

A HISTORY OF FLORIDA BAPTISTS

By

EDWARD EARL JOINER

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dedicated

to

Florida Baptists

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CHAPTER ONE

Roots and Foundations of Florida Baptists; to 1854

Baptists were among the first Americans to bear witness for the Christian faith in the area of Florida before statehood was achieved, and they were to become the largest Christian group in the State. However, the Territory of Florida had a long, political and religious history before it achieved statehood, and before the coming of the early Baptist settlers who organized the Florida Baptist Convention. Thus, before plunging into the main story of Florida Baptists, it seems appropriate to examine briefly the religious and political background of the territory into which early Baptists came.

The first efforts to establish some form of Christian witness in what came to be known as Florida were made not by Baptists but by Spanish Roman Catholics and French Huguenots. This religious interest, though genuine among some members of both groups, was subordinate to the political and economic concerns which dominated both the Spanish and the French. The military clashes between the French and the Spanish, however, soon resulted in the end of the Huguenot community.¹

Spanish explorers had made several attempts at establishing some kind of foothold on the Florida peninsula between 1513 and 1560, and although all of them were abortive, the Spanish still maintained that

¹Michael V. Gannon, *The Cross in the Sand: The Early Catholic Church in Florida*. (Gainesville, University of Florida Press, 1965), p. 28. Gannon says there were no clergy among the Huguenots; however, since the Huguenot movement was a relatively young Protestant movement, one can hardly conclude that the religious element was not present in the group.

Florida belonged to them. Accordingly, they readily assumed the right to destroy the French Huguenot adventurers who began building a fort (Fort Caroline) near the mouth of the St. Johns River in 1564. With a sense of military and religious responsibility Pedro Menendez de Aviles volunteered to go and remove the French threat and convert the Indians. Leading an expedition of ships loaded with armed men and taking with him several priests, he arrived at Fort Caroline in 1565 and engaged in battle four French warships which had come to defend the fort. The battle was a draw, and Menendez then sailed to what came to be named St. Augustine, landing on September 6, 1565.² Shortly thereafter, Menendez and a task force of soldiers marched overland and destroyed the fort, killing all the men and leaving a sign saying, "I do this not to Frenchmen but to Lutherans."³ Later, a French expedition made a raid on the Spanish settlement, and after killing a number of Spaniards left a sign saying, "We did this, not because these people were Spanish or even because they were Catholics, but because they were murderers and thieves." Although some of the early priests are reported to have ministered only to Spanish soldiers, those who came with Menendez and those with later Spanish expeditions were seriously concerned for the salvation of the Indians. Menendez established a chain of military outposts from Parris Island, South Carolina, to the Gulf Coast of Florida, and later a chain of Spanish outposts was established along the northern border of Florida between St. Augustine and what is now Pensacola.

Successful but short lived missionary activities were established in connection with some of these military outposts. Temporary successes were achieved during the 17th century, for example, among three groups of Indians: the Timucuan, the Gual, and the Apalachee. These missionary efforts were often hampered, and sometimes ended, however, by three factors. First, the religious purposes of the priests were often misinterpreted by being identified with the more economic and political interests of the Spanish military men. Second, the priests could not adjust their missionary efforts to the migratory nature of many of the Indians. Third, the priests had great difficulty in imposing their concepts of Christian morality on the Indian converts.⁴ Ultimately, the English exploited the Spanish weaknesses and turned many of the Indians in the missions against the Spanish. In addition,

²*Ibid.*, p. 27.

³See Marjory S. Douglas, *Florida: The Long Frontier* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), p. 74.

⁴Gannon, *op. cit.*, pp. 34, 40-41.

according to Gannon, James Moore, former governor of Carolina, carried many of the mission Indians away as slaves.⁵ Gannon adds, however, that many of the missionaries lost their fervor before the missions died. By 1708 the Spanish Catholic missions were no more. Their failure appears to have reflected the general Spanish decay of the time.⁶ In 1740 General Oglethorpe tried to take St. Augustine for England, but failed. His efforts, however, were prophetic of more to come, for the English were soon to be in control of Florida.

THE ENVIRONMENT INTO WHICH THE EARLIEST FLORIDA BAPTISTS CAME

English

Under the terms of the Treaty of Paris, Florida was ceded to England in 1763, and was under British domination until 1783. According to Gannon, within a year all Catholics were gone from Florida except eight laymen.⁷ During the twenty years of English rule, the Anglican Church was established,⁸ and Catholicism survived, though greatly weakened. There is no clear evidence that any Baptists came to Florida during these twenty years of British domination, but since Georgia was in process of settlement and since Baptists came to Georgia very early, it is possible that some Baptists then lived on what is now Florida territory. Boundary lines were not so precisely drawn then as they are now. Moreover, the main Spanish strength in Florida was centered in the garrisoned towns of St. Augustine and Pensacola, whose collective purpose was to protect shipping between Spain and her colonies further south. The English immediately began building real colonies. The American Revolution, furthermore, drove many Tory refugees from the Southern Colonies to settle in Florida.

Second and Final Spanish Rule — 1783-1821

In 1783, when without warning, England ceded Florida back to Spain, almost all the English settlers departed. The resulting Spanish rule was very weak, however, because the main Spanish garrisons of Pensacola and St. Augustine were so poorly supplied with men and materials that about all they could do was defend themselves. They

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 50.

⁶Clifton E. Olmstead, *History of Religion in the United States*. (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1960), p. 28.

⁷Gannon, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

⁸John L. Rosser, *A History of Florida Baptists* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1949), p. 2.

could not maintain control over the rest of the peninsula.⁹ As Spanish relations with the Indians deteriorated, moreover, the Spanish increased their problems further by giving asylum and freedom to slaves escaping from Georgia and other places.¹⁰ While the freedom they knew under the domination of the Spanish was still a form of servitude, it held a promise of hope to those who dared to make a break for freedom. However, the Spanish offer of asylum for slaves so infuriated the Georgia farmers that many of them raided Indian and Spanish territory, taking land, timber, and slaves, and enslaving some who had been born free in Florida.¹¹

At the beginning of the last period of Spanish rule, Indians dominated a great deal of the land territory of Florida and they were viewed as a threat to all of it. Although many of the Timucuan and Appalachees along the North Florida border had either been killed in battle or died of white man's diseases, in Central and South Florida the Calusas and the Seminoles were strong. To gain any help they could get in controlling the Indians, the Spanish offered land to the hungry Southern settlers. Thus, gradually much land came to be occupied by Americans, most of whom were eager to bring Florida into the United States.¹² Their desires were effected by the Treaty of 1819 in which the Territory of Florida was formally ceded to the United States.

THE EARLIEST BAPTISTS IN FLORIDA *Runaway Slaves*

No one knows for certain exactly when the first Baptists set foot on Florida soil, but it would appear possible, even probable, that some of the first Baptists in Florida were Southern slaves who had escaped to promised freedom under the second and last period of Spanish rule (1783-1821). Some of those Negro Baptists who held the earliest known meetings in St. Augustine in 1784 undoubtedly were former slaves who had accepted the faith of their masters in Georgia or South Carolina.¹³ Unfortunately, we cannot identify any of these slaves who may have found in their Baptist faith a spiritual freedom which proved an added stimulus to gain political freedom as well.

⁹Douglas, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 119.

¹¹*Ibid.*

¹²*Ibid.*

¹³L. B. Lassiter, *On This Foundation*. (Jacksonville, Florida: Convention Press, 1961), p. 4.

Adventurers, Patriots, and Migrants from Neighboring Southern States

Since Florida was one of the last sections on the eastern seaboard to be settled by Americans, it was natural that many of those moving into Florida during the latter part of the Spanish dominion were transplanted frontiersmen, mainly from Georgia and South Carolina. Some of them were land-hungry adventurers who violated Spanish domain the same way the Spanish had earlier violated the domain of the Indians. Others were men of integrity who unknowingly crossed the rather uncertain boundaries.

Some of these adventurers, moreover, anticipated the eventual domination of this territory by the United States. Europeans, however, avoided settlement in Florida during the early years of the Republic because they did not expect the weak, new nation to last. Thus, during much of the last period of Spanish rule, most of the newcomers to Florida were transplanted Southern adventurers. One of the most significant events among many actions of those Southerners who crossed into Spanish territory was one with which the coming of *Wilson Conner, the first known Baptist minister*, was associated. Wilson Conner came to Florida, not on a preaching mission, but rather on a political and military mission. He was part of a movement initiated by General Matthews, a former Governor of Georgia, who had secret indications from President Madison and some members of the Congress that if he could capture Amelia Island (now Fernandina) and offer it to the United States it would be accepted. Forming a group of men and securing help from Colonel John McIntosh, who had a great plantation on the St. Johns River, and obtaining nine American gunboats, Conner easily captured the island. The group then elected John McIntosh as governor and proclaimed the "Republic of East Florida." A provisional government was set up, and Conner was selected as delegate to the Continental Congress. The President, however, under pressure from England and Spain, refused to recognize the venture, and Conner returned to Florida and later to Georgia, by 1815. Thus, *one of the first efforts to gain statehood for Florida was led by a Baptist minister*.¹⁴

Wilson Conner had been ordained to the ministry in 1803 in Georgia, but we have no evidence that he did any preaching during his adventure in Florida. Since, however, among ministers in early American Baptist life, the lines between the minister and the laity

¹⁴Douglas, *op. cit.*, p. 124; Rosser, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

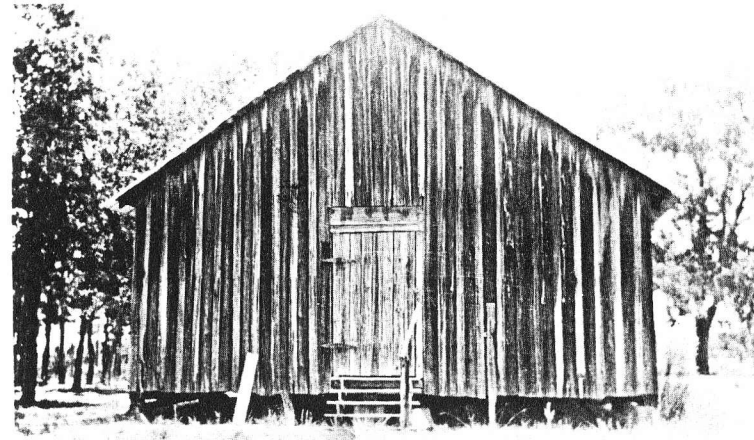
were not so clearly drawn as they are now, this is not surprising. Commonly, a farmer would be ordained to the ministry and continue farming, sometimes preaching and sometimes not. Conner was described as being in a "backslidden" state during much of his life as a political and military adventurer. Later, he did return to the ministry and in fact died preaching, when in the summer of 1844 he preached at Hawkinsville, Georgia, on the text, "Verily, I say unto you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live." At the end of the sermon he sat down and died, probably of a heart attack.¹⁵ Unfortunately, if any Baptists other than escaped slaves settled in Florida during the time of Spanish dominion, their names are not known. It is clear, however, that when Florida was ceded to the United States in 1821, Georgia and South Carolina were heavy contributors to the settlement of the State, especially along the northern border.

Seafaring Migrants from Northern Areas along Coastal Settlements

The settlers who came by boat were more diverse in geographical origin than those who came over land, and they came to be distributed very rapidly over a very wide area. Along the coast they came to Jacksonville, St. Augustine, Key West, Tampa, Pensacola. Up the rivers they came, mainly to those places which had military protection. Many Northern states were represented among the new settlers who came by water. It was through the instrumentality of some of these seafaring migrants that the first Sunday school in Florida was established, at Key West in 1844.¹⁶ Although in many instances Northerners and Southerners were intermingled in the same communities, a greater concentration of Southerners was found in the most heavily settled areas along the northern border during the early years of the 19th century. In other areas Northerners were more common. Thus it seems safe to assume that early Florida Baptists were both Northerners and Southerners who lived for a long time in the same state with little awareness of one another.

¹⁵Jesse H. Campbell, *Georgia Baptists: Historical and Biographical* (Richmond: H. K. Hilyson, 1847), pp. 11-13.

¹⁶Rosser, *op. cit.*, p. 121.



FIRST CHURCHES AND MINISTERS

Pigeon Creek

Although some preaching and organized worship may have occurred earlier, the first established Baptist church in Florida was the Pigeon Creek Baptist Church, organized on January 7, 1821, in Nassau County near what is now Callahan. The Spanish flag still waved over Florida. Some interesting facts about this first Baptist church in Florida, organized near the border of Georgia, are worth reviewing because it seems typical of the early Baptist churches in Florida and in other Southern states. It was organized by Isom Peacock and Fleming Bates with twelve members including Bates, who is listed in the minutes of the church as the first Pastor.

A Calvinist type theology was implied in the statement of faith, along with a strict code of discipline. When the question of footwashing arose, it was discussed and readily accepted as an appropriate part of the observance of the Lord's Supper. Moreover, no hesitation or discussion is indicated in the minutes when on July 20, 1822, "a black man of Brother Lopers by the name of Peter" is reported to have come forward for membership in the church. Thus, the first Baptist church to be organized in Florida was integrated.¹⁷

¹⁷Pigeon Creek Baptist Church, *Minutes*, January 7, 1821, p. 1.

sion Society to replace O. T. Hammond,⁴⁴ and he worked with him until the slavery controversy, when his connection with him threatened to limit the effectiveness of his work. Then he resigned and worked for the Florida Association for about two years—from 1842. When the Southern Baptist Convention was organized in 1845, he was appointed by the Home Mission Board, serving the Board for two years. MacDonald often ministered to a mixed and unresponsive population of Spanish Catholics, universalists, skeptics, moral renegades, and Negroes. Often he received the greatest response from Negroes, whom he baptized freely and admitted to membership in the churches. MacDonald led in establishing the Alachua Association in 1847, and published in 1848 the first Baptist newspaper in Florida. He called it *The Baptist Telegraph and Florida Emigrant*. Though he was able to continue publication only a few months, the effort he made reflects his awareness of the need for a paper to advance the work of missions.

Toward the end of his labor in Florida MacDonald lamented that in all east Florida in an area 200 miles long there were no more than five ministers.⁴⁵ In 1853 he resigned as pastor of the Sharon Baptist Church in Nassau County and returned to Georgia, where he died on April 25, 1869.

J. M. Hayman

Born in Georgia in 1822, Hayman came to Florida with his father in 1843. During the same year young Hayman was converted and baptized by John Tucker. Almost immediately he felt the call to preach, and preached his first sermon in Hillsborough County on June 8, 1851. His subsequent ministry was to be spent in DeSoto, Hillsborough, Manatee, Hernando, Polk and Pasco Counties. Traveling 38,000 miles through difficult terrain he ministered sacrificially to hundreds of isolated areas and established churches in Bartow (originally called Peas Creek—1854), in Tampa (1860) and in Plant City (1866).⁴⁶

Other Pioneer Baptist Leaders

Four men are discussed together because of their connection with the founding of Baptist work in Key West. Key West was settled in 1823 by merchants who came from Rhode Island, Virginia, and North

⁴⁴*Southern Baptist Missionary Journal*, 1849, p. 19.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*

⁴⁶Rosser, *op. cit.*, p. 12-13.

Carolina to develop among other things, a lucrative salvage business. The first Baptist minister to come to Key West was Charles C. Lewis, a sea captain who had been converted in 1842 back in Connecticut. Seeing the great need for a Baptist work in Key West, he exchanged the title of "Captain" for that of "Reverend." Going from house to house, he soon assembled a congregation and after being licensed to preach by a Baptist church in Connecticut, he organized a small group into the Key West Baptist Church in 1843. The congregation then proceeded to call him as pastor and to ordain him. By 1843, the congregation had 23 members.

Lewis returned to Connecticut in 1843, and in 1844 G. G. Tripp became pastor and *organized the first Sunday school in Florida*, but he appears to have stayed only a few months, and the Sunday school died. In October, 1845, H. D. Doolittle brought together the scattered Key West flock, consisting of whites and blacks. Interestingly, he observed better discipline and faithfulness among the blacks than among the whites. During the period when the church was without a pastor, the blacks had continued to hold prayer meetings each week and had heard preaching by Austin Smith, a slave who had earlier been licensed to preach by Lewis. With the help and support of these faithful blacks, Doolittle re-organized in 1845 the Sunday school begun earlier by Tripp, with about 100 members.⁴⁷ Despite the great hurricane of 1846 which destroyed the church building and despite the temporary absence of Pastor Doolittle, who had gone north, the fire of spiritual zeal was not quenched. When Doolittle returned, the Key West Baptists worshipped again in the Monroe County Courthouse, as they had done in the beginning.

When appointed by the American Baptist Home Mission Society to replace Doolittle in 1847, J. H. Breaker found the Baptist fellowship still without a building.⁴⁸ In 1850, Breaker reported that despite a malicious attack by an Episcopal minister, who published a tract calling the Baptists heretics,⁴⁹ the work was flourishing, religious interest requiring three services a day.

⁴⁷J. H. Breaker, letters in *Southern Baptist Missionary Journal*, Sept. 1850, pp. 90, 94-96; also *Report of American Baptist Home Mission Society*, May, 1846, p. 46.

⁴⁸*Report of American Baptist Home Mission Society*, 1849, p. 188.

⁴⁹*Ibid.* The name of the minister is not given.



Hardship in the Wilderness

From the preceding discussion, it should be clear that the pioneers who labored to establish Baptist work in Florida between 1800 and 1854 faced great difficulties, frustrations and dangers, but a few men had the courage to face the challenges of one of the last sections of the eastern frontier.

From numerous descriptions may be painted a picture of the beginnings and difficulties of a typical frontier Baptist church. A missionary would come into an area where there were a few houses in reasonable proximity to one another, and going from house to house, he would gather a small group for preaching. Together they would agree on another home to meet for the next preaching services some weeks later when the preacher returned. Thus churches would be organized and often would continue for years before constructing a building. Many of the early buildings were crude structures built by the members themselves, who cut the logs, rived out boards, hewed puncheons or planks and put them together for a church. Often those who came to church would travel long distances, bringing their guns and hunting dogs, hunting on the way to church and back. Some-

times during the services there would be several deer hanging up near the church.⁵⁰

Theology, Polity and Discipline

Despite the freedom and variety one finds among Florida Baptist pioneers, the prevailing theology, if one judges from numerous statements of faith by churches and associations, was Calvinistic.⁵¹ Although Calvinistic theology produced widely different interpretations among Florida Baptists, it provided a basis for strict moral discipline. What may appear to Florida Baptists today as a rather extreme standard of discipline instead must be viewed as a natural response to the loose and untamed morality of frontier men. Most early missionaries and associational histories witness to the great difficulties experienced in maintaining discipline.⁵² Mrs. Peaslee's history, for example, states that a common topic of discussion in early association meetings was how to raise moral standards in the churches. The typical answer was to advocate Bible study and church discipline. This history reports, moreover, that members excommunicated from one church would often move to another church where they were frequently taken in without question. However, demands were very strict. For example, one association even advised, "That all light literature such as novels, romances, plays, etc., be banished from the house of the brethren of the Association, as pernicious to the morals and spiritual welfare of themselves and children."⁵³

A major theological controversy which split many churches and affected the practice of church life during the pioneer period was the anti-mission question. While it was not a long lasting problem, it threatened the struggling Baptist movement where and when it began, along the border of north Florida in the 1830's and 1840's. The removal of most of the original churches forming the Suwanee Association when it became dominated by anti-mission leadership in 1845,

⁵⁰I. C. S. Sheffield, W. E. Yearly, Graham Carter, and W. H. Tucker, *History of Harmony Baptist Association Since Organization, Comprising Parts of Levy, Gilchrist and Alachua Counties* (N.D., Garwood Historical Collection, Stetson University Library), p. 2.

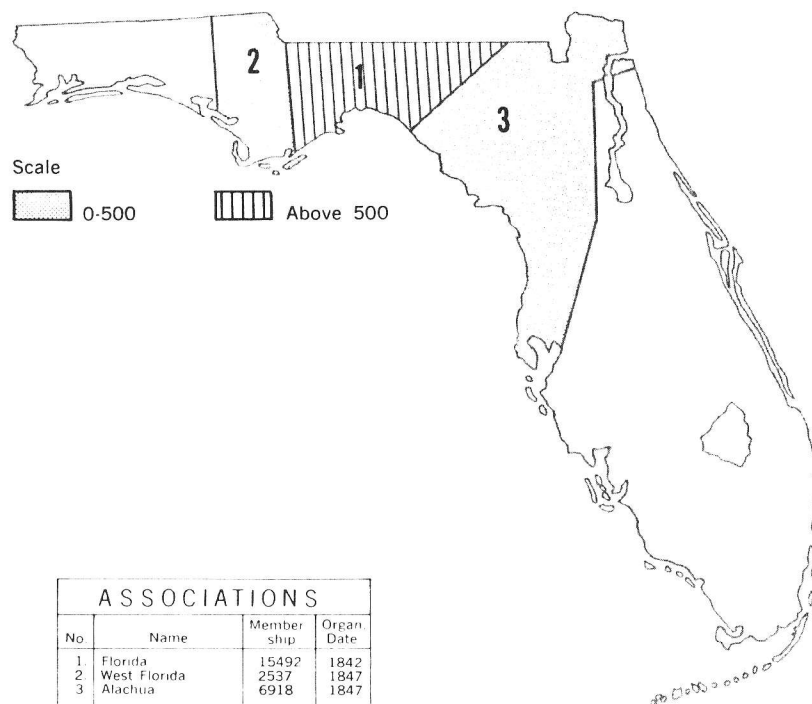
⁵¹Alachua Baptist Association, *Minutes*, 1848, p. 3, for a typical statement.

⁵²For example, Mrs. Herbert R. Peaslee, Jr., *A Century of Witnessing in South Florida Baptist Association, 1867-1967*. (Published by the South Florida Baptist Association, 1967), p. 4.

⁵³*Ibid.*, pp. 5-7.

Associational Development and Growth

1850



ASSOCIATIONS			
No.	Name	Member ship	Organ. Date
1	Florida	15492	1842
2	West Florida	2537	1847
3	Alachua	6918	1847

CHAPTER TWO

Convention, Catastrophe, and Survival: 1854-1880

While many Florida Baptists were still recovering from the wounds and insecurity created by the Seminole wars, and others were already apprehensive of tensions which would soon split the nation as they had already split most denominations, a few Florida Baptists had sensed the need for a state convention. Between 1830, when the population was estimated to be about 34,730 including Indians, and by 1845 the population had increased to 57,951.¹ Statehood, just achieved in 1845, meant that Florida was the youngest of the 31 states then established, and since economic opportunity seemed great, many settlers and adventurers came. By 1850 the population was 87,445.² Reflecting elements of settled and landed Southern aristocracy and rough pioneers, the Baptist leaders in the three existing associations (Florida, West Florida, and Alachua) saw and responded to the need for organizing for more effective work of the Kingdom of God in Florida.

I. ORGANIZATION OF THE CONVENTION

Although the name of the person who originally conceived the idea is not known, the suggestion that a Florida Baptist convention be organized was first made in the Florida Association annual meeting in 1853, at Olive Church, Thomas County, Georgia.³ At this meeting a resolution was introduced and approved which called for the orga-

¹Douglas, *op. cit.*, pp. 143, 158.

²Article on "Florida," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica Co., 1965), Vol. IX, p. 473.

³Florida Association at this time included a number of churches in south Georgia.

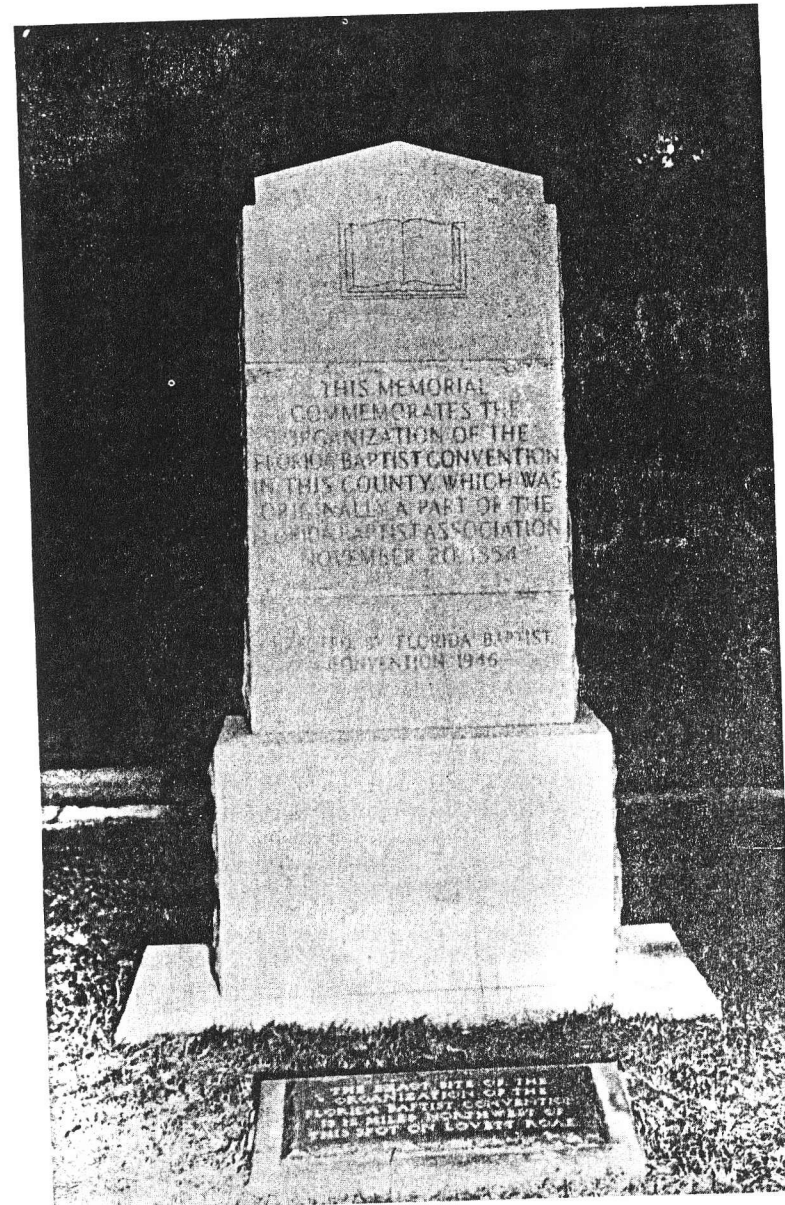
nization of a Florida Baptist convention. Immediately, committees were appointed to contact the other two associations to determine their interest in the venture. William B. Cooper and W. Blewett were requested to communicate with the West Florida Association. S. W. Baker and W. H. Goldwire were to contact the Alachua Association.⁴ Both the committees were to report at the next annual session of the Florida Association. Clearly, the next annual meeting of the association proved to be also a convention organization meeting. While the Florida Association was meeting in the Concord Baptist church, near Madison, the delegates (as they were then called) from the three associations assembled only a short distance from the church in the parlor of Richard Johnston Mays to organize the convention. They probably met there instead of the Church for three reasons. First, the associational meeting was in session at the church. Second, since the church was small, it probably would not have held all the local association delegates and those from the other associations who had come for the convention organization meeting. Furthermore, to conserve time for those involved in the Florida Association and the convention organization it may have been thought necessary to hold both meetings at the same time rather than ask delegates involved in both meetings to stay an extra day. Finally, since the convention organization meeting occurred on November 20, 1854, the weather probably required a meeting inside a building, and the large home of R. J. Mays was the most appropriate place. Also, Browning reports that many of the delegates stayed at Mays' ten room home, which was larger than the church building.⁵

Seventeen delegates participated in this organization meeting. Representing the West Florida Association were Josh Mercer, D. P. Everett, and G. W. Underwood. Representing the Alachua Association were J. M. Hayman, Daniel Edwards, J. H. Breaker, and William Connell. From the Florida Association, representatives were R. J. Mays, William B. Cooper, B. S. Fuller, W. H. Goldwire, W. Blewett, D. G. Daniel, H. Z. Ardis, S. C. Craft, T. W. Terrell, and John Cason.⁶

⁴*Proceedings of the Florida Baptist State Convention, 1854*, p. 1. Hereafter, although the exact title varies from year to year, the title Florida Baptist Convention, *Minutes*, will be used.

⁵Edwin B. Browning, "The Early History of Concord Missionary Baptist Church, 1841-1866," mimeographed, 1946, Garwood Baptist Historical Collection, Stetson University Library, pp. 2 ff.

⁶Florida Baptist Convention, *Minutes*, 1854, p. 1.



R. J. Mays was asked to preside over the organization meeting, and D. G. Daniels was appointed secretary. The first item of business was the adopting of a constitution, modeled, according to Rosser,⁷ after that of the Georgia Baptist Convention, which had been organized in 1822. However, brief comparison of the two constitutions leads to a different conclusion. Indeed, what strikes the reader first and most forcefully is the contrast with rather than the similarity between the original constitutions of the Georgia Baptist Convention and the Florida Baptist Convention. In fact the only prominent similarity in form or content is the proportionate church member representation.⁸ There are similarities in form and content between the original constitution of the Georgia Baptist Convention and those of the Alachua, Florida, and West Florida Baptist Associations.⁹ Those associations perhaps borrowed directly from the original Georgia Baptist constitution. The conclusion is obvious, however, that the model used by the framers of the original constitution of the Florida Baptist Convention must be sought elsewhere. Similarities in form and content between Florida Baptists' original constitution and those of both the Triennial Convention of 1814 at Philadelphia and the Southern Baptist Convention, adopted in 1845, suggest that they were the main models used.¹⁰ However, distinctive elements in the Florida Baptist Convention constitution suggest also that either another source was used or that those who drew up the Florida constitution thought for themselves.

One of the most striking elements that all three of these constitutions have in common is the reference to "societies" and their representation through financial contributions. The inclusion of this section in the constitutions of both the Southern Baptist Convention and the Florida Baptist Convention is most remarkable in view of the contention of Barnes, a notable Southern Baptist historian, that one of the differences between Northern and Southern Baptist leaders was over the question of membership through societies based on finances. Barnes

⁷*Op. cit.*, p. 37.

⁸Jesse Mercer, *A History of the Georgia Baptist Association*. (Washington, Ga., 1838), pp. 29-34.

⁹Alachua Baptist Association, *Minutes*, 1848, pp. 3-4; West Florida Baptist Association, *Minutes*, 1850, p. 14; and Florida Baptist Association, *Minutes*, 1860, pp. 6-7.

¹⁰W. W. Barnes, *The Southern Baptist Convention, 1845-1953*. (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1954), p. 6. Cf. Southern Baptist Convention, *Annual*, 1845, pp. 3-5.

offers the explanation that the continued power of anti-mission groups throughout the Convention forced the framers of the constitution to compromise to get the constitution adopted. Then the first task the Southern Baptist Convention leaders had to perform was to effect a practical change from the traditional society method of supporting denominational causes to a more centralized method.¹¹ Barnes' explanation may also account for the presence of the "societies" representation section in the Florida Baptist constitution, but the presence, contribution and influence of J. R. Graves, the famous Landmark leader, suggests another possibility.¹² It is strange that his presence is not mentioned in the records of the organization meeting. Is it possible that J. R. Graves was present and assisted in the writing of the Florida Baptist Convention constitution, but left Florida before the organization meeting assembled?¹³ The great influence of J. R. Graves among some Florida Baptists at the time would suggest an affirmative answer.¹⁴ However, distinctive elements in the Florida constitution suggest that those who drew up that document were not determined in the process, either by Graves, or any other influence, but by their own vision of Baptist tradition and the needs of their day.¹⁵

Because the constitutional structure of the Florida Baptist Convention has changed so radically, significant features of that first constitution are worth reviewing.¹⁶ The first article is what one informed of Baptist tradition would expect. It reads, significantly: "This body is constituted upon the New Testament Scriptures as acknowledged and held, generally, by the Baptist Denomination."¹⁷

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 33. The society method, which prevailed in the Northern Baptist Convention and was common among Baptists in the South before 1845, involved several organizations that were dedicated to the support of various and benevolent enterprises, but were independent of denominational control.

¹²Article signed "G," "Florida Association," *Christian Index*, December 11, 1854, p. 198, where the author says: "J. R. Graves was present, and contributed not a little to the interest and success of the occasion." The occasion of course was the organization of the Florida Baptist Convention.

¹³*The Southern Witness*, February 22, 1906.

¹⁴West Florida Baptist Association, *Minutes*, 1859, p. 3, where it is stated that D. P. Everett, one of the editors of the *Landmark Banner and Cherokee Baptist*, praised that paper before the Association and that the Association adopted the paper as its medium of communication. D. P. Everett had been one of the delegates representing the West Florida Association at the organization meeting.

¹⁵Graves' influence is more obvious in other ways, as will be shown later.

¹⁶Appendix I.

¹⁷*Ibid.*