

Florida Baptist Historical Society Biography Collection

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Strawn, Willie Lee (b. 1885; d. 1946), a native of Jasper, Florida, was a bi-vocational pastor, which meant his livelihood was derived from work in sawmills and as a carpenter. One of his most notable accomplishments was his handmade wood carvings on the mantles in the former governor's mansion in Tallahassee. At age 55, in 1940, responding to the call of God, Rev. Strawn became a circuit-riding Missionary Baptist preacher. His circuit went from Jefferson County to Walton County with many stops in the small towns with Baptist churches without a pastor. During his six years of itinerant preaching, Strawn served as the pastor of the Elizabeth Baptist Church, Monticello, between 1942 and 1944, and Frink Baptist Church, 1943-1944.

with it. What he did remove was simply the rubbish that had accumulated about the law and upon it. His enemies, however, called him a lawbreaker. But they could not convict him of the slightest infraction of either the law of the Lord or the law of the land. By no means did he annul the mandates of Moses. On the contrary, he came purposely to fulfil the law and the prophets, not only in their ceremonial aspects but also in their larger spiritual meaning and application.

IN LOVING MEMORY

On April 28, 1946, the Leonia Baptist Church of the Holmes County Association met for a memorial service in honor of their recent pastor, Rev. W. L. Strawn.

Brother Strawn died after a short illness at his home in Tallahassee. He had served the church more than two years, and the esteem in which he was held by the church and friends was shown by the host of friends who came to honor his memory.

The morning message was preached by the Rev. Barnett of Tallahassee, who was the pastor and close friend of Brother Strawn.

Lunch was served by the church and the afternoon program was dedicated to the honor of the recent pastor.

A fine tribute was paid to the pastor by three of the fine young girls of the church, Misses Lell Miller, Polly Jones, and Hilda Heath.

Special music was rendered by the girls ensemble of Enterprise, Ala.

A few words of appreciation and love Mr. Wooten, Sunday School Superintendent; Mr. Jones, Training Union Director; and Mr. Harrell, from the Board of Deacons.

The meeting was opened for words of appreciation from any friends and fellow laborers of Rev. Strawn. Many high tributes were paid to the servant of God for his wonderful service to the church and the community.

The Memorial Message was delivered by the Regional Missionary Glenn Bridges. After the message an offering was taken to apply on the proposed building. The one strong desire of Rev. building. The one strong desire of Rev. Strawn for Leonia Church was that they might have a new house of meeting. In honor of his zeal for this project an offering of \$232.18 was taken.

—The Leonia Baptist Church.

JAMES S. ODUM

On April 26, 1946, James S. Odum passed to his reward.

He was a member of the First Baptist Church of Branford, Florida. Having been converted at the age of 18 years, he was a devoted member until his death.

He was a faithful lay reader, having served his church in various official capacities: Sunday School teacher, Sunday School Superintendent. His advice and counsel were invaluable; and in and out of the church those who came in contact with him, were made better by his influence.

Prior to his death, he had been in declining health for several years; and all through his suffering, his faith in God never wavered.

Our church deeply feels the loss of this

truly great Christian man. Our loss is his mission to the will of our Heavenly gain, therefore we bow in humble submission, Father, who doeth all things well.

Therefore be it resolved:

That our church extended the bereaved family our sincere sympathy in their loss.

That a copy of these resolutions be sent the family; and a copy be sent the Florida Baptist Witness for publication; and a copy be kept for the church record.

Respectfully submitted:

G. R. Carver,
R. L. Welburn,
A. C. Dorsett,

Committee.

A TEXAN RETURNS TO FLORIDA

Rev. Edmund H. Rice has been called to the pastorate of the Southside Baptist church of Miami and began his work the first of June. This is the fourth pastorate for Rev. Rice in the Miami Association besides serving for a time as Associational missionary. He was born in Texas and educated in Baylor University but came to Florida immediately after finishing college and became pastor of the old historic church in Key West. He came to Miami in 1925 and began the work of the Allapattah church where he remained for about eleven years. He left the Miami Association to become pastor of the First Baptist Church of Wauchula but after a few years returned to become pastor of the First Baptist Church of Hollywood. He left the Association again to become pastor at Fernandina and then to Texas for a few years but has now returned to the Magic City of Miami where he and Mrs. Rice have a host of friends who will wish them Godspeed in their new work.

The Southside Church is located in the Orange Glade section of Miami and is near the Miami High School. It is in one of the most important sections of Miami and has perhaps ten thousand people within a mile of the church. "We hope to build here one of the strong churches of Miami," says Rev. Rice, "and we feel sure it can be done by hard work and faith in the Lord."

The church has a splendid location on S.W. 27th Avenue and Tenth Street and is already gathering funds to erect a suitable buildings as soon as conditions will permit.

TRAINING UNION DEPT.

(Continued from Page 7)
feel the influence of the personality of this great man of God.

—Hawley E. Ridenour, Jr.

"LET YOUR LIGHT SO SHINE BEFORE MEN, THAT THEY MAY SEE YOUR GOOD WORKS, AND GLORIFY YOUR FATHER WHICH IS IN HEAVEN." Truly Dr. Willian has carried this great principle with him throughout his ministry. His Christian influence will linger in the hearts of those who were privileged to associate with him.

I am personally grateful to the Lord for the privilege of being touched by his life. There are many times I went to Dr. Willian for encouragement and he always took time to talk to me.

—F. Warren Capell.

Bessie Tift College

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Limited space available. \$490 covers board, tuition and fees. Wholesome social and religious program.

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Government Farm Mission (continued)**Now and then views of a typical Government Farm home**

The photo on the left is the Floyd Register home as it looks today. The photo to the right features the George D. Demott family who moved to the Government Farm in 1938. The twins Marie and Maurice (in front) were born there in 1939, delivered at home by Dr. John B. Brinson Sr. Next row are siblings A. D., James, Grace and Herbert. Behind is Inez Clark Demott (mother), and daughters Ruth and Dorothy, along with their grandmother Sallie Wilson Demott Freeman. At the back is George Demott (father).

The initial construction project to build the several facilities on each farm effectively employed many local residents who were in dire need of work during those Depression years. By the end of 1938, the first families began moving into their new farm.

The Evangelistic Preacher

Willie Lee Strawn, while serving as pastor of the Elizabeth Church between 1942 and 1944, saw the evangelistic opportunity to establish a mission church in the newly developed Government Farm project. He also recognized that the families working on their own farms would not or could take the time on a Sunday morning to travel across the county to attend church. Rev. Strawn encouraged the church members to “reach out” and be evangelistic by “taking the church to the people.”

Pastor Strawn (b. 1885; d. 1946), a native of Jasper, Florida, was a bi-vocational pastor, which meant his livelihood was derived from work in sawmills and as a carpenter. One of his most notable accomplishments was his handmade wood carvings on the mantles in the former governor’s mansion in Tallahassee. In 1940, responding to the call of God, Rev. Strawn became a circuit Baptist preacher. His circuit went from Jefferson County to Walton County with many stops in the small towns with Baptist churches without a pastor.⁷

“His job, as a circuit minister, was to help churches build their membership and then help them with the construction of a new building if they needed him,” recalled his grandson Les Strawn. Pastor Strawn, having no formal theological training, only knew what he read in the Bible. And his preaching style was characterized as heavy on “fire and brimstone” that was an alternative to the redemptive grace of Jesus Christ. While serving the Elizabeth Church, Pastor Strawn held the baptismal services of new Christian converts in a pond across the road from the barn used for the mission.⁸

Government Farm Mission *(continued)***Pastor Willie Lee Strawn and wife Nellie****The Mission Outreach**

Members of the Elizabeth Church immediately recognized the immediate need to provide a Christian witness to the new residents of the Government Farms. Initially, church member Norman Hartsfield drove his truck to the farms to pick up the families who wanted to come to the Elizabeth Church twice-a-month services. By now, December 7, 1941, America had been drawn into World War II. Soon thereafter Mr. Hartfield joined the military, and Arthur Wilder, Jr., took up the task by driving a borrowed truck to carry the children from the farms to the church's Sunday School program. A short time later, Mr. Wilder had to enter the military service.

The war brought on fuel shortages and almost everything else was rationed. The members of Elizabeth Church considered an alternative means to effectively minister to the Government Farm families. By 1942 the church members agreed to start a mission church near the farms. This was initially made possible when member George Demott offered to make available a barn on his farm for use as a church building. Makeshift seating and a pulpit were soon installed. Pastor Willie Lee Strawn began to conduct two preaching services: one in the main church sanctuary on Sunday morning; and a second preaching service later at 2 p.m. at the Government Farm mission building. Two members – Mrs. Sara Wimberly and Mrs. Lydia Leggett – taught the Sunday School lessons at the mission.

This hands-on mission ministry lasted from 1942 to 1944, when Rev. Strawn was called to another church and the Elizabeth Church was temporarily without pastoral leadership. But during the time the mission church functioned, people made professions of faith and 28 were added to the Elizabeth Church membership. But beyond its immediate impact at the time, the families who were the beneficiaries of the Government Farm mission continue to be a part of the Elizabeth Baptist Church today.

The Remnant Families

Among those original families, a remnant group of family members, either by birth or marriage, constitute a large percentage of the leadership of Elizabeth Baptist Church. In 2023, six of the nine deacons are from those families. Additionally, the church clerk, assistant treasurer, W.M.U. leader, Sunday school director, TeamKids' music leaders, cook team and TeamKids recreation leaders are from those families. Several Sunday school teachers and mission friends' teachers, Singles Again leaders and Balance Exercise leader also are from those families.

LAKEVIEW BAPTIST CHURCH
T J Barnett, Pastor
9:45 a m—Bible school, Mr E D Moon, Supt. A class for every age.
11:00 a m—Morning worship, sermon by **Rev W L Strawn**.
7:30 p m—Training union, Mr J M Miller, director. A department for every age.
8:30 p m — Evening Worship, sermon by **Rev W L Strawn**.
Wednesday 8:30 p m—Mid-

March 11-12.
**Rev Strawn Dies
Of Heart Ailment**
Rev W L Strawn, 50, pastor of the Leonia Baptist church near DeFuniak Springs, but a resident of Tallahassee for the last 20 years, died in the Johnston hospital at 10:30 today of a heart ailment.
Funeral services have not been completed, members of the family said today but will be announced later.
Rev Strawn is survived by his widow, Mrs Nellie **Strawn** of 1000 West St Augustine street, one son, **W L Strawn** jr, and one daughter, Mrs Willard Hancock, both of Tallahassee.

Following is a list of pastors who have served over the years, as far as records are available

- | | |
|--------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. Rev. Judah | 21. Frank Philips |
| 2. Charles Stewart | 22. Art Hoff |
| 3. Dan McAlpin | 23. Wallace Hurley |
| 4. Rev Hinson | 24. Kindy Roberts |
| 5. Ottaway Hall | 25. James Parks |
| 6. Roscoe Hall | 26. Wayne berry |
| 7. Willie T. Davis | 27. Richard Carron |
| 8. Ashley Pickron | 28. Wally Draffin |
| 9. Frank Pickron | 29. David Turpin |
| 10. D. W. Newman | 30. Jerry Thomason |
| 11. Otis Walden | 31. Kevin Burgess |
| 12. Otha Martin | 32. David Riddle |
| 13. Roy Walters | 33. Mark Seales |
| 14. Lamon Walters | 34. Bill Peters |
| 15. L. E. Wood | 35. James Swofford |
| 16. Terry Yates | 36. Bonnie M. Johnson |
| 17. Bill Larue | 37. Dan Thomas |
| 18. Jerry Harper | 38. Roland Youmans (2018-2019) |
| 19. Billy Gregory | 39. Cole Thompson (2019-Present) |
| 20. Gene Corbin | |

Homer Dugger, 1941-42
W. L. Strawn 1943-44
Hugh Edwards, 1946
J. H. Settlemire, 1955
Richard Caron, 1978-79