

The Florida Baptist Historical Society seeks to **preserve the legacy** of Florida Baptist pastoral leaders and laity, the past and present functioning Baptist churches, the State Convention's cooperating ministries and milestone events that were historically significant to Florida Baptists. The Society's mission is accomplished through a variety of ministry services provided to Florida Baptists. To underscore this emphasis the Society's monthly newsletter, **LEGACY**, seeks to highlight the legacy endowed by the people, churches and events in Florida Baptist history. During the next several months this newsletter will feature those persons whose legacy in Florida Baptist life was achieved in part, by their service as president of the Florida Baptist State Convention.

As noted in previous issues of **LEGACY**, since 1854 (excluding the seven years at various times the State Convention did not meet), the persons elected as president have included 78 pastors and 16 laypersons. The first two issues of **LEGACY** featured brief profiles on those 16 laypersons. Continuing this month, we provide brief profiles on selected pastors who served as State Convention president.

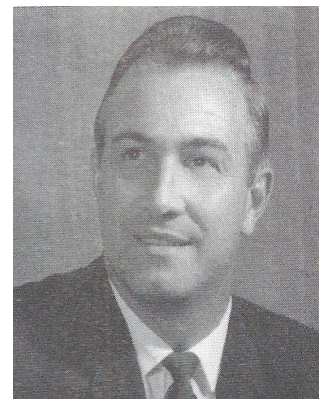
A. Douglas Watterson, President 1970

A. Douglas Watterson (b. 1927; d. 2006) was serving as pastor (1968 – 1971) of the First Baptist Church, Tallahassee, at the time of his election to lead the Florida Baptist State Convention. He previously served the First Baptist Church, Marianna and the First Baptist Church, Vero Beach. He left Florida in 1978 to serve as pastor, Cliff Temple Baptist Church, Dallas, Texas.

The 1970 annual State Convention meeting agenda was filled with a host of recommendations considered by the messengers, including three matters related to educational institutions. First, the messengers learned that a proposed Baptist college had become a reality as a result of unilateral action taken by the Palm-Lake Baptist Association to establish the **Palm Beach Atlantic College** in 1968. The state convention messengers affirmed its desire to pursue a goal of establishing a Baptist junior college and decided not to assume any responsibility for Palm Beach Atlantic College.

In another matter, a report was made by a state convention-appointed Stetson Relationship Committee which considered the long-standing conflict between the State Convention and the **Stetson University** over the issues of control and the election of trustees. Although those issues remained unresolved, the study committee's report noted that with the election of a new university president – John E. Johns – the committee "optimistically" anticipated a "strengthening of the ties between the denomination and the school."

A third educational institution matter related to the **Baptist Bible Institute** which had been an institution of the state convention since 1957. Messengers approved a study committee's five recommendations, which among other things: authorized the Institute to increase its enrolment ceiling to 400 from 300 students; encouraged a significant increase in the book holdings available in the institute's library; and called for major improvements in the institute's financial accounting records and reporting systems.



A. Douglas Watterson

W. G. Stracener, President 1971

William Guy Stracener (b. 1905; d. 1991) was nearing his December retirement after 21-years' service as editor of the *Florida Baptist Witness* (1949 – 1970), when he was elected in November, 1970, to lead the state convention during the year 1971. Prior to his position as editor, Stracener had served as pastor of Florida Baptist churches in Madison, Miami and Pensacola.



W. G. Stracener

The non-existent relationship with **Palm Beach Atlantic College** was brought up as messengers discussed the proposed 1971-72 Cooperative Program budget. A messenger sought to amend the budget by including \$50,000 for ministerial student scholarships at the college. The state convention proceedings document noted, “after lengthy discussion and prayer for guidance . . . the amendment was soundly defeated.”

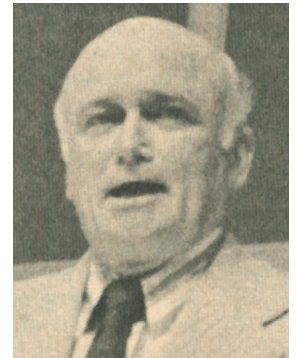
In another follow-up matter, last considered in the 1970 annual meeting, messengers adopted the report of the **Stetson Relationship Committee** which proposed a continuation of the then current working relationship between the denomination and the university. Specifically, the recommendation called for continuing the current, albeit contentious, process used in the selection of university trustees. On a more positive note, the report stated that University President John E. Johns was committed to seeking: to enlist “qualified Baptists” to serve on the faculty; to increase the enrolment of Baptist students; and to emphasize the “Christian” aspect of university campus life; among other proposed actions.

Joe M. Bamberg, President 1973

Joe Maurice Bamberg (b. 1915; d. 2007) was in the midst of 33-years' service as pastor (1947 – 1980) of the First Baptist Church, Milton, when he was elected as state convention president. Prior to responding to the pastoral call at Milton, Bamberg served as an Army chaplain in WW II and the few years following.

Revisions to the respective charter and bylaws of the **Baptist Bible Institute** and the **Florida Baptist Children's Home** were approved by messengers which brought consistency to the two governing documents and reaffirmed the “control” the state convention retained over the agencies as it related to their property sites, financial responsibilities and the election of trustees.

In another major action, the messengers approved the sale of the convention's long-time **West Florida Assembly** property near Panama City to fund the purchase of a more centrally located and expanded Panhandle property site in Marianna, which would become the Blue Springs Baptist Assembly. The new assembly was to provide similar facilities as existed at the Lake Yale Baptist Assembly near Eustis.



Joe M. Bamberg



Virginia R. Parker

Virginia R. Parker, President, 1974

Mrs. Henry A. (Virginia R.) Parker (b. 1912; d. 2014) served in 1974. Virginia Parker holds the distinction of being the only woman to serve as president, Florida Baptist State Convention. Mrs. Parker's unusual process by which she succeeded to the presidency from having been elected second vice president, **was featured in the February, 2019, issue of *Legacy*.**

N. B. Langford, Jr., President 1979

N. B. Langford, Jr., (b. 1930; d. 1998) was pastor of the First Baptist Church, Panama City, at the time he served as state convention president. Interestingly, because there were four nominees, it took two written voting ballots for Langford to be elected as president.

The 1979 annual meeting was celebrated as the **125th anniversary** since the founding of the **Florida Baptist State Convention** in Madison, Florida, on November 20, 1854. Each session featured a “great moments in Baptist history” vignette which highlighted the significant people and events that occurred during the state convention's 125-years of existence.



N. B. Langford, Jr.

In an ironic, yet perhaps Providential act of program scheduling, four former, current and future executive secretary-treasurers of the Florida Baptist Convention corporation were featured on the program. This was the first convention at which **T.G. “John” Sullivan**, then pastor, Broadmoor Baptist Church, Shreveport, La., was a featured preacher. “The church that does not evangelize and do missions will not die; it is dead already,” Sullivan declared. **Dan C. Stringer** was introduced as the newly appointed Executive Secretary-Treasurer of the convention corporation. Stringer replaced **Harold C. Bennett**, who resigned earlier on March 31 to accept the secretary-treasurer position, SBC Executive Committee. Both men were featured in a Q&A segment hosted by Conrad Willard, pastor, Central Baptist Church, Miami. Also participating in the convention program was **John Maguire**, retired secretary-treasurer emeritus.

Despite the anniversary observance, messengers managed to engage in extended discussions over: the annual Cooperative Program budget; capital funding needs for the new Blue Springs Assembly and the educational institutions; and approved a near-record nine resolutions whose topics ranged from terrorism to world hunger to Christian higher education and to the Gideons Internationals.



Three Executives: During the 1979 annual state convention meeting, three former and current Executive Secretary-Treasurers of the Florida Baptist Convention were featured on the program. This 1985 photo shows the three men together. From left (with their dates of convention leadership) are Dan C. Stringer (1979 -- 1988), John H. Maguire (1945 -- 1967), and Harold C. Bennett (1967 -- 1979).

The sequential order of State Convention Presidents between 1970 and 1979:

A. Douglas Watterson, 1970
W. G. Stracener, 1971
James L. Pleitz, 1972
Joe M. Bamberg, 1973
Virginia R. Parker, 1974

James F. Graves, 1975
John L. Pelham, 1976
Barney B. Burks, Jr., 1977
Cornelius B. Davis, 1978
N. B. Langford, 1979

[Series to continue next month]