

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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Smith, Marie Claire Bates (b. 1918; d. 1996) was a registered nurse who became a missions' volunteer in the last 20 years of her life that earned her the honorary title of "Mrs. Baptist." A native of Reading Berks, Pennsylvania, Marie graduated from high school, and subsequently moved by 1935 to Seminole County, Florida, where she completed her nursing training. Marie Bates' first career as a registered nurse began in 1940 when she went to work at the Leesburg Regional Medical Center serving until she retired in 1980. She met her future husband (m. 1941) Earl Smith (b. 1916; d. 1969) who served in the U.S. Air Force. The couple had two sons and two daughters. Her husband Earl died prematurely in 1969. Marie Smith's second career as a Baptist volunteer nurse began in 1980 and initially continued for the next 11 years as summer camp nurse at Lake Yale Baptist Assembly. Mrs. Smith's interest in volunteer missions resulted in her being appointed as the Lake County Baptist Association's special ministries director. Her first major volunteer ministry service was in the Cutler Ridge area of South Florida, following the 1992 Hurricane Andrew disaster. There she worked for five weeks using her nursing skills ministering to residents. Mrs. Smith also served as the Missions Service Corps (MSC) consultant for Seminole, Halifax and Lake Baptist associations. In July 1993, Marie Smith was named "Volunteer of the Year" by the then called Home Mission Board (now the North American Mission Board) of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Over the years, Marie Smith still found time to teach English as a second language to migrants in her church, play the piano for worship services, volunteer at summer Vacation Bible School and instruct an adult women's Sunday school class for several years at the Haines Creek Baptist Church in Leesburg.



WEBSITE BIO TO BE ADDED

Marie Bates Smith

Marie Claire Bates Smith (b. 1918; d. 1996) was a registered nurse who became a missions' volunteer in the last 20 years of her life that earned her the honorary title of "Mrs. Baptist." A native of Reading Berks, Pennsylvania, Marie graduated from high school, and subsequently moved by 1935 to Seminole County, Florida, where she completed her nursing training. Marie Bates' first career as a registered nurse began in 1940 when she went to work at the Leesburg Regional Medical Center serving until she retired in 1980. She met her future husband (m. 1941) Earl Smith (b. 1916; d. 1969) who served in the U.S. Air Force. The couple had two sons and two daughters. Her husband Earl died prematurely in 1969.

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Secondary sources:

Orlando Sentinel, January 11, 1996;

Florida Baptist Witness, January 18, 1996;

Ancestry.com/Marie C. Bates (1940 U.S. Census) and Marie C. Smith (U.S. Find-A-Grave Index)

'Cooperation' key to Seagrove Beach church start

BY MICHAEL CHUTE
Editor

Cooperation' was the word for the day as Baptists from several churches in two associations met Jan. 14 to dedicate the new building for Seagrove Beach Baptist Mission.

The Seagrove mission, sponsored by the First Churches of Panama City and DeFuniak Springs, began just two years ago and now has 35 members. J. W. Lee, professor of Old Testament at Florida Baptist Theological College, has served as interim pastor since October 1995.

During the dedication services, church clerk Kathy Gilbert told the congregation 52 people interested in a church for the Seagrove Beach area met at the fire station on Nov. 2, 1994. A core group began meeting in Robert and June Pender's home for Bible study, fellowship and outreach.

In two years, we've come a long way and we have much to do," said Lee, chairman of FBTC's biblical studies division. But with God's help, he will see us through. Thank you for the many things each and every one of you has done.

The Seagrove mission has been a cooperative effort from the beginning.

Noting "God has His own timetable," Robert LaFavre, Walton County Association director of missions, related that in 1988 he tried to purchase land for a new work near the fire station but the owners decided not to sell. Two years earlier, Rufus J. Frazier, associational missions committee chairman at the

time, took a survey of the area in hopes of starting a mission.

In 1993 Bill Scott of the Florida Baptist Convention became the catalyst for the new work when he arranged a meeting of several groups interested in starting a mission in the area. Scott is the Florida Baptist Convention Church Extension departments consultant for Northwest Florida.

Walton County Baptists contributed \$30,000 and workers, the convention added a \$25,000 grant, and First Church in Panama City took out a \$45,000 loan for the new work and sent workers. First Church of DeFuniak Springs contributed personnel and some funding to the effort.

There is no church within 10 miles of Seagrove in either direction along Highway 98, according to Lee. First Church of Santa Rosa Beach is the closest Southern Baptist church and members from that congregation helped form the core of the Seagrove Beach mission.

"We are grateful the pastors were able to get together from different associations," said Lee, noting DeFuniak Springs is in Walton County Association with Panama City in Northwest Florida Association. "One of our barriers has been that we were in Walton County but needing help from another association. These two churches have bridged that barrier to work cooperatively."

DeFuniak First Church pastor Vernon Harkey told the congregation, "Praise God for the miracle because that's what this can be called. A lot of

things are impossible until God puts His hand in it. Starting a church is like giving birth—it's a painful experience."

"I wasn't sure we could do anything to help. We were in a building program and had about all the load we could carry. But God works in mysterious ways. First Church, DeFuniak Springs has always been a strong mission-minded church. We knew it would be a difficult endeavor but we knew the needs were great, and we knew God wanted to put a church here."

Without God's help and without the willingness of a lot of different entities to lay aside their different agendas and be willing to work together, this would not be here today. What God has done here in two years takes some congregations years to accomplish. As I look at it, it's a miracle."

N.B. Langford, pastor of First Church, Panama City, challenged the members of Seagrove mission that "everything has been done for you and now you have to reach out to this community. If you're going to reach this community, you have to think big."

Langford said the population of the Seagrove Beach area increases 50,000 to 75,000 in the summertime. "You have an opportunity and responsibility and you cannot let visibility zero come into the life of this church," he said. "Whenever you want to do something, just remember that all you had to begin with was God and God is still in the business of making it possible and with Him you can do what you want to do."

"You have a responsibility to



J.W. Lee (center), interim pastor of Seagrove Beach Mission, addressed the congregation during the building dedication while pastors of the two sponsoring churches—Vernon Harkey (left) of First, DeFuniak Springs and N.B. Langford of First, Panama City—look on.

Photo by Michael Chute

People attending the Jan. 14 service signed a card for Rufus J. Frazier, who as chairman of Walton County Association's missions committee 19 years ago, took the first survey of the Seagrove area to start a church. Frazier has cancer and was not able to attend the dedication services.



Photo by Michael Chute

FIVE REASONS TO DIE WITHOUT A WILL

1. State law can do a better job of disbursing your assets than you can.
2. A court is more capable of choosing your personal representative than you are.
3. A court can choose a better guardian for your minor child than you can.
4. Uncle Sam will use your estate tax dollars more efficiently than a Baptist ministry.
5. Untangling the mess you leave behind will give your grieving loved ones something to do.

Compelling reasons? Hardly.

If you do not have a will in place, contact your attorney today or if you would like to make a gift through your will to a Baptist ministry, the Florida Baptist Foundation can help. Give us a call.

Florida Baptist Foundation
1320 Hendricks Ave.
Jacksonville, FL 32207
(904) 780-0326

Volunteer Marie Smith dies

Marie C. Smith, a longtime volunteer in missions with the Florida Baptist Convention, died suddenly Jan. 7. She was 77 years old.

Recognized recently as volunteer of the month by the Florida Baptist Convention and as a national volunteer of the year by the SBC Home Mission Board, Smith's career as a volunteer spanned many areas. She served as the Mission Service Corps area volunteer consultant for Seminole, Halifax and Lake associations, a Christian Service Corps short-term volunteer and a member of the Baptist Nursing Fellowship.

"When I observed Marie in action working in ministry, it was really a reflection of Jesus Christ," said Linda Johnson, director of the Atlanta International Ministries (AIM). She showed kindness, charity and compassion.

Smith began her mission work in 1980 with the Aftersix G8 camp after retiring from a nursing career. She served as the camp nurse for the past 11 years where she was known affectionately as "nurse."

During her 15 years of mission service, Smith touched the lives of hundreds of children through her devoted work at a women's and children's crisis center as camp nurse for local 4-H camps and for the

Florida Baptist migrant children's camp. She also reached hundreds of college students with the gospel message while staffing the "sun burn unit" in Clearwater, Daytona Beach and Panama City Beach during "Spring Break Beach Reach." In Daytona Beach, Smith volunteered each year with the raceway ministries of Florida, providing blood pressure checks and witnessing to the bikers during Bike Week.

"She was the only 70-year-old I know who would spend weeks on the beach easing the pain of college students who had too much sun," said Johnson. "This is a big loss for Florida and the kingdom work."

Smith spent weeks volunteering on the Mobile Dental Clinic during the aftermath of Hurricane Andrew, providing medical attention to 500 people knocked on the door for treatment of their cuts," said Johnson. "She was always willing to share her faith in these opportunities."

Survivors include two sons and two daughters.

Services were held Jan. 11 at Haines Creek Church in Leesburg, where Smith had been a member for 15 years.



Marie Smith

[SOURCE: <https://www.orlandosentinel.com/1996/01/11/marie-smith-southern-baptist-volunteer-of-year/>]

MARIE SMITH, SOUTHERN BAPTIST VOLUNTEER OF YEAR

By

PUBLISHED: January 11, 1996 at 5:00 AM EST | UPDATED: July 31, 2021 at 7:33 PM EDT

Marie Smith, known as Mrs. Baptist to thousands who benefitted from her work as a Southern Baptist volunteer for 20 years, died over the weekend.

A service for the retired registered nurse is set for 4 p.m. today at Haines Creek Baptist Church.

Mrs. Smith, 77, had two complete careers.

She retired in 1980 from the nursing staff of Leesburg Regional Medical Center, where she had worked for more than 40 years. She immediately found herself deeply involved in myriad volunteer programs.

Her work as a volunteer ranged from spending five weeks in hurricane-ravaged Cutler Ridge in South Florida to serving as special ministries director for the Lake County Baptist Association.

In that position, she directed the twice-yearly visit of the Florida Baptist Convention's dental clinic to Lake County. She served 11 years at Lake Yale Baptist Assembly tending the needs of hundreds of youngsters each summer. She also regularly attended such events as Bike Week and College Week in Daytona Beach to hand out suntan lotion and give medical advice.

For several years, she had a table at the Flea Market in Eustis each Thursday, where she would take blood pressure, check hearts and give physical and spiritual advice to those who stopped.

In July 1993, she was named Volunteer of the Year for the Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention.

"I had no idea I would be so honored when there are literally hundreds of thousands of Southern Baptist volunteers all over the world," Mrs. Smith said at the time.

Mrs. Smith still found time to teach English to migrants in her church, to play the piano for worship services, volunteer at summer Vacation Bible School and instruct an adult women's Sunday school class for several years.

She is survived by two sons, two daughters and nine grandchildren.

END

Marie C Smith

in the U.S., Newspapers.com™ Obituary Index, 1800s-current

Detail

Source

Name	Marie C Smith
Gender	Female
Death Age	77
Birth Date	abt 1919
Birth Place	Reading, Berks, Pennsylvania, USA
Residence Place	Leesburg, Lake, Florida, USA
Death Date	8 Jan 1996
Death Place	Leesburg, Lake, Florida, USA
Obituary Date	11 Jan 1996
Obituary Place	St. Petersburg, Florida, USA
Newspaper Title	Tampa Bay Times
Child	Arthur E. Smith Joanne Wassel Linda Shepherd

maiden name
(Marie C. Bates)
"Claire"

① The facts in this collection were found using artificial intelligence technology and may contain errors. [Learn more](#)

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Married June 11, 1941 - Earl Smith
(b. 1916; d. 1969) Technical Sergeant / U.S. Air Force
Age 53 Served 1940 - 1960
Buried Myrtle Hill Memorial Park

Father: ~~Joseph Samuel Bates~~ Joseph Samuel Bates (b. 1881; d. 1947)
Black Diamond, PA
Coal Mine foreman

Mother: Eunice R. Bates

Marie Home in 1950 - Washington, DC
Working as Registered nurse in hospital

Marie C Bates

in the 1940 United States Federal Census

Detail

Source

Name	Marie C Bates
Age	21
Estimated Birth Year	abt 1919 [abt 1919]
Gender	Female
Race	White
Birthplace	Pennsylvania
Marital Status	Single
Relation to Head of House	Student
Home in 1940	Orlando, Orange, Florida
Map of Home in 1940	Orlando, Orange, Florida
Street	South Orange Avenue
House Number	1400
Inferred Residence in 1935	Rural, Seminole, Florida
Residence in 1935	Rural, Seminole, Florida
Resident on farm in 1935	No
Sheet Number	64A
Institution	Orange General Hospital
Occupation	Student Nurse
Attended School or College	No
Highest Grade Completed	High School, 4th year
Hours Worked Week Prior to Census	48
Class of Worker	Wage or salary worker in private work
Weeks Worked in 1939	50
Income	0
Income Other Sources	Yes
Neighbors	View others on page

Marie C. Smith

in the U.S., Find a Grave® Index, 1600s-Current

Detail

Source

Name	Marie C. Smith
Gender	Female
Birth Date	20 Jul 1918
Death Date	8 Jan 1996
Cemetery	Myrtle Hill Memorial Park
Burial or Cremation Place	Tampa, Hillsborough County, Florida, United States of America
Has Bio?	N
Father	Joseph Samuel Bates
Mother	Eunice Rosanna Bates
URL	https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/67956757/marie-c.-smith

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LEGACY

Our Mission: Researching, preserving and promoting the Legacy of Florida Baptists

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Volume 18

May, 2026

No. 5

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 2026, the LEGACY monthly issues will feature brief personal profiles of those men and women whom we call:

“Florida Baptists’ Heroes of the Faith.”

The featured Heroes of the Faith for May are Henry M. King, and Marie C. Smith.

H. M. King

Henry Monroe King (b. 1839; d. 1917) was born in Ralls County, Missouri. He committed his life to mission work and over 35-years in the preaching ministry in Missouri, Kentucky, Texas and Florida.

He attended Shelbyville Seminary at Shelbyville, Missouri, and later, as was the practice of the time, he studied under the tutelage of a minister, which happened to be a Presbyterian minister. He was ordained to the ministry in 1858 in Taneyville, Missouri.

He married Frances "Fannie" Martha Moredock in 1861. They had six children in 11 years.



King labored in the ministry in Missouri, Kentucky, and Texas before moving to Gainesville, Florida around 1900. King, who moved to Florida due to his health, had a particularly meaningful influence upon the evangelistic endeavors of Florida Baptist churches. King was the first pastor of the Ancient City Baptist Church at Saint Augustine. **He also served as pastor at Fernandina, Starke, Melrose, Hawthorne, Campville, Gainesville, Key West, Palmetto, and Micanopy. In 1890, King served as missionary for the St. Johns River Baptist Association.**

He helped start Baptist work in Cuba and Mexico through the Home Mission Board. While he was pastor at Chapel Hill, Texas, he and another Kentucky pastor began the first Home Mission Board work in Mexico. **In 1884-1885, King, along with pastor**

William F. Wood of First Baptist Church in Key West, Florida, and mission volunteer Adela Fales, helped start the Home Board's missionary outreach in Cuba. King preached the ordination sermon of A. J. Diaz, who became an influential Cuban pastor and missionary.

It was also under the preaching of King that Frank Fowler, the first native Floridian appointed by the Southern Baptist Convention's Foreign Mission Board, was converted. King also baptized Fowler. Dr. and Mrs. Fowler and their family served in Argentina from 1908 to 1933.

With the help of A. P. Ashurst, James Turner, and C. V. Waugh, Rev. King helped established the *Florida Baptist Witness* in 1883. He served two years (1884, 1885) as vice president and two years (1886 and 1888) as president of the Florida Baptist State Convention and chairman of the Board of Trustees at Stetson University.

Marie Bates Smith

Marie Claire Bates Smith (b. 1918; d. 1996) was a registered nurse who became a missions' volunteer in the last 20 years of her life that earned her the honorary title of "Mrs. Baptist."



Marie Bates was a native of Reading Berks, Pennsylvania, where her father Joseph Bates was a coal mining foreman. After Marie graduated from high school, she subsequently moved by 1935 to Seminole County, Florida, where she completed her nursing training. And then she went to work in a local hospital.

She met her future husband (m. 1941) Earl Smith (b. 1916; d. 1969) who served in the U.S. Air Force as a Technical Sergeant from 1940 to 1960. The couple had two sons and two daughters. Her husband Earl died prematurely in 1969. Marie continued working at the Leesburg Regional Medical Center until she retired in 1980, completing 40 years' service.

Marie Smith's second career as a Baptist volunteer nurse began in 1980 and initially continued for the next 11 years as camp nurse at Lake Yale Baptist Assembly. She primarily tended to the medical needs of hundreds of youngsters each summer participating in the Royal Ambassador and Acteens camps.

Mrs. Smith's interest in volunteer missions resulted in her being appointed as the Lake County Baptist Association's special ministries director. Her first major volunteer ministry service was in the Cutler Ridge area of South Florida, following the 1992 Hurricane Andrew disaster. There she worked for five weeks using her nursing skills ministering to residents.

As special ministries director, Marie directed the twice-yearly visit by the Florida Baptist Convention's mobile medical/dental unit, which provided free dental services to low-income residents.

Mrs. Smith also served as the Missions Service Corps (MSC) consultant for Seminole, Halifax and Lake Baptist associations. Additionally, she served as a MSC volunteer and a member of the Southern Baptist Nursing Fellowship.

For several years Marie Smith had a table at the Flea Market in Eustis each Thursday, where she would take blood pressure, check hearts and give physical and spiritual advice to those who stopped. Marie also regularly attended such events as Bike Week and Spring break in Daytona Beach to hand out suntan lotion, give medical advice and share the gospel message of Jesus Christ.

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[**RESOURCES:** Florida Baptist Historical Society files; William Cathcart, *The Baptist Encyclopedia*, Vol. I; no author, *The Long Road With God. . . A Living History of Ancient City Baptist Church, 1887-1987*; George C. Osborn. *The First Baptist Church, Gainesville, Florida, 1870-1970*; *Orlando Sentinel*, January 11, 1996; *Florida Baptist Witness*, January 18, 1996; Ancestry.com.]

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LEGACY**
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