



FLORIDA BAPTIST
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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, churches and events in Florida Baptist history. During the next several months this newsletter will feature those churches and their leadership who between 1821 and 1849 contributed to the development of the Florida Baptist State Convention. Each monthly issue will feature at least one church established in the 1820s, 1830s and the 1840s respectively. **While dozens of Baptist churches were established during these decades, most have not survived time. The featured churches continue to function in 2020.**

Florida Territory Missionary Baptist Churches Established in the 1820s

Leon County: Indian Springs Baptist Church – 1829

Approximately fourteen miles east of Monticello, near the Lake Miccosukee area in northern Leon County, settlers organized the Indian Spring Baptist Church.

(In the ensuing years an “s” was added to the name Spring.) This church was constituted on July 18, 1829, by Henry Miller and Theophilus Hardie who served as the visiting presbytery (ordained ministers who verified the Baptist faith and practice of those persons seeking to organize the new church). There were eleven charter members: Arthur and Sarah

Burney, Nancy Hagin, Ebenezer and Nancy Folsom, Helen Farmer, Joseph and Elizabeth Miller, Fannie Hay, John Smith, and Amos Albritton. The church called Theophilus Hardee as its first pastor. The church in 2020, will observe its 191st anniversary since founding. Located 17 miles northeast of downtown Tallahassee, the church still meets in a wood frame building constructed in 1854.



Florida Territory Missionary Baptist Churches Established in the 1830s

Lake Butler: Old Providence Baptist Church – 1833



Following his ordination, Georgia itinerant missionary John Tucker traveled on horseback to a settlement on the Florida side of the Olustee River then located in Columbia County (now part of present-day Union County). Tucker was requested to lead a preaching service in the wilderness home of Henry Beals on April 12 – 13, 1833, where the settlers had agreed to organize a church. They requested Elder Tucker to assemble a presbytery to assist in constituting their planned church. By July 13, 1833, a constituting service was scheduled and present were ordained ministers John Tucker, Fleming Bates, William A. Knight and Paul B. Colson. The church's charter members were Theophilus and Ann Weeks, John D. and Martha Osteen, Abraham Colson, John M. and Ezilia Prevatt, Ephraim and Jane Miller, Benjamin Miller, Mary Gaskins

and Margaret T. Campbell. The Providence Baptist Church (or the Church of Christ, Providence, as they originally referred to themselves) agreed to adhere to the principles of faith held by the Ochlocknee (Georgia) Association. The church agreed to call John Tucker as their pastor, who would travel through the area once a month. In time, as other churches adopted the name Providence, the Columbia County church added the prefix “old” to its name to distinguish itself as being the original. Old Providence Church, located in Union County’s Lake Butler community, in 2020 will observe its 187th anniversary since founding.

Florida Territory Missionary Baptist Churches Established in the 1840s

Ponce DeLeon: Sandy Creek Baptist Church – 1844

A year before Florida became a new state (1845) in the Federal union, a group of settlers seeking fertile farmland decided to establish homesteads in a West Florida territory that in 1848 became designated as Holmes County. The northern boundary of the county aligns with the Florida-Alabama state boundary while its eastern boundary abuts Jackson County. Little is known about the group of people, who likely had brought their Baptist faith and practice with them when they migrated from the Carolinas either by way of Geneva County, Alabama, or from Jackson County, Florida, where several early Baptist churches existed. By the time of the 1850 census, there were only 1,200 residents scattered across the county. However, there were itinerant preachers from the Bethlehem Domestic Missionary Society in southern Alabama that were traveling between settlements along the Florida-Alabama boundary and on the south flowing rivers into Florida beginning in 1835 until the late 1840s. As an example, these missionaries – Alexander Travis, Kedar Hawthorne, and J.H. Schroebe – likely may have traveled into the Holmes County area. There are no existing records that report on the people and the method used in 1844 to organize and name their church Sandy Creek. Local historians believe Sandy Creek Baptist Church was the first Baptist church organized in this furthestmost southwestern area of Holmes County that borders Washington County. These Baptists constructed their first meeting house out of logs cut from the nearby forest. Baptismal services were held in the nearby Sandy Creek. In 2020 the church is expected to observe its 176th anniversary since founding.

DeFuniak Springs: Cluster Springs Baptist Church – 1845

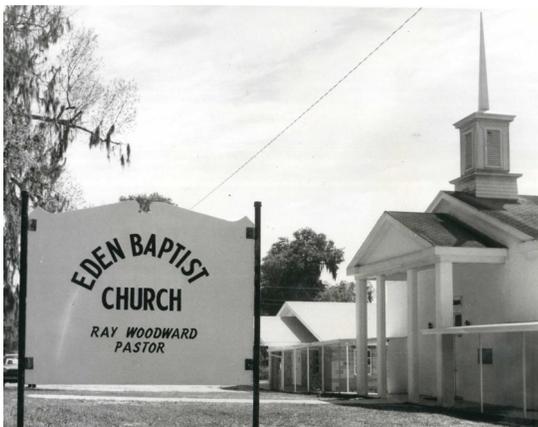
The historical information about the Cluster Springs church is similar to that of other early Baptist churches established along the Panhandle just as Florida was transforming from a Territory into a part of the United States in 1845. The area was inhabited by non-native European settlers over one hundred years earlier when the Territory was under British control. English and Scottish settlers migrated from the backcountry of the Carolinas to what had been established as Walton County in 1824. Some of these early settlers stayed in the DeFuniak Springs area, while others, most of whom were either farmers or fishermen, settled in the southern portion of the county by the sea. The Scottish settlers are credited with establishing in 1827 the first Presbyterian church in Florida, in Walton County’s Euchee Valley. By the time of the 1840 census, there were a little over 1,400 residents scattered across the county. Little is known about the group of English people, who likely had brought their Baptist faith and practice with them when they migrated from the Carolinas. There are no existing records that report on the people and the method used in 1845 to organize that first Baptist church in the county. As previously noted, there were itinerant preachers from the Bethlehem Domestic Missionary Society in southern Alabama that were traveling between settlements along the Florida-Alabama boundary and on the south flowing rivers into Florida beginning in 1835 until the late 1840s. As an example, these missionaries – Alexander Travis, Kedar Hawthorne, and J.H. Schroebe – likely may have traveled into the Walton County area. Local historians believe the church took its name from a “cluster of fresh water springs” located near the community of Liberty where the church likely was established. These Baptists constructed their first one-room meeting house out of logs, which also served as a public school. Baptismal services were held in the nearby cluster of springs. In 2020 the church is expected to observe its 175th anniversary since founding.

Hernando County: Eden Baptist Church – 1845

From the mid 1820's until 1843, while Florida was still a territory, the then Alachua County stretched from Georgia South along the coast of the Gulf of Mexico to Charlotte Harbor. Much of that area was still occupied by the native Seminole Indians who fought the US. military. In 1842, the US. Congress passed the Armed Occupation Act, which was intended to do what the military could not – let settlers bearing arms finish clearing out the Indians in exchange for free land, most of it south of Newnansville (now Gainesville) and the Withlacoochee River. The first wagon train in this area of about 30-40 wagons soon arrived, and the homesteaders camped around what is now McKethan Lake. Soon settlers staked out and secured land permits of 160 acres each. Out of the limited 1250 permits issued to 400 settlers for the land area that in 1843 became Hernando County (named for explorer Hernando de Soto) that had been carved out of Alachua and Hillsborough counties.



SKETCH OF EDEN BAPTIST CHURCH BUILDING AS IT APPEARED OVER 100 YEARS AGO BY ARTIST MARYLEEN WEBB.



It was in this environment that the seeds of Eden Baptist Church (located near present-day Brooksville) began. Jeremiah Madison Hayman (b. 1822; d. 1902) and his father, James, received two land permits, near Lake Lindsey. During a funeral service preached by itinerant missionary Rev. John Tucker on July 7, 1844, Jeremiah made a profession of faith in Christ. Hayman and one of his sisters were baptized that afternoon in Lake Lindsey. They were among the charter members of the Eden Baptist Church that resulted from a revival led September, 1845, by Tucker. The newly organized church called John Tucker (b. 1785; d. 1853) as its pastor, although he continued his itinerant preaching

circuit, returning to the church once a month. Jeremiah Hayman was chosen as the church's first clerk, and was ordained as a deacon. Hayman sold his farm in 1850 and moved to Hillsborough County and was destined to become a leading Baptist minister on the Florida West Coast, as was his brother, James Henry Hayman (b.1829; d. 1916).

The Eden Church's two appointed delegates – Rev. Tucker and Deacon Jeremiah Hayman – were among representatives from 13 churches that in November, 1847, participated in the organization the then called Alachua Missionary Baptist Association (until 2006 when it was re-named the Nature Coast Baptist Association). In 2020 the church is expected to observe its 175th anniversary since founding.

This series on early churches continues next month