

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.

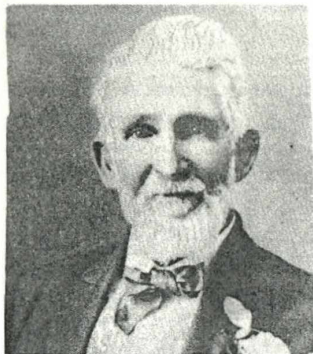
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Straton, John Roach (1875-1929) born in Evansville, Indiana, the son of the Reverend Henry Dundas Douglas Straton and the former Julia Rebecca Carter of Virginia. He became a Christian when he was a teenager and heard the revival preaching of James Hawthorne. Straton was ordained in 1900 and spent most of his adult life as pastor of several churches in four major cities: Chicago (1905–1908), Baltimore (1908–1913), Norfolk, Virginia (1914-1917), and most notably of the Calvary Baptist Church in New York City 1918–1929. Straton graduated from Mercer University, GA and Southern Seminary, Louisville, KY. Straton served as pastor of West Palm Beach Baptist Church, Florida in 1926.

PASTORS OF THE FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH
WEST PALM BEACH, FLORIDA

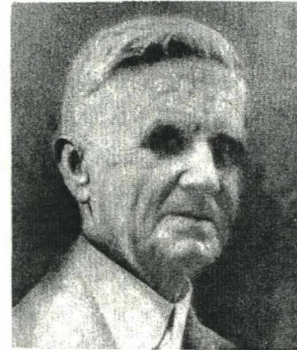
	Year	Membership
H. H. Sturges, Florida	1901-1903	37
W. R. Lambert, Alabama	1903	65
W. L. Savage, Jackson, Tenn.	1903-1904	83
C. V. Waugh, Lake City, Fla.	1904-1905	65
S. S. Gibson, Hendersonville, N.C.	1906-1911	101
Frank P. Gates, Lexington, Ky.	1913	107
C. R. Phillips, Florida	1913-1914	117
W. H. Hubbard, N. Y.	1915-1918	116
C. S. Lester, South Haven, Mich.	1919-1920	
E. B. Jenkins, Kershaw, S. C.	1920-1925	600
John Roach Straton, New York	1926	800
J. W. Williams	1926-1927	
C. H. Bolton, Alabama	1927-1939	1,438
Ira D. S. Knight, Virginia	1939-1945	1,739
R. Kelly White, North Carolina	1946-	2,644



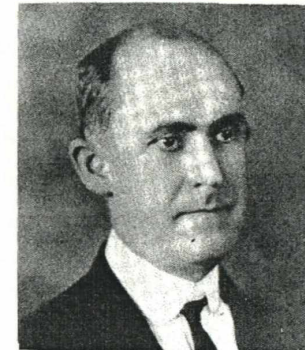
H. H. Sturges



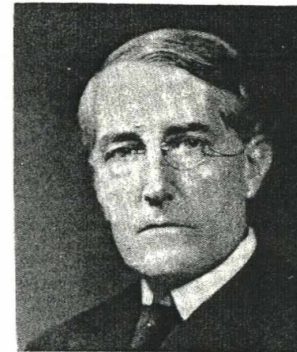
W. R. Lambert



C. S. Lester



E. B. Jenkins



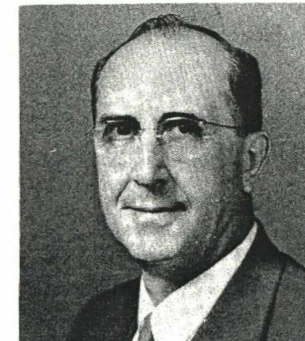
John Roach Straton



J. W. Williams



C. H. Bolton



Ira D. S. Knight



John Roach Straton

John Roach Straton

Born John Roach Straton

April 6, 1875

Evansville, Indiana

Died October 29, 1929 (aged 54)

Clifton Springs, New York

Known for Antievolutionism

John Roach Straton (surname rhymes with "Dayton"); born April 6, 1875 in Evansville, Indiana; died October 29, 1929 in Clifton Springs, New York) was a noted Baptist pastor. Straton was the son of the Reverend Henry Dundas Douglas Straton and the former Julia Rebecca Carter of Virginia. He became a Christian when he was a teenager and heard the revival preaching of James Hawthorne.

Biography

Straton was ordained in 1900 and spent most of his adult life as pastor of several churches in four major cities: Chicago (1905–1908), Baltimore (1908–1913), Norfolk, Virginia (1914–1917), and most notably of the Calvary Baptist Church in New York City 1918–1929, which was the first church in the country to make regular use of radio to broadcast services.[citation needed] Straton was supportive of the work of Uldine Utley, an immensely popular 14 year old child preacher in the 1920s,[1] and invited her to preach at Calvary Church.[2]

Along with William Bell Riley of Minnesota, Dr. Straton was one of the foremost leaders of the anti-evolution campaign of the 1920s. For years Straton carried on a feud with the American Museum of Natural History in Manhattan, New York City because of its Hall of the Age of Man, which displayed the remains of fossilized men. Straton charged the museum with "mis-spending the taxpayers' money, and poisoning the minds of school children by false and bestial theories of evolution."

From December 1923 to May 1924, Dr. Straton engaged in a series of debates with the Modernist minister Charles Francis Potter of the West Side Unitarian Church. Friendly enemies, Straton and Potter debated the following subjects: (1) "Resolved, that the Bible is the infallible word of God"; (2) "Resolved, that the world and man came by creation of a living God and not by evolution"; (3) "Resolved, that the miraculous virgin birth of Jesus Christ is an essential Christian doctrine"; (4) "Resolved, that Jesus Christ is the Divine Son of God"; and (5) "Resolved, that Jesus Christ will return in bodily presence to this earth and establish the reign of universal peace and righteousness." Later Straton published a book, *The Famous New York Fundamentalist-Modernist Debates*, which contained only his own speeches and omitted those of Potter.

On June 28, 1924, he offered the opening invocation on the fifth day of the 1924 Democratic National Convention.[3]

During the Scopes Trial when the judge was considering letting scientists testify for the defense, William Jennings Bryan wired Straton to come to Dayton, Tennessee, to be a rebuttal witness. However, the judge

ruled against the defense and Straton never went to Tennessee. After the trial and Bryan's death, Straton challenged defense attorneys Clarence Darrow and Dudley Field Malone to debate, but was rebuffed.

During the 1928 presidential campaign, Straton, along with William Bell Riley and J. Frank Norris, rallied opposition to Al Smith, the Roman Catholic nominee of the Democratic Party. In keeping with his strong opposition to the liquor traffic, Straton was one of the first to label Smith "the candidate of rum, Romanism and rebellion", a phrase used unsuccessfully in 1884 against Grover Cleveland in the race against James G. Blaine. Huey Pierce Long, Jr., the governor of Louisiana in 1928 and a Smith supporter, claimed that Straton was being paid \$500 a night for speeches on behalf of the Republican candidate, Herbert Hoover. Long accused Straton of waging war against white supremacy in the American South. Long said that he respected all clergymen and denominations but not when "political considerations entered therein."^[4]^[5]

Straton's health was broken by his intense schedule during the campaign, and in April 1929 he suffered a slight paralytic stroke, which led to a nervous breakdown brought on by overwork in the fall and finally a fatal heart attack.

Straton married the former Georgia Hillyer of Atlanta, Georgia, on November 2, 1903 and they had four sons: Rev. Hillyer Hawthorne Straton, John Charles Straton, Rev. Warren Badenock Straton, and George Douglas Straton.

References

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Matthew Bowman (2014). "The Urban Pulpit: New York City and the Fate of Liberal Evangelicalism". Oxford University Press. Retrieved July 29, 2016.
Official Report of the Proceedings of the Democratic National Convention, published by the Democratic National Committee (1924), pp. 221-222
The Shreveport Times, October 13, 1928, p. 18
Billy Hathorn, The Republican Party in Louisiana, 1920-1980, (Natchitoches: Northwestern State University, 1980), p. 15

1951 Golden Anniversary

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- H. H. Sturges , Florida 1901-1903
W. R. Lambert, Alabama 1903
C. S. Lester
E. B. Jenkins
W. L. Savage, Jackson, Tenn. 1903-1904
C. V. Waugh, Lake City, Fla. 1904-1905
S. S. Gibson, Hendersonville, N.C. 1906-1911
Frank P. Gates, Lexington, Ky. 1913
C. R. Phillips, Florida 1913-1914
W. H. Hubbard, N. Y. 1915-1918
C. S. Lester, South Haven, Mich. 1919-1920
E. B. Jenkins, Kershaw, S. C. 1920-1925
John Roach Straton, New York 1926
J. W. Williams 1926-1927
C. H. Bolton, Alabama 1927-1939
Ira D. S. Knight, Virginia 1939-1945
R. Kelly White, North Carolina 1946-

John Roach Straton

BAPTIST BIBLE TRIBUNE

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The Fundamentalist's Pope

by Thomas Ray

John Roach Straton was one of the most flamboyant and controversial preachers of the 20th century. He was born in 1875 into a Baptist pastor's home. When young Straton was 18 he moved to Atlanta, Georgia, to study law. During this period of Straton's life he embraced humanism and evolutionary concepts. The result of his new beliefs left him morally and spiritually bankrupt.

Straton experienced a spiritual transformation when he attended a revival service at First Baptist Church. Shortly after his conversion he enrolled in Mercer University. Straton possessed natural oratorical skills, receiving two gold medals for winning the Georgia and the Southern Intercollegiate Oratorical Championships. In 1898, having completed his studies, the university appointed him to teach Elocution and Oratory. In 1900, he enrolled in Southern Seminary in Louisville, KY. After completing his elective studies, he was hired as professor of oratory and Interpretation of Literature at Baylor University.

Straton was too much of an activist, however, to remain in the classroom. In 1905, he began his pastoral ministry serving churches in Chicago, Baltimore, and Norfolk, VA. When Straton began his pastoral ministry he was committed to post-millennialism and the social gospel. He was firmly convinced that the church was destined to usher in the Golden or Millennial Age. But the First World War and the realities of man's sinfulness convinced him that the only hope for mankind was the transforming power of the gospel.

In 1918, Straton became the pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in New York City. Straton believed that preachers were prophets and it was their responsibility to expose society's sins. He saw New York City as a leader in the moral and spiritual decay of America. He began immediately to expose what he believed were the consequences of this decay. He attacked the illegal sale of alcohol, prostitution, political corruption, the modern theatre, sexual immorality, and the modernism he believed was destroying the Northern Baptist Convention. However, Straton's tactics were not without their drawbacks. The press often emphasized the negative and dramatic side of issues and neglected his positive redemptive message. Hostile journalists and cartoonists dipped their pens in acid and satirized Straton as "the Fundamentalist's Pope," the "Witch Doctor of Gotham," and the "Meshuggah (Yiddish for crazy) of Manhattan." Some disgruntled church members objected to his bold course and charged him with sensationalism.

None of these attacks deterred Straton. He believed the phenomenal growth of the church justified his methods. One of Straton's most successful and controversial methods was his public

debates. His most famous debate was with Dr. Charles Francis Potter, a former Baptist who had become a Unitarian pastor. The interest in the debates was so great that Madison Square Garden had to be rented to accommodate the crowds. The judges declared the debates a draw, but every impartial person acknowledged that Straton was the clear winner.

Straton's reputation as a debater and lecturer gained him invitations to debate or to lecture at Columbia, Dartmouth, Harvard, and numerous other colleges and universities. In 1928, Al Smith, former governor of New York and a Catholic, was the Democratic nominee for president. Straton strongly opposed Smith, not because of his religious beliefs but because of his association with the corrupt Tammany Hall political machine. Straton travelled throughout the South speaking against Smith and his politics. Smith lost the election and much of the credit was attributed to the efforts of Straton and his friends J. Frank Norris and W. B. Riley. However, his constant speaking and exposure to the elements left him physically and mentally exhausted. He suffered a fatal heart attack and died October 29, 1929. He was only 54 years old.