840—Tribute will be paid the Baptist Church at the annual convention of the Florida Baptist Churches in Daytona Beach November 16-17. The church is located in the Oak Grove Community.

John Moore, or Rev. G. M. Sims.

"There is a story still repeated by residents of the community that the Rev. Moore walked from Milton to the church building once each month, a distance of 40 miles, to preach. He is credited with constructing some of the old benches, still in use in the church, rebuilt about 20 years ago. The seats are made from the finest pine timber and are still in perfect condition. The benches, with backs, are mortised together, hand-constructed style.

"The records of the century old church show that the salary of ministers who served the congregation back in 1902 and 1903 was a small amount. The minister in 1902 was voted a monthly salary of \$3.50, but the following year, he was given a raise to \$5 per month.

"In 1899, members of the church seemed to be better

bers to the Yellow River Church are inside the books. One of the letters, dated January 13, 1897, from the Milligan Church, recommended 'Sister Lenora King, as a beloved Sister in Christ.' The letter was signed by the pastor of the Milligan Church, Rev. J. W. Senterfitt and the clerk, J. Thomas Garrett.

"The original copy of the articles of Faith and Decorum adopted when the church was organized is still in perfect and legible condition. The articles were: (1) We believe in only one true and living God, the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. (2) We believe the Old and New Testament to be the revealed mind and will of God and the only rule of Faith and practice. (3) We believe in the Doctrine of election, that God chose His people in Christ before the world began. (4) We believe in the doctrine of

Beach. Services are held twice each Sunday.

"The officers of the church are: G. E. Parker, chairman of deacons; Taft Barrow and Lewis Davidson are the two other deacons. The church clerk is Mrs. Nancy Moore Barrow; treasurer, Lewis Davidson, the Training Union director; G. E. Parker, Sunday School superintendent. Lewis Davidson is the president of the adult union class.

"Two of the oldest members of the 114 year old church are Mrs. Sarah Barrow and Mrs. Margie Milligan. Their ancestors were among the first members. Mrs. Barrow has been a member for 63 years.

Mr. and Mrs. L. P. Parrish of 410 Forest Avenue, Tampa, are both descendants of founders of the historic church.

New Zion Was The First Baptist Church South of South Fork Of The Alafia

New Zion Baptist Church, which was organized Sept. 29, 1866, at a point on the South Fork of the Alafia river, but is now located about seven miles west of Ona, erected as its first place of worship a log structure, but it is now housed in a very attractive modern building.



This history of the church Mr. Herndon was written by the Rev. Grady Herndon, the pastor:

"In the oldest record book of New Zion Baptist Church is found the following Church Constitution, copied in the beautiful flowing script of one N. T. Jones, long a deacon of New Zion Church:

"Maple Branch, Manatee County, September 29 and 30, 1866. At the above mentioned time and place Elders J. M. Hayman, A. Wilson and S. L. Cross met with the regular members of the Baptist Church residing in this vicinity for the purpose of organizing them into a church. And after mature deliberation and with the advice and consent of the ministering brethren present, adopted a church covenant in the usual form and manner. This body to be known as the Maple Branch Baptist Church (now New Zion).

"ELDER S. L. CROSS was chosen to be pastor for the ensuing year and J. W. Whidden church clerk. Rules of order, a church covenant, and rules of decorum were adopted. Rules of Decorum Number 9 provided that if any male member absented himself from three church conferences in succession he could be dealt with by the church. This rule was rescinded in 1918. According to Mr. Charles Roberts, oldest living deacon of the New Zion Church, this historic meeting took place in a school house known as Baton Rouge, north of Ft. Green, Fla. Thus came into being the first Baptist church south of the South Fork of Alafia river.

"A lot was acquired and a house of worship was built. After the church removed to the New Zion community, the original church house was sold to the Methodists. There was some altercation between the two groups regarding a payment by the purchasers, resulting in the Baptists taking back the building. The minutes of the church fall to record the final disposition of the property.

"From the date of the organization to Jan. 28, 1872, all minutes of the church were lost except one entry for Oct. 5, 1867. Rev. John W. Hendry was chosen pastor that year, 1867, and served continuously until 1870. He served three other pastorates of two, 11 and two years, respectively, making a total of 27 years served by this remarkable man. An interesting account of the life and work of Mr. Hendry was written many years ago by The Rev. W. D. 'Buddy' Payne. Several copies of this booklet are now extant, one of which is now in the hands of the writer.

"IN APRIL, 1873, it was decided to move the church organization to a new location near the home of the pastor, J. W. Hendry, near the present church site. Accordingly a committee composed of N. T. Jones, M. Alderman, Louis Carlton and J. W. Hendry was appointed to dispose of the original Maple Branch property, with the result noted above. On April 23, 1873, the church met in a school house located near the present home of Mr. Marion G. Roberts, approximately two miles southeast of the present church site.

"A committee was appointed to make recommendations about a wood arbor. Such an arbor, of wood posts covered with lattice and brush, 25 feet by 30 feet, was built near the home of the pastor, about one mile northeast of the present church

would revert to it whenever it ceased for school purposes. Of reversion is not the church minutes, lot with the old school has been recovered church. Material in the school house has in building a home pastor.

"After the school burned in 1917 the auditorium was built made by Rev. C. E. was dedicated on Oct. The Rev. J. F. Tripp, superintendent of the Home at Arcadia, presided at the dedicatory sermon. Today school rooms in 1940 or 1941. At the house was wired tricity.

"In 1948 under the of Rev. Robert S. home was built for in 1953 under the of the present pastor, tional building, 23 feet was erected. Hart cut and milled from the church church labor erected ing. The church h some time soon it ca the auditorium to be one.

"THE MINUTES of old church furnish complete history of Zion community. Sp giving many of the earliest church roll names familiar to surrounding county Albert, Louis, W Alderman, C. R. H. Hendry, J. M. Hendry, Wm. Whid Garner, Matthew Robert Roberts, Wm James Albritton, W Marlow N. W. Jones a few. The descendants and other such made Hardee Count

"When the write Florida Roberts, oldest living Wright and Alderm members of his fi congregation at No

"In early years t met monthly on Su Sunday for a pree church conference. little business to t cept the reception a of new members. discipling of the church. Discipline was st offenses were name In unvanishe Propriety forbids terms sometimes quoted here. Offend ren and sisters who failed to give satisfac church were expe membership. A vigi Mittee functioned years and monthly re discontinued only in Footwashing was occasionally in early 1900 under the pa Rev. W. D. Payne, a quarterly observa his pastorate it was only once or twice.

"ALL THE EARLI received no salary. almost non-existent. ing for foreign missi 65 cents. Offerings were generally la those for the pastor. no financial plan for through all the earl One interesting inc growth of the church crease in financial: it shown by the chu The total cash cont 1902 was \$47.53. Th budget prepared en 1934, is \$6,018.65 plu for building fund.

"Space forbid; roll of all who have church officers, those served church and humbly and self effa pastors are as follo Cross, John W. Hen Hull, I. A. Redd, rance, W. D. Pay White, J. H. Has Hendry, J. M. Hend A. W. Lynn, H. C. H Roberts, J. N. Hei Coker, J. E. McLo Coker, L. N. Smith Armond, W. J. Bry Whitcomb, R. C.