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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Sublette, R. A. (1850-) was born in Jackson County, Alabama to col. J. J. and Sara Wood Sublette. Sublette was licensed to preach in 1873 and ordained in 1879. He attended Furman College, SC and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, KY. Sublette served as missionary pastor under the State Board of Florida, establishing new congregations at Ft. Myers, Bonita, Naples, Moore Haven, Buckingham, Olga, and LaBelle. He served as pastor at Punta Gorda and Moore Haven during 1918-1919.

Historical Sketch FBC Moore Haven

dustry, and initiative. Moore Haven, the Magic Metropolis of the Muck, is the living incarnation of the foregoing features. In spite of occasional adversity, drought, devastation by fire, and the vicissitudes of post-war deflation, the city continues to expand, and her roseate future may safely be left to the sanguine expectations and untiring exertions of her enterprising citizenry.

The political and educational life of the city has kept pace, in its enterprise and initiative, with the physical expansion. Political leaders are to a large etxent selected with a view to traits of honor, probity, virtue, and good repute. The superior type of the immigrants contributes a constituency which readily responds to leadership toward superior educational ideals.

The religious development of the section received attention from the origin of the enterprise, and it is to this subject that this brochure shall be largely confined.

While several religious denominations are now represented among the active religious forces of Moore Haven, and while each in its field is pressing forward with gratifying success, it is our purpose to limit our discussion largely to the activities of the Baptists.

With the new impetus of development which came to the Caloosahatchee basin upon the opening up of the Everglades, The Mission Board of the Florida Baptist Convention sent Rev. R. A. Sublette, long time resident of South Carolina, to Ft. Myers to take initial steps in establishing centers of Baptist worship in Ft. Myers, Estero, Naples, Marco, Buckingham, Immokalee, Alva, LaBelle, and Moore Haven. Though sixty-five years of age, he was possessed of untiring energy, vigilance, initiative, and determination. Residing in East Ft. Myers, and preaching regularly in the mission church there, he visited and preached in all the aforenamed localities, gathering a nucleus of adherents at every point, and laying foundations which have proved permanent.

Born Jan. 23, 1850, in Jackson County, Alabama, near Scottsboro, Rev. R. A. Sublette was the son of Col. J. J. Sublette and Sara Wood Sublette. On his father's side, the grandfather of R. A. Sublette was

Benjamin S. Sublette, the son of the celebrated Benjamin Sublette of Revolutionary fame, the Great War Horse of the Revolution. The father of this Benjamin Sublette was Peter Lewis Sublette, who left Paris in 1685, as a result of the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, and wandering over Europe for fifteen years, finally sailed for America, and landing at Jamestown, settled in Powhatan County on James River above Richmond. The father of Peter Lewis Sublette was Abraham Sublette, who left Paris July 24, 1685, and taking with him his little son, Peter Lewis, went to Germany, thence to Holland, thence to Littleberry, England, and thence to America, landing at Jamestown in September, 1700.

The Sublettes resided in Powhatan County for four or five generations, until a portion of them went west and settled near Bowling Green, Ky. In this party was Benjamin and perhaps also his father, the War Horse, but the latter perhaps returned to Virginia. After remaining near Bowling Green for years, Benjamin S. Sublette and his family located in Tennessee, near Murphreesboro, and from there they all went into the Cherokee Nation, now Northern Alabama. Here J. J. and Mary Wood Sublette were married, to them being born three sons and two daughters, by name, in order of age, Margaret, William Madison, Richard Anderson, John Benjamin, and Mary Ann.

At six years of age, R. A. Sublette lost his mother by death, and he lived for a while with his grandfather. When R. A. was eight years of age, his father married a Miss Woodall. R. A. and his new stepmother clashed. Tying up his duds in a pocket handkerchief, the boy left home, and worked for a widow lady one entire year, receiving as compensation a female pig, two shirts, and a pair of homespun pants. The year afterward he spent in the service of another lady, for which he received a heifer calf and two shirts. He worked outside for a pair of yellow jeans pants, which were dyed with moss gathered from the mountain rocks.

There were panthers, wolves, and bears all through the mountains of North Alabama, during the young manhood of R. A. Sublette. Young Richard hunted at night. While in a big swamp in the

Tennessee River bottoms, a bear got after the party. He ran all the dogs off and went for the boys. They tried to get out of the swamp by wading up to their necks. Being unable, they built a fire and stayed until daylight, standing guard wtih axes all night. James Jefferson, an uncle of R. A. Sublette, killed by shooting and stabbing thirteen big panthers in one winter. Numbers of wolves were killed annually by poison.

During the Revolution the Tories came down to rob the settlements, when an uncle of R. A. killed their leader on his own front door steps. Another of the early Sublettes was wounded by an Indian, the arrow penetrating his leg. Crawling into a cave to escape, he saw the leg beginning to inflame. Fearing blood poison, he hacked his knife upon a rock and sawed his leg off below the knee and threw it out of the cave. We see that R. A. came from a lusty, sinewy, sturdy, vigorous, and invincible stock. He was the scion of a brawny ancestry, the offshoot of a puissant parentage.

In 1866, under the preaching of a Free Will Methodist preacher, R. A. was converted, the agonies of the new birth being very pronounced in his case. So deep was his conviction for sin, that he felt like getting under the bench in humility. His early education was limited to the three R's. When he was converted he insisted on being immersed. The Methodist preacher advised him to join the Baptists, as he was a Baptist in principle.

Laboring for a period of five years under the conviction that he ought to preach the gospel, he finally started for Texas as captain of a boat, taking twelve passengers. Floating down the Tennessee River into the Ohio, thence into the Mississippi, he found the Father of Waters fifty miles wide with a freshet. The boat struck a snag and was sinking. The life boat got loose and floated down stream. Swimming down stream a quarter of a mile, R. A. caught it, rowed it back, and rescued the twelve passengers, including women and children, just as the boat went under. He landed them on an island two feet above the water stage, and stayed there fifteen days with the mosquitoes, gnats, and flies so thick they would darken the sun in evening. They saved

part of a barrel of flour. They toasted on a stick dough which had neither soda, salt, nor grease in it.

He worked as carpenter and punched cattle in Texas for two years or more. The call of God followed him to the cattle fields. He yielded to the call. His sister remonstrated and opposed the idea. The two quarreled all night, whereupon R. A., just before day, said with determination: "I'll do it or die."

And so he did. Yes, praise God, he preached fifty years in nearly every state in the South, and has led about eleven thousand converts to the Savior.

The aforenamed sister was an infidel. She and her brother turned the back of their hands to R. A. when he decided to preach. Having a few dollars, he spent it for books. He went to school to a Presbyterian preacher, who charged him no tuition. R. A. worked all day for bread and studied at night. Going afterward to Mt. Pleasant, Texas, where a court house was under construction, he secured work for 14 days at $2 per day, of which amount he spent $25 for tuition, $2 for books, and felt rich with one dollar left.

It was in Mt. Pleasant, Texas, that R. A. Sublette was licensed to preach in May, 1873. Preaching as occasion offered, with little or no pay, he plodded on in his high calling. His brother summed up the situation thus: "He has had a fool notion to preach, but he has got stranded, and now he is ready to work." His infidel sister no doubt concurred in the statement.

But the indomitable R. A. held his course with resolute tenacity. He had set his hand to the plow. He would not look back. With characteristic pluck, he burned all bridges behind him.

The sheriff of the county heard he was trying to secure an education to prepare himself for the ministry. He offered him a job as deputy sheriff, marshal, and turn key, with a fee of one dollar for every person locked in jail or turned out of jail, at which he worked two years, with the distinct understanding that his work would not prevent his attending school. He also had an income of $20 per month from feeding prisoners. He saw the first man ever executed in Texas by law, baptized in the jail, like

Punta Gorda First Baptist voted in January 1975 to undertake a $1 million three-phase building program. First was an addition to the Crosland Chapel. The educational building expansion was completed in January 1976. Phase three consisted of walks, paving, drainage and landscaping.

During this busy period, the church sponsored the South Punta Gorda Baptist Mission. Rev. Jack Edgeman was the first pastor there. The Mission became Trinity Baptist Church.

Punta Gorda First Baptist has 700 members guided by the Rev. Charles Mack Hutson --- and is still growing.

Today, the first sanctuary awaits a new mission. The spire roof was taken off in the early 30s (prior to 1935) when the wood shingles needed replacing and no one could be found to undertake the dangerous job.

The belfrey was removed by the Rebekahs in the late 60s (after 1962) when the flat cap replacing the spire began to leak. The bell was given to the Palm Dale Methodist church in Glades County.

Nevertheless, the tower and original, main structure are still sturdy --- ready for another century of service to the city.

PASTORAL ROSTER

Records of early pastors prior to 1924 are missing, but those remembered by long-time parishioners or discovered in early issues of the "Herald" are as follow:

Rev. Thomas J. Sparkman --- 1889, 1893
Rev. M.S. Stevens --- 1895-6
Rev. Dr. Martin A. Wood --- 1910
Rev. Thomas R. Woodson
Rev. Sanders
Rev. R.A. Sublette--- 1919
Rev. W.R. Poindexter--- 1919
Rev. Harry Grady Kenney --- 1919
Rev. Swain
Rev. E.L. Andrews
Rev. Dr. A.J. Holt --- 1924-26
Rev. Dr. James S. Day, Jr.