



LEGACY

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

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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 July are husband and wife couple Napoleon Bailey and Ann Hester Bailey.

A Nineteenth Century Power Couple

In contemporary parlance Napoleon Bailey and his wife Ann Hester Bailey could be appropriately called a power couple. Such a designation is assigned to “two people who are each influential or successful in their own right.” During the second half of the nineteenth century the Baileys were a dynamic and evangelistic power couple – each by their own actions and influence – who were strong proponents in the spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ both domestically and internationally.

Napoleon Alexander Bailey

In the summer of 1836 three-year-old Napoleon Bailey stood on a riverbank bluff in Town Creek, Alabama, observing a large crowd of people who had gathered along the river’s edge to witness the baptism of at least 25 converts. The baptism ceremony made such an unusual, yet indelible, impression upon the young boy to the degree it became an image he could hardly erase from the memory in his mind.

At the age of nine, young Napoleon was received into a Methodist Episcopal Church and was sprinkled with a little water by the pastor – called baptism. Unfortunately for Napoleon his water sprinkling baptism ceremony did not correspond with the scene which he had witnessed six years earlier.

However, as he studied the Bible in the following years, Napoleon could not find a ceremony corresponding to the baptism he personally experienced. But in reading the accounts of the multitudes baptized by John the Baptist in the river Jordan, Napoleon recalled the baptismal event he witnessed as a young child. During his teenage years he struggled with the implications of the Biblically prescribed baptism. At age 17 Napoleon

Bailey made a public profession of faith in the Liberty Baptist Church, Lawrence County, Ala. The church's pastor Rev. Jackson Gunn administered a baptism by immersion in water and welcomed the young Bailey into the fellowship of the church in July 1850.

Napoleon Alexander Bailey (b. 1833; d.1897), a native of Lawrence County, Alabama, three years after his conversion experience felt the call of God to serve as a pastor. He requested the Liberty Church to license him to preach the gospel. In September 1854, he enrolled in Tennessee Baptists' Union University where he earned an A.B. degree in 1857. He was then ordained into the gospel ministry. Bailey was soon called to serve as pastor of his adopted "home church" Liberty Baptist Church, in Lawrence County, Ala. and another church six miles away.

Napoleon soon met and proposed marriage to Ann B. Hester of Fayetteville, Tennessee. He was 25 and she was likely age 17. There is little record of the young woman's early life. They married in Lincoln County, Tenn., January 1858. One historian noted that Napoleon in his marriage to Ann "had secured a most intelligent and zealous helper in his work."

Napoleon Bailey continued his church ministry as well as conducting many revival services in neighboring Tennessee communities. Unfortunately, the cold and damp weather caused chronic health problems for Napoleon. Finally, at a doctor's urging to move to a warmer climate, the Baileys moved south into Jefferson County, Florida, where he was called as pastor of the Monticello Baptist Church. The Baileys remained in Monticello during the early years of the Civil War until 1863 when they moved to Perry, Georgia.

Rev. Bailey became an itinerant preacher serving as the parttime pastor of several rural churches and also served as the principal of the Houston Female College in Perry. After two years, the Baileys moved to accept subsequent pastorates in Milledgeville, Albany and Dalton. As they served in Georgia, the couple received a missionary vision for planting the gospel on the other side of the nation.

That God-inspired missionary vision encouraged them to travel by train 3000 miles west to northern California. Beginning in 1873 and continuing for the next two years the couple planted churches in Santa Rosa and Healdsburg and toiled as missionaries in sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ. Within time the California climate caused health problems for Ann Bailey, forcing the couple to give up their mission and return to Napoleon's hometown in north Alabama.

Soon thereafter God presented an opportunity for Napoleon to serve as the parttime pastor of the Baptist Church at Talladega, Ala. It was there that Ann Bailey apparently began her involvement in the growing movement of women's mission societies.

In 1876 Napoleon accepted a call to serve as pastor of the Baptist Church in Quitman, Georgia. Soon Ann Bailey resumed the task of organizing women's mission societies.

When Reverend and Mrs. Bailey moved to Micanopy, Florida in early 1880, Baptists in the state gained a wealth of experience both in the pulpit and in woman's mission work.

Napoleon during the ensuing decades served as parttime pastor of several churches in various associations: Alachua, Santa Fe River, Marion and Wekiva. In each of these associations Bailey was elected to serve as either clerk or moderator of the respective association's annual meetings.

Becoming involved in the work of the fledgling Florida Baptist State Convention (org. 1854), N. A. Bailey was enlisted to serve on a number of Convention-appointed committee's including the committee on state missions (that proposed organizing of women's mission societies "in all our churches for systematically collecting funds for missions") and a committee to create a State Convention history committee. Two years after the State Board of Missions was organized, Bailey was elected as a Board member who served continuously from 1882 to 1893. During the annual Florida Baptist State Convention meetings Bailey was elected and served 16 years (1881 – 1897) as volunteer recording secretary. Between 1884 and 1886 Bailey was a non-paid editor of the *Florida Baptist Witness*. He also served as an agent for Stetson University to secure financial support for a university endowment fund. In the early 1890s, Bailey served several years as president of the Florida Baptist Ministers' Conference.

Ann Hester Bailey died eleven years earlier (1886) than Napoleon. Census records indicate that Napoleon remarried but information on the new spouse is sparse.

Napoleon A. Bailey died July 7, 1897, in a train sleeping car while traveling from Atlanta to Jacksonville. In a memorial, that was published in the 1898 Florida Baptist Annual *Minutes*, **Bailey's service as State Convention recording secretary was "marked with pains-taking accuracy." The tribute continued, "But it was his preaching that he rose to the zenith of his power. That power . . . [was] in the resistless might of the clear and loyal preaching of the word of God."**

Ann B. Hester Bailey

Ann B. Hester Bailey (b. 1841; d. 1886) was a native of Fayetteville, Tennessee. From her 1858 marriage Ann was a supportive pastor's wife. Yet, as previously noted, Ann Bailey became committed to the promotion of mission societies among women in Alabama and Georgia before going to Florida in 1880.

Napoleon Bailey continually encouraged his wife to be all that God had created her to be," Martha Trotter wrote in her history of the Florida W.M.U. "Perhaps it was those two years as president of the female college in Perry, Georgia – or maybe it was just his nature to believe God created women to serve Him, just as He created men."

Ann Bailey's missionary awareness and commitment likely occurred in 1875 while the couple were serving the Baptist Church at Talladega, Ala. There Ann Bailey established a women's mission society and became its first volunteer secretary (director). Soon women mission leaders in South Carolina asked Alabama Baptist women to help in the raising of funds to build a Southern Baptist missionary home in China. Ann Bailey took on the fundraising challenge. She also was personally encouraged by Rev. H. A. Tupper, Corresponding Secretary (president) of the SBC Foreign Mission Board, to work

diligently to organize women's societies in other churches to become committed to financially supporting foreign missions.

In accompanying her husband to a new church field in Quitman, Ga., Ann Bailey left an initial void in the Alabama women's missions work that was quickly filled by leadership she had trained.

In Georgia, Ann Bailey found the women's mission societies to be in greater numbers due to the greater prevalence of Baptist churches. **Additionally, she found a strong enthusiasm for supporting foreign missions that had been galvanized by Georgia resident Lottie Moon who in 1873 had "offered herself to the Foreign Mission Board as a missionary to China."** To further broaden the support for missions, Ann Bailey organized the several church societies within Baptist associations to create "associational unions."

As previously noted Napoleon and Ann Bailey moved to Micanopy, Florida, in early 1880, and Baptists in the state gained a wealth of experience both in the pulpit and in woman's mission work. Napoleon initially served as parttime pastor of several churches in the Alachua Association. Later he would serve central Florida churches in Santa Fe River, Marion and Wekiva associations.

The growing outcry for more concerted and organized missionary efforts by the Florida Baptist State Convention, resulted in the establishment of a State Board of Missions in 1880. W. N. Chaudoin (b. 1829; d. 1904), a missionary of the then named Home Mission Board, SBC, was elected as the Corresponding Secretary (director) of Florida's State Board of Missions.

The following year, during the 1881 annual session, Micanopy Pastor Napoleon Bailey, in his report on state missions, proposed, "to earnestly urge the importance of our sisters' organizing societies in all our churches for systematically collecting funds for missions." He went on to request the State Board of Missions, "be authorized to appoint a sister state Secretary" to undertake the organizing of Ladies Mission Societies in every church and association. In short order the State Convention directed the State Board of Missions to appoint a woman to organize and lead a statewide Ladies Missions Society. In response the Board's Corresponding Secretary Chaudoin subsequently appointed Mrs. Ann B. Hester Bailey of Micanopy as the "Sister secretary" for Woman's Mission Work.

During the ensuing five years (1881 – 1886) Mrs. Bailey worked diligently promoting the starting of Women's Missionary Societies in churches and associations despite passive resistance by some women and outright opposition by some pastors. She used as her theme, "For Jesus' sake," to inspire and mobilize women in supporting missionary efforts. As she had done in Alabama, Ann Bailey introduced the use of mite boxes to encourage women to save their pennies as mission gifts. And she also promoted the creation of children's mission bands which provided fun musical activities while cultivating "a missionary spirit."

In her second annual report to the State Convention meeting Mrs. Bailey reflected upon the joys and challenges: “It affords me much pleasure to state that valuable and efficient aid has been received from some of our pastors. . . Much has been done in this way in removing the prejudices existing in the minds of some good brethren and sisters to this work. As these prejudices give way under the light of correct information, the natural sanctified impulses of women’s hearts lead them once in this new field of usefulness; they realize that God has honored them with a place beside their brethren in the great work of evangelizing the world.”

On September 16, 1886, Mrs. Bailey died from an undisclosed illness that had plagued her during the last several years of leading the woman’s mission work. During her five years tenure, the number of organizations had increased from four women’s societies and one children’s band to 109 societies and bands. By 1886 annual mission gifts had increased to \$1,225 [\$43,673 in 2026 dollars] from the \$74 [\$2,431 in 2026 dollars] collected in 1881.

“Our sainted sister, it is true, was not an ordained minister,” observed J. J. W. Place, “but, she was the ministry of love and consecration to the service of the Savior,” in comments recorded in the 1886 *Florida Baptist Annual*.

[**RESOURCES:** **N.A. Bailey:** Thomas Owen, *History of Alabama and Dictionary and Alabama Biography*; Christian Index, *Biographical Compendium and History of the Baptist Denomination of Georgia*; Ancestry.com/U. S. census data; Alachua Baptist Association *Minutes, 1897*; *Florida Baptist Annuals, 1881 – 1897*; and Florida Baptist Historical Society files. **Ann Hester Bailey:** Ancestry.com/U. S. census data; Martha Pope Trotter, *Faithful Servants*; *Florida Baptist Annuals, 1881 – 1886*; *Florida Baptist Witness*; and Florida Baptist Historical Society files.]

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