THE OKLAHOMA BAPTIST CHRONICLE

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Spotlight on the Archives

The Fort Gibson Church Organ

The organ pictured that accompanies this article has a good history. One I believe that is worth telling.

This organ was received into the Gaskin Baptist Historical Archives this past July (2009). It is from the First Baptist Church, Fort Gibson, Oklahoma, and was the first organ used by the church in the early 1900's.

The church was founded on August 1, 1903, by Bro. J. G. Brindal, a missionary to the Cherokees. The first church building at Fort Gibson was built between 1903 and 1907. It was built out of locally quarried stone hauled to the site by team and wagon. The church started with twenty members, sixteen by letter, and four by baptism.

One can only imagine the joy found in this new building with the sweet melodies heard from this fine organ. They had a new preacher, a new place to worship, a new organ, and the old Bible based purpose of reaching the lost folk about them. What else could be desired?

The instrument is from the Estey Organ Company which was established in 1846 at Brattleboro, Vermont. It is a small portable pump organ and is only three feet long and three high. It is a two-peddle masterpiece of engineering.

The organ itself isn't dated, but it is believed this model was produced in the late 1800's. A representative of the Estey Organ Muse-

um said he has never seen this instrument. Ken Gabrielse, BGCO, Music Specialist, states this type of organ was used for street ministries in the 1800's and into the early 1900's.

While it was used for several years in those early days, the history of the organ was just beginning.

Carlos V. Knight and his wife, Gray, came to First Baptist, Fort Gibson, in January, 1950. They immediately saw a great mission purpose for this little old organ.

For the next forty-five years Bro. Knight and his wife used the organ at churches, in prison ministries, and for revivals. The fairly light weight instrument is equipped with leather handles on each end for easy portability.

When Knight retired in 1995, the organ was also retired to his home for a time of quiet obscurity. When Bro. Knight died last year the family donated the organ back to the church.

The church recently contacted us to see if we would like the organ for the Gaskin Archives. Like it? We would love it!

Now it sits in a place of prominence in our beautiful outer entry display room.

Within this past year we have acquired the only pulpit and organ the Archive possesses. That's all we need.

This fine organ along with the circa 1900 handsome pulpit from Old Bokoshe Baptist Church are great examples of the tools of the pioneer work among Oklahoma Baptists.

In the autumn 2008 Chronicle I invited the readers to come by sometime and I would preach to them. I will again invite you to come, but this time we can sing and preach together.

The Editor

Sources:

Williamson, Dana. *The Baptist Messenger*, "Long Knight Tenure to End At Fort Gibson", July 27, 1995,

E-mails and teleconferences. Esty Organ Company, Brattleboro, Vt., August 4, 2009.

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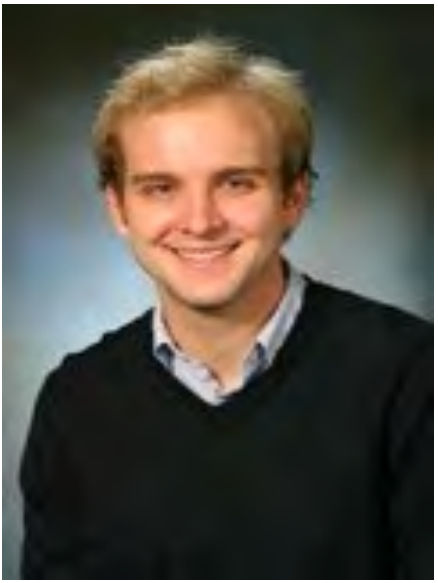
Gabrielse, Ken, Worship and Music Specialist, BGCO, Nov. 2, 2009.

“Let Man Be Free: Virginia Baptists and the Struggle for Religious Liberty in America”

By

D. H. Dilbeck

Oklahoma Baptist University
Gaskin Baptist History Award
May 13, 2009



D. H. Dilbeck

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I. Introduction

On June 8, 1789, newly elected Virginia congressman James Madison put forth a motion before the House of Representatives to consider twelve amendments to the recently ratified Constitution. Ten of these proposed amendments would eventually emerge as the Bill of Rights. Although slowed by contentious House Committee meetings and joint House-Senate conferences, within three and a half months both chambers of Congress approved the amendments and sent them to the states for ratification. By December 1791, ten of Madison's amendments had been adopted by three-fourths of the state legislatures, enshrining the new provisions as the foundational legal rights granted to American citizens. The consequential culmination of Madison's monumental labor with the Bill of Rights was the explicit preservation of the premiere civil liberties afforded to the American public. Chief among these rights is the freedom to worship as one's conscience dictates; free from the restraints of a state-sponsored church. While Madison's role in securing a legal guarantee of religious liberty is unrivaled, he was not alone in his efforts. The fight for religious freedom in America cannot be fully understood without significant recognition of the influential role of Baptist groups in Virginia. Baptists within Orange County, Virginia—the region from which Madison was frequently elected to various state legislative bodies—played a particularly significant role in the struggle for religious liberty by way of their unique and often influential relationship with James Madison.

No denomination in the colonies was more passionately committed to securing religious liberty in America than the Baptists, particularly of Virginia. To understand the fight for religious freedom as merely the work of Madison and other political leaders is to miss a crucial aspect of American history. Baptists of Virginia were relentless in their efforts to ensure legal protections for religious liberty. The motivations spurring these efforts primarily sprang from two sources. First, the Baptist experience in colonial Virginia was long marked by religious persecution. In many respects, the dedication among Baptists to protecting religious liberty was driven by a very practical desire to avoid the harsh persecution endured for many decades. Second, Baptists were deeply supportive on a theological level of the right of every individual to determine his or her own opinions in matter of religion, free from the constraints of human authorities. Religious liberty was one of the earliest and most passionate convictions of the Baptist denomination. The lack of genuine religious freedom in

Virginia ran in stark contrast to this deep theological affirmation. It was precisely these beliefs that were eventually utilized to motivate Baptist efforts in defense of religious liberty.

While Baptists in Virginia suffered immensely because of laws targeting religious dissent, they actively pressed for a guarantee of religious freedom. The most dynamic and effective leader of the Baptist of Orange County was an itinerate preacher named John Leland. While Leland is widely forgotten by most historians of American history, his relentless work to secure religious freedom in the United States cannot be ignored. One historian once wrote that if all the historians of the world were to be asked, "Who was most responsible for the American guarantee for religious liberty, their prompt reply would be 'James Madison'; but if James Madison might answer, he would as quickly reply, 'John Leland and the Baptists'."[1] In the struggle to establish an explicit guarantee of freedom of religion in America, John Leland and Virginia Baptists made a critical contribution—primarily through their influential relationship with James Madison.

II. A Climate of Persistent Persecution: Virginia Baptists in the 1700s

Baptist efforts for religious liberty must be understood in their proper context—a context of fierce religious persecution in Virginia stretching throughout most of the colonial period. The Church of England was legally recognized as the official church of the colony, effectively suffocating sincere religious pluralism. Those religious opinions dissenting from the established Church were met with harsh persecution for most of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The contribution Virginia Baptists made to religious freedom was wrought in the midst of persistent religious persecution. While it must be admitted that the laws harshly prohibiting religious dissent were not always enforced as strictly or consistently as possible, religious discrimination was a very real part of the Baptist existence in colonial Virginia. Despite this inconsistency in the hostility aimed towards dissenters, by the 1750s severe religious persecution in Virginia had escalated to an alarming level. The Virginia colony renewed its efforts to minimize religious dissent, and as H. Leon McBeth notes, throughout this "new wave of persecution, Baptists suffered most." [2] Religious persecution was an ever-present reality for Virginia Baptists in the mid-eighteenth century. Yet in spite of the mistreatment they endured, Baptist support for religious freedom was unwavering. This fervent dedication to religious liberty was made all the more sincere by a harsh struggle against relentless religious persecution.

Early laws against dissent in Virginia were so stringent that Baptists were largely kept out of the colony until nearly a century after its

founding. While Baptist churches were formed in the colonies of Rhode Island and South Carolina throughout the 1600s, Baptists were not worshipping collectively in Virginia until at least 1695. Strict laws were enacted in the colony's first century that stifled religious diversity. As early as 1634, a law was enacted "to preserve purity of doctrine and unity of the church" that prohibited preaching by individuals who were not ministers of the Church of England.[3] Measures were passed in the 1630s that forced those missing Sunday church services to forfeit a pound of tobacco. Fifty pounds were forfeited if an individual missed services for an entire month. Similarly restrictive statues were applied throughout the seventeenth century, to such a degree that dissenting groups in Virginia were effectively stifled in the first half of the 1700s. Because their small numbers presented no real threat to the established church, Baptists were largely left alone by legal authorities. Yet the large influx of energized Baptist groups, unwilling to relent in the face of persecution, that entered Virginia in the late 1750s altered the ferocity of religious persecution. Because of their rapidly increasing numbers and unashamedly public stance on issues of religious liberty, Baptists suffered the brunt of the newly invigorated persecution of the mid-18th century.

By the 1760s, Baptist dissenters were having great success at converting large numbers of Virginians who were formerly members of the Anglican Church. The rising prominence and influence of Baptist groups only served to heighten the religious persecution of the era. At the same time, public opinion was growing more favorably towards Revolutionary, anti-Britain sentiments—further exacerbating the negative persona of the Anglican Church. Dissenting groups posed a mounting threat to the stability of the established church of Virginia, and were lashed out against more harshly than before. It is estimated that between 1768 and 1777 at least thirty Baptist preachers in Virginia were "thrown into prison, whipped by law officers, or stoned by mobs." [4] The full force of every legal code related to religious dissent was unleashed upon Baptist groups. Dissenters were required to register their church meetinghouses, Baptist-performed marriages were considered invalid, old and seldom-used laws requiring attendance to Anglican churches were reinforced, and some parents were fined for "parental cruelty" for withholding their children from infant baptism.[5] The Baptists of Orange County, Virginia, certainly endured a fair share of religious persecution throughout this period. Lewis Peyton Little's *Imprisoned Preachers and Religious Liberty in Virginia* identifies at least thirteen preachers in Orange County alone who were publicly persecuted from the 1750s to the 1780s. An unsympathetic listener once pulled down Pastor Samuel Harriss from the place where he was preaching and hauled him about

by the hair of his head. David Thomas, "one of the ablest Virginia Baptist preachers", was once delivering a sermon when suddenly confronted by "an outrageous fellow with a gun in his hand." [6] Fortunately another man was able to wrench the gun away from the attacker before he could fire. Many other Orange County Baptist preachers were jailed for preaching dissenting religious views—though evidence exists to suggest that Virginia did not have a law explicitly allowing for the imprisonment of dissenting preachers. The story of Virginia Baptists in the early eighteenth centuries is one of vibrant growth in the midst of persistent persecution. As opportunities became available to significantly influence the fight for religious freedom in both Virginia and the entire United States, Virginia Baptists were more than willing to contribute their fullest measure of devotion. Religious persecution played not only a significant role in defining the Baptist experience in colonial Virginia, it also ultimately served as a powerful motivator in the fight for a legal guarantee of religious liberty. A legal protection of religious liberty would mean, among other things, that Baptists in Virginia would no longer have to endure harsh persecution because of their religious dissent. Their own long struggle against religious persecution lent a greater urgency to the dedication of Baptists to the task of ensuring a guarantee of complete religious liberty.

III. John Leland: The Premiere Defender of the Unalienable Rights of Conscience

Baptist sentiments on securing legal protections for religious liberty were shaped in large measure by deeply held theological convictions central to the denomination's identity. The support that Virginia Baptists lent to the cause of religious freedom was greatly motivated by fundamental theological opinions on the autonomy and competency of every individual to freely choose their religious beliefs. These theological foundations should be explored at greater length, for they are central to understanding Baptist efforts for religious liberty. John Leland—an itinerant pastor from Orange County, Virginia—serves as a highly accurate representation of the opinions on religious freedom characteristic of the wider Virginia Baptist community. Leland was an undeniably unique man. He achieved great influence in both the religious and political realms of Virginia, and certainly lived a life of consequence. Yet despite his extraordinary and often eccentric life, Leland still powerfully conveyed the fundamental Baptist ideas on religious liberty shared by most within the denomination in Virginia. Adequate attention must be devoted to Leland if one hopes to understand the role of Virginia Baptists in the fight for religious freedom. The life

and writings of Leland capture the seminal theological ideas underpinning and motivating the Baptist enthusiasm for religious liberty.

Leland was born in Grafton Massachusetts on May 14, 1754 to a modest family of mostly farmers that stretched back five generations in America.[7] His childhood was marked by bookish tendencies fulfilled by frequently reading the Bible and John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. Although he desired a career as a lawyer, at the age of eighteen Leland was confronted with a challenge to pursue a drastically different calling. Leland experienced a sort of radical conversion as a young adult—upon which he immediately devoted his life to preaching. He described this momentous event as follows:

> In the summer of 1772, I met with one thing singular. When I was returning from my frolicks or evening diversions, the following works would sound from the skies, "You are not about the work which you have got to do." The last time I heard those sounds, I stood amazed; and turning my eyes up to the heaves, it seems that there was a work of more weight than a mountain, which I had yet to perform.[8]

While Leland believed that his calling in life was to be a Baptist preacher, his contribution to American history would stretch beyond the purely religious fold. The great impending work that was pressing upon him—the task of advancing the call for freedom of religion—was waiting in Virginia. In the spring of 1775, he was formally licensed to preach by the Baptist church of Bellingham, Massachusetts. He was married to Sally Devine in September 1776, and within several weeks the two settled in Virginia—first in Culpepper County, and ultimately in Orange County in early 1778. Leland would remain in Orange County until 1791, accomplishing more in that brief time for the cause of religious freedom than could have ever been imagined by an aimless teenager in the summer of 1772. His work of great significance—of "more weight than a mountain"—would bring him into the company of influential political figures in Virginia.

Leland's popularity and influence as a preacher grew steadily during his early years in Virginia. One early Baptist historian wrote that Leland was "probably the most popular preacher of any who ever resided in [Virginia]." [9] As Virginia Baptists heightened their cooperative political efforts—particularly through the General Association, and its successor (after 1783) the General Committee—Leland embraced an active role throughout the late 1770s. He was astutely aware of how consequential an explicit guarantee of religious liberty would be for American society. The ramifications for both believers and non-believers were immense. The Baptist General Committee of Virginia frequently adopted resolutions expressing their opinions on major legislative issues concerning religious liberty. Comprised of dele-

gates from four major Virginia Baptist regional associations, the General Committee's primary function was to draft all the major Baptist petitions presented to the state legislature. Its focus was not limited to matters of religious liberty, but the topic certainly dominated the Committee's attention throughout the 1770s and 1780s.

In many ways the details of Leland's work in the late 1770s and early 1780s are somewhat vague. While it is known that Leland worked closely with the General Committee and other Baptist groups voicing political opinions, a certain level of uncertainty exists as to the exact role he played. Leland's writings in particular generally have little to say about his specific political contributions. In an early autobiography, charting his life through 1835, Leland devotes his attention almost entirely to his accomplishments as a pastor, remaining remarkably silent about his work for religious liberty. In fact, for the year 1789, the year in which the Constitution was finally ratified by two-thirds of the states, Leland writes only, "nothing of importance turned up." [10] Leland's silence on his specific actions in defense of religious liberty should not be interpreted as a lack of contribution. It is more reflective of Leland's understanding of himself and of his calling. His primary focus was always upon his work as a Baptist preacher. The writings of his contemporaries, and the records of the General Committee, indicate that Leland was repeatedly tapped to lobby influential Virginia political leaders to lend their support to the fight for religious liberty.

The pinnacle of Leland's work for religious liberty occurred in 1788 in the midst of the debate in Virginia over ratification of the new Constitution. Leland played an important role in leading Virginia Baptists through this pivotal event. Baptist demands for an explicit protection of religious freedom reached an unsurpassed fervency in the midst of the ratification debate. Leland's most direct encounter with James Madison occurred during the run-up to ratification in Virginia. The full nature of Baptist sentiments during this moment, and the specifics of a supposed meeting between Leland and Madison, will be discussed later at further length.

It was not only through action, but also through written word that Leland lent his talents to the defense of religious liberty. Leland's *The Rights of Conscience Inalienable* offered an eloquent and penetrating justification of religious freedom—securing his status as the premiere American Baptist prophet of religious liberty. First published in 1791, after the Bill of Rights had been ratified, Leland's treatise was a culmination of his efforts to defend the right of religious liberty. The arguments presented in the brief work are both direct and articulate. The central question Leland poses is whether the rights of conscience are

alienable or inalienable. Upon affirming that these rights are inalienable—that man does not surrender his rights of conscience upon entering a social compact of government—Leland moves forward to argue for complete religious liberty. Religion is deemed a personal matter, an issue that everyone must ultimately reconcile individually. Government coercion on religious matters runs contrary to the core of Christianity and its teachings on personal liberty and responsibility. As Leland wrote, "If government can answer for individuals at the day of judgment, let men be controlled by it in religious matters; otherwise, let men be free." [11] Leland argued that government has no authority to impinge upon the inalienable rights of conscience—rights granted by God—in religious matters. Virginia Baptists found their most compelling and articulate defender of religious liberty in John Leland. His talents as a persuasive writer and dynamic leader, coupled with his unsurpassed devotion to destroy the bonds of religious coercion, inevitably plunged Leland to the center of the debate over religious freedom in America. His persona as one of the most respected Baptist leaders in Virginia afforded him the opportunity to engage the politically powerful while protecting the unalienable right of religious liberty.

IV. A Powerful Alliance: James Madison and the Virginia Baptists

Baptists of Virginia were never far removed from James Madison in his early political career. The two crossed paths often, most frequently on the issue of religious freedom. The work of Virginia Baptists, particularly of Orange County, in defense of religious liberty can be easily framed as an examination of the dynamic political alliance formed between Virginia Baptists and James Madison. Baptists of Virginia maintained a unique and frequently influential relationship with Madison, a relationship repeatedly utilized for the benefit of religious liberty. A great deal of the most lasting and consequential aspects of Baptist efforts for religious liberty came as a direct result of the relationship between James Madison and Virginia Baptists.

Madison first took serious note of Virginia Baptists during his years as a college student and immediately after graduation. While he was aware of (and repulsed by) instances of religious persecution as a younger teenager, it was at the age of twenty-three that the seeds of Madison's longstanding connection to Virginia Baptists were deeply planted. In a letter to William Bradford dated January 24, 1774, Madison alludes to several Baptist of Virginia recently jailed for "publishing their religious sentiments, which in the main are very orthodox."[12] Madison's frustration over the disregard of religious dissent

is evident. At the close of his letter, he bids Bradford to, "…pray for Liberty of Conscience to revive among us all." [13] Over the next fifteen years, Madison would play a profound role in reviving the cause of religious liberty in both Virginia and the entire nation. As his political career began, and was often dominated by the issue of religious freedom, Virginia Baptists were always nearby—praising his efforts when deserved, cajoling in moments of uncertainty, and pressuring relentlessly for action when needed.

In the spring of 1776, Madison was elected to represent Orange County as a delegate to the Virginia Constitutional Convention. At the age of twenty-five, Madison was the youngest member of the convention yet he would achieve a notable victory for the cause of religious liberty. George Mason, a respected elder of Virginia politics, had been chosen to lead a subcommittee to draft a Declaration of Rights to be included in the Constitution. In the section related to religious rights, Mason opted for language that read, in part, "all men should enjoy the fullest toleration in the exercise of religion." [14] Madison denounced this use of the word "toleration" as uncharacteristic of the true nature of religious freedom. Toleration implied that the right of religious liberty was in some manner dependent upon the approval of a civil authority. It suggested that religious liberty was not an unalienable right, but a freedom that government graciously bestows. This implicit suggestion in the Declaration's wording ran contrary to Madison's core beliefs on religious freedom. He ultimately prevailed in amending the section to read, "all men are equally entitled to the full and free exercise of it [religion] according to the dictates of conscience." [15] While this victory for religious liberty cannot match the significance of future accomplishments, it offers an early example of Madison's sincere conviction to defend the unalienable right. The young, relatively inexperienced delegate was willing to oppose George Mason—one of the most powerful members of the convention—because of an unshakeable conviction to uphold the rights of man. This subtle accomplishment was only the beginning. Along the way, the Virginia Baptists who had made a distinct impression upon Madison the college student would continue to closely align themselves with Madison the statesman in an effort to ensure religious liberty for all Americans.

In 1784 the Virginia legislature considered a motion to levy a general assessment of taxes to support the various religious groups of Virginia. This bill was an attempt to forge a compromise between those favoring an established church and those calling for complete religious liberty. The General Assessment Bill stipulated that all citizens would be subject to a tax supporting religion, but would be able

to designate the denomination their taxes would support. A broad range of prominent individuals, including George Washington and Patrick Henry, supported the bill. Many religious groups were quick to abandon the principle of separation of church and state to receive this new form of financial support. Presbyterians and Anglicans alike were widely supportive of the bill, yet Virginia Baptist remained staunchly opposed to the measure, refusing to compromise on such a cherished belief. At their August meeting in 1785, the Baptist General Committee adopted a resolution denouncing the General Assessment Bill. They labeled it "repugnant to the spirit of the gospel for the legislature thus to proceed in matters of religion. Even more powerfully, the Committee scoffed at the notion of government financial support for religion, declaring, "that the gospel wants not the feeble arm of man for its support." The General Committee's brief resolution closed by proclaiming that any taxes levied to support religion would be "destructive to religious liberty."[16]

In the midst of the legislative battle over the bill in 1784, Madison wrote to James Monroe detailing the public sentiments among religious groups. He began by recounting those denominations lending their support. "The Episcopal clergy are generally for it…The Presbyterians seem as ready to set up an establishment which would take them in as they were to pull one down which shut them out." The lone opposition to the bill came from Baptist groups. Even though the General Assessment Bill would have provided financial support to Baptist groups, it garnered no support from Baptist believers who deeply valued complete separation of church and state. "The Baptists", Madison continues, are "standing firmly by their avowed principles of the complete separation of church and state."[17] He goes on to reference the resolution adopted by the Baptist General Committee, quoting the section in which the General Assessment bill is described as repugnant to the true aims of the Gospel. Action on the bill was temporarily delayed so that it could be reprinted and dispersed throughout Virginia for the consideration of the general public. This consequential move would ultimately mark the beginning of the bill's demise.

When the Virginia legislature reexamined the bill several months later on October 17, 1785, it had been flooded with formal petitions from across the state declaring opposition to the bill. Fifty-five hostile petitions from forty-eight different counties (as opposed seven favorable petitions) expressed the will of the Virginia public very clearly to state legislatures. No one was more influential in rallying public opposition to the bill than James Madison. As the bill was being circulated across Virginia, so also was Madison's "Memorial and Remonstrance on the Religious Rights of Man". In one of the

most significant written works of his career, Madison offered a persuasive summation of the arguments favoring the separation of church and state. His treatise remains one of the finest ever produced on the subject. Madison argued that an intimate connection between church and state is profitable for neither the church nor the state. For "it is known that this Religion [Christianity] both existed and flourished, not only without the support of human laws, but in spite of every opposition from them." Madison denounced the bill as wholly contradictory to the fundamental spirit of the United States, as "a departure from the generous policy, which, offers an Asylum to the persecuted and oppressed of every Nation and Religion." The General Assessment bill was labeled a "melancholy mark…of sudden degeneracy" upon Virginia and the entire nation. Madison appealed to historical evidence to support his arguments. For nearly fifteen centuries, he argued, "the legal establishment of Christianity has been on trial." Establishment had existed long enough for one to accurately judge its effects on both the church and the state. "What have been its fruits?" Madison asks. His answer, "More or less in all places pride and indolence in the clergy; ignorance and servility in the laity; in both, superstition, bigotry and persecution."[18] Any supposed benefits drawn from an intimate connection between the church and state—even the relationship established by a measure like the General Assessment Bill—pale in comparison to the negative impacts on the vitality and integrity of both institutions. But Madison also believed that the evils of the bill stretched beyond its immediate impacts. Any restriction on religious liberty also carries momentous theological implications. The offense of the General Assessment Bill was ultimately not against man, Madison argued, but against the God who endowed this unalienable right of religious liberty to all mankind. As Madison wrote:

> "Whilst we assert for ourselves a freedom to embrace to profess and to observe the Religion which we believe to be of divine origin, we cannot deny an equal freedom to those whose minds have not yet yielded to the evidence which has convinced us. If this freedom be abused, it is an offence against God, not against man: To God, therefore, not to man, must an account of it be rendered."[19]

Madison astutely understood that the General Assessment Bill would not offer equal protection or support for every religious group. While it may have appeared conciliatory on the surface, it ultimately stood in opposition to the principles of freedom and equality in matters of religion. Madison believed that the Virginia legislature had no authority to restrict or impede an unalienable right granted by God. To lessen religious liberty in Virginia would be an offense against the divine Creator who endowed mankind with certain unalienable rights.

"Memorial and Remonstrance" resonated with the Virginia public, stirring widespread opposition to the General Assessment Bill.

In the face of undeniable public disapproval, the Virginia legislature abandoned the measure. One historian estimates that possibly ten or fifteen thousand Virginians signed hostile petitions delivered to the General Assembly.[20] The General Assessment Bill had many prominent supporters that carried great clout in Virginia. Yet the state legislature could not ignore the widespread public opposition advanced by the petitions of organized groups like the Baptists. With the unwavering support of Virginia Baptists—coupled with his unsurpassed political genius—Madison secured another momentous victory for the cause of religious liberty. Soon after the bill's defeat, Madison wrote to Thomas Jefferson to describe his legislative victory. In reference to the defeat of the General Assessment Bill, Madison wrote that he desired for it to "extinguish forever the ambitious hopes of making laws for the human mind." The bulk of Madison's early political career was devoted to this lofty ambition—to permanently protect the unalienable rights of the human conscience.

Yet it would be wrong to suggest that Madison and the Baptist enjoyed a completely cordial relationship throughout the 1780s. As is true of any passionate and dedicated leaders, they were not immune to the conflict arising from differing ideas. Although they accomplished much together, Madison and Virginia Baptists did not always see eye-to-eye. This was never more visible than during the run-up to the ratification of the Constitution. As the Virginia Legislature adopted a resolution on October 25, 1787 calling for the formation of a state convention to ratify the newly written federal Constitution, Madison's relationship with Virginia Baptists entered its most contentious moment.[21] Baptists were appalled that the Constitution lacked an explicit guarantee of religious liberty. Many felt betrayed by their former ally Madison—who, throughout the drafting process at the Philadelphia Constitutional Convention, refused to support the inclusion of a religious freedom provision. Madison's actions at the Constitutional Convention were not spurred by an intellectual abandonment of his sincere devotion to religious liberty. He was, above all, a pragmatic statesman; one who believed that the Constitution might not be ratified by three-fourths of the states if the guarantee of religious liberty was included. While his concerns were likely valid, the tide of public opinion among Virginia Baptists was shifting decidedly against Madison. The resolution calling for a ratification convention in Virginia charged each county with the duty of electing two representative delegates. Madison desired to be elected from Orange County, yet his recent troubles with the vocal Baptist population complicated his wishes. On January 3, 1788, Madison received a letter

from his father warning him that the Baptist population was widely turning against the Constitution. When Madison announced that he would be a candidate for election as a delegate, many prominent leaders opposing the Constitution, both Baptist and non-Baptist, began to direct the brunt of their attacks at Madison—the "author" of the Constitution. The exact nature of Baptist protests aimed at derailing ratification is not entirely clear. Some accounts indicate that John Leland temporarily entered the race against Madison. Yet others suggest that the pool of possible opposition candidates did not include Leland. Regardless of the potential candidates, a definitive hostility had emerged among the Baptist population of Orange County. Madison hastily returned to Virginia (he had been serving in Congress in New York) to assuage ill feelings among Baptists who were skeptical about the prospect of him representing Orange County at the ratification convention. This task inevitably led him to encounter Leland—the most influential Baptist leader in Orange County—in a pivotal, if not highly misunderstood, moment in the history of religious freedom in America.

V. The Meeting: Did the Baptist Hero and the Virginia Statesman Collide?

Much ink has been spilled concerning a supposed meeting between John Leland and James Madison in 1788. Some historians have argued that a physical meeting took place some time immediately after Madison's return to Virginia in late March 1788. If Madison had hoped to calm Baptist hostilities by meeting with prominent leaders, there is little doubt that Leland would have been the first choice. Yet many still question if an actual physical meeting occurred. There are some who believe that such a meeting is pure folklore, unsupported by historical evidence. Given the brevity and focus of this work, the question of whether or not a physical meeting between Leland and Madison occurred must be left somewhat unresolved. Convincing arguments built upon persuasive historical evidence have been constructed for both sides of the argument. It would be difficult, if not unwise, to try to fully address the various theories (and corresponding evidence) surrounding the infamous Leland/Madison meeting in such a brief manner. It will unfortunately not be attempted at length and this time. Many of the oldest sources state that Madison visited Leland's home and discussed the Constitution for several hours. The traditional story suggests that at the close of the discussion Leland withdrew from the race and threw his support behind Madison—practically ensuring that most Baptists would do the same. Rueben E. Alley's *A History of Baptists in Virginia* provides one of the most thorough and objective analyses of the supposed meeting. Alley is

quick to note the many errors and discrepancies among early records concerning the meeting. He ultimately concludes that there simply does not exist enough credible evidence to support the traditional storyline (though it cannot be entirely discredited either). Many works of Baptist hagiography have been written over the past two centuries that unwisely exaggerate the nature of the meeting between Leland and Madison in an effort to inflate Leland's role in the fight for a guarantee of religious liberty. Such embellishments are ultimately unnecessary, for Leland's status as a premiere defender of religious freedom does not hinge on a single meeting with James Madison in March 1788. The Baptist-backed Madison was elected as a delegate to the ratification convention and eventually returned to his role as a Virginia Congressman. Less than a year after ratification in Virginia, Congressman James Madison would present his proposed amendments to the Constitution—the amendments comprising the Bill of Rights—to the House of Representatives. It would be only a matter of months before religious liberty was permanently secured in the United States.

VI. The Baptist Legacy: A Timeless Contribution to Religious Liberty

Virginia Baptists offered unrelenting support for religious liberty in America throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Though freedom of religion was permanently secured by preeminent statesmen in legislative chambers, much is owed to the prodding and pestering of the Baptist population. Most of these common citizens neither held an elected office nor produced a stirring treatise on religious freedom, yet their devotion to religious liberty continues to be of undeniable importance to American culture. Because of their persistence, new generations of Americans—believers and nonbelievers alike—are free to adopt religious beliefs according to the dictates of their conscience; free from the oppression of those in power. Virginia Baptists played a particularly significant role in the fight for religious liberty. When others wavered, Baptists were steadfast. When others compromised, Baptists doggedly pressed forward. Decades of persecution in Virginia could not silence their demands for religious liberty. Exploiting all possible avenues, Baptists recognized that much could be gained by establishing strong ties to political figures. Despite their differences, James Madison and the Virginia Baptists were united by a fierce devotion to the unalienable right of religious liberty. Their motivations for pursuing freedom of religion were not always identical, and their intellectual justifications often varied, yet a dynamic alliance was forged—benefiting both Virginia and the entire American republic. The Baptist commitment to religious liberty must not weaken with

each passing generation. The comforts of legal protections in America can easily lull advocates of religious freedom into a state of inaction. Yet the scars of religious persecution borne by Baptists of years past demand a renewed commitment to the defense of religious liberty in both America and the entire world.

ENDNOTES

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THE

OKLAHOMA

BAPTIST

HALL OF FAME

2009

INDUCTEES

THELMA ARNOLD

Inducted 2009

Thelma Louise Arnold was born to Mr. and Mrs. Milburn Owens October 23, 1904, in DeLeon, Texas. She married Cula Green Arnold and they had one son, C.G. Arnold. As a young mother, she was left alone to raise their son. With firm Biblical teachings from early childhood, C.G. became a respected school band director, junior high school principal, high school principal, assistant school superintendent, and school superintendent in Pawhuska, Oklahoma. He was a faithful member and deacon at the First Baptist Church of Pawhuska.

Leaving a job as a department store buyer, in 1942, Thelma became church secretary at the First Baptist Church, Guthrie, Oklahoma. She was later given the title of education director. While serving in that church, she worked with three pastors, Don Milam, H.H. Boston and Leo Perry. Her extra-curricular activities included working with youth. Following the "amen" on Sunday evenings, the young people gathered in her home for refreshments. By the time Thelma "turned out the lights and locked up the church," the gang had refreshments ready and records spinning when she arrived. Her home was a continuous "open house" for them. Because of her love, devotion, encouragement and biblical example, some twenty-five of those young people are serving, or have served, Christ around the globe. To name a few: Harry Griffin (pastor/missionary); Bill Dickover (pastor); Roberta Hampton (missionary/translator, Brazil); Marilyn Kessler Brown (music ministry); Ted Dowell (Baptist Seminary, Korea); plus denominational workers, pastors, education directors, musicians, and Christian laypeople.

In 1948, Thelma moved to Tulsa, Oklahoma, to serve with Leo Perry in the Tulsa Baptist Association. It was during those days Thelma became really involved in associational missions and the programs of local churches.

Albert L. Lowther, Director of Missions for Oklahoma County Baptist Association (Capital Baptist Association) discovered the hard-working Thelma, and in 1950 invited her to serve as education director for the association. In a position dominated by men at that time, she became known as the "best education director in Oklahoma." She was involved (along with Lowther) in establishing missions and growing churches. She provided suggestions for classroom space, record-keeping and leadership training. She would often go to a small church with a bi-vocational pastor, and no secretary, to help prepare their annual "church letter" to the association. For several years, she was named "associational clerk of the year" by the Baptist Sunday School Board. Her office had a constant stream of pastors, education directors and staff members seeking her advise and expertise in growing churches and Sunday schools. She planned "central training schools" throughout Oklahoma to make training more accessible for church leaders to attend.

The associational office had all kinds of antiquated equipment, from the manual typewriter, "ditto" copier, and the hand-turned mimeograph. Even so, Thelma turned out training materials by the thousands. Several times a month, she drove to Shawnee, Oklahoma, for the Baptist Press to publish *The Capital Baptist* newsletters and the annual associational minutes.

"A Million More in '54" was the battle cry for expanding church membership growth and reaching people for Christ. She was involved in enlisting churches to participate in that Baptist Sunday School Board promotion. The results were immediately recognized as a success. Thelma, also, played a great role in the first Billy Graham Crusade in Oklahoma City where thousands committed their hearts and service to Christ.

When time allowed, Thelma also served as a “state-approved” elementary (childhood education) worker for the Religious Education Department, Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma. She traveled across Oklahoma, along with workers such as Dr. E.W. Westmoreland, Dr. and Mrs. Lyle Garlow, Sophia Duerksen, Connie Record, and Darlene Koch (to name a few), to lead conferences in the

areas of Sunday school and church training (BTU). Workers from churches came by the carloads to attend her conferences. She loved Falls

Creek and was instrumental in the development of preschool, elementary and junior parks. She taught five weeks there every summer (one of her spiritual highs for the year). She equally enjoyed Vacation Bible School, seeing the results of children giving their hearts to Christ. She was quoted as saying “heaven must be one continuous VBS.”

During her combined thirty-nine years of service, Thelma traveled across the Southern Baptist Convention leading clinics, seminars, etc., including Ridgecrest and Glorieta. She wrote numerous articles for the Baptist Sunday School Board and other Baptist publications.

Known as "Bo" to her friends and associates, Thelma retired from Capital Association, November 1, 1971, after twenty-one years of service. She moved to Pawhuska, Oklahoma, to live near her son and his family.

"Bo" loved the Lord with all her heart and continually relied on him for strength. She gave so much of herself to the lives of others and to the Lord in his service. Her passion was training leadership to further the "great commission." There is no earthly way to compute the great numbers of people whose lives were touched and changed by her influence and dedication.

Thelma died June 8, 1979. Preceded in death by her husband, parents, two sisters and a brother, she is survived by her daughter-in-law, Norma Jean Arnold; three grandchildren: Steve Arnold, Linda Arnold Harris and Sharon Arnold Norton; three great-grandchildren, three great-great-grandchildren, three great-great-great-grandchildren and also a niece, Sue Blackmon and husband, Reverend Curtis Blackmon, and their children. Thelma nurtured Curtis in his Christian journey. Her son, C.G. Arnold, died in 2006.

"*She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue*."
(Proverbs 31, NIV)

Submitted by Fern Corley

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EUGENE LOWELL HILL

Inducted 2009

Eugene Hill was born in Knox City, Texas in l909. He moved to Oklahoma with his family as an infant. The family lived in a rural area, southwest of Lawton, where he learned to read and write from the Bible and Pilgrim's Progress. His mother died when he was 10. Shortly after her death, he was saved at the Cache Valley School House, where T. P. Haskins was pastor. His father died when he was 13, leaving him an orphan with the care of 5 younger brothers.

As a teenager Eugene surrendered to the ministry. He graduated from high school at age 15, he was already accepted as a young leader. His church designated him a messenger to the 1925 Southern Baptist Convention, meeting at Memphis. At that convention he was a witness to the organization of the Cooperative Program, the unified budget plan that became the major financial help for his almost 41 years of mission service.

After high school, Hill worked for two years in the oil fields with his first congregation being his fellow roustabouts to whom he preached and read scripture. Converts among his fellow employees later became the nucleus of a church which still exists.

At the age of 17, Hill returned to school to prepare for the ministry. He studied two years at Southeastern State, Durant, and transferred to O.B.U. in 1931. He earned a BA from Oklahoma Baptist University at Shawnee in l932 and a Master of Theology and Doctor of Philosophy Degree from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville in l935 and l943, respectively. He met his wife, Louise Heirich of McAlester, Oklahoma, at OBU/Shawnee. Two years later, soon after her graduation at OBU, they were married.

Hill's first fulltime pastorate was at Horse Cave, Kentucky. Shortly after their move to this church, C. E. Maddry, chief administrator at the FMB/IMB asked the Hills to become missionaries in China. They were appointed in l935 and taught at Graves Theological Seminary in Canton. Conflict in the area due to Japanese bombardment led to a separation from his pregnant wife. A year later the three were reunited. At Graves Seminary, Hill was Dean of Studies until l949 and President until early 1951 when the couple fled to Singapore to pursue evangelistic work. He was chairman and treasurer of the South China Baptist Mission as well as Director of the China Baptist Publication Society and a trustee of the University of Shanghai and the All-Baptist Theological Seminary. His work in China further involved relief and rehabilitation projects.

Hill resigned from the field in December, l955 to work at the FMB as head of missionary education and promotion, supervising publication and editing of *The Commission* magazine and other print and audio-visual products. He authored three books in Chinese: *Between the Covenants* (1938), *Life of Christ According to the Gospels* (1947), and *A Handbook for Studying the New Testament* (1948).
Their retirement from the FMB came in 1975, after serving 20 years overseas and almost 20 years FMB staff as head of the department of missionary education. The following year at the fall convocation at OBU, Shawnee, Oklahoma, September 22, 1976, Hill was conferred the Honorary Degree Doctor of Literature. He also gave the main address at that same service. The Hills taught a year at Hong Kong Baptist Theological Seminary in l977-1978. In 1988, the Chinese Baptist Church of Richmond, for his 79th birthday, depicted in a plaque acclaiming the Hills: "For their lifetime love and dedicated service to the Chinese people."

Hill died tragically on December 10, 1992 when his car skidded into the rear of a dump truck during a heavy downpour on US 301 in the Richmond, Va. area. He was buried in McAlester, where one of their sons is also buried. Mrs. Hill, survived the accident.

Hill's issue were three sons and two daughters (3 died in infancy and a fourth, a boy, fell from a hotel window in Memphis). John L. Hill, a professor at Concordia College was the only survivor to adulthood. John has three sons, Allen, Bruce and Derrek, and four grandsons.

Submitted by Curtis Dixon

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SUE O. HOWELL

Inducted 2009

Sue O. Howell was born in Morgantown, West Virginia, on June 16, 1866. She died on August 5, 1956 at Herrington, Kansas, where she had made her residence the last ten years of her life.

Miss Howell came to Oklahoma City soon after her graduation from the Missionary Training School in Chicago and took the position of Corresponding Secretary in the two year old State Woman's Missionary Union (also called Women's Missionary Society).

When the Executive Committee of the WMS held its January, 1908, meeting Miss Catherine Hansen, field worker, tendered her resignation, effective the end of the quarter. Mrs. CA Porterfield, the corresponding Secretary, also resigned. They accepted Miss Hansen's resignation and hired a new field worker, Miss Mattie Braswell. They persuaded Mrs. Porterfield to stay on in name for the rest of the year, and employed Miss Sue Howell as a paid assistant Corresponding Secretary for $500.00 a year, and a brand new typewriter. At the end of the year Miss Howell became Corresponding Secretary. She served faithfully for 11 years. These were difficult years because Oklahoma and the state convention of Baptists was young.

The economy was weak and there was limited money for promotion, materials, salary and travel. The convention was dually aligned with the Northern Baptist Convention and the Southern Baptist Convention. The Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma voted in 1914 to be singly aligned with the Southern Baptist Convention. This brought some tension because of the love some of the churches and missionaries shared for Northern Baptists. World War I was fought during Miss Howell's time as Corresponding Secretary, with all the pain and

hardships of war. Then there was the terrible Influenza Epidemic in 1918 with its effect on the women's work. Meetings had to be cancelled. Some of the stalwart leaders died and some buried children, mates and loved ones.

In spite of all these challenges, during this period from 1908-1919, Miss Howell was instrumental in beginning or helping to begin several ministries in Oklahoma.

She was instrumental in founding the Good Will Center in Oklahoma that still continues as the Baptist Mission Center in Oklahoma City. Miss Howell reported that, "a child could be fed at the Center for one dollar per week or 15 cents per day. This included a good meal at noon, an afternoon lunch, and the children were taught principles of home refinement and Christian Culture." A short time before her death (at age 90), she was invited back to Oklahoma City to appear on television. During the interview, she detailed the founding of the Center.

She was also involved in the founding of Falls Creek. W.D. Moorer and James Burley Rounds were the primary leaders in funding the assembly, but Miss Howell led the WMS (later WMU) of the state to support the programs. She led the women in raising the money, the selection of the lot and building the first building, a dormitory for 20 women, being a two story structure. The upper floor was for sleeping quarters and the first floor was used for classes the first year. The State WMS board on April 14, 1912, voted to change the name of the building to read "The Howell Hall For Women" in honor of Sue Howell.

Miss Howell introduced the Standard of Excellence to Baptist Women of Oklahoma and in 1912 it was adopted state–wide. She led local societies to take study courses about missions. Through her outstanding leadership, WMS Organizations increased their giving to missions.

The name of Sue O. Howell is very important to the foundation and early work of Baptist women in Oklahoma. Missions, was the love and theme of her heart. She mentored for Baptist Women the heart of Jesus and what it means to be a "Great Commission" Christian.

Her life was full until a few weeks before her death. On the morning of July 3, 1956, with walking cane in hand she went uptown in Her-

rington, Kansas, to do some shopping and attend to some business. She stumbled and fell, breaking her left hip. She was hospitalized until her death on August 5th, from a cerebral hemorrhage. She is buried in Lost Springs Cemetery at Herrington.

Miss Howell quoted the following poem at her closing address to the Third Annual Meeting of the Women's Missionary Society of Oklahoma:

"Deeply and long the sap must flow,
Ere the merest layer of elm can grow.
Many a wave's recurrent shock,
Is needed to smooth the tiniest rock.
Thousands of leaves must fade and fall,
To make the mold of the garden wall.
Thus as the patient seasons roll,
Slow is fashioned a human soul.

Purpose and failure, and purpose still,
Steadily moved by a quiet will.
Layer on layer in sturdy way,
Hardly seen in the growth of a day.
Times of failure and fear and fall,
But one strong tendency through it all.
God and Purpose and sun by sun,
Reach the stars before they are done."

Submitted by Robert Haskins

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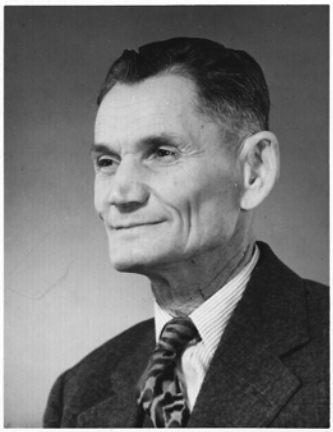
WALTER RAY McGHEE

Inducted 2009

Walter Ray McGhee, son of Mr. and Mrs. Lonie McGhee, was born in the Limestone Community, south of Wilburton, Oklahoma, on June 10, 1897. He became a Christian at the age of twenty and was baptized into the Mountain Home Baptist Church.



Shortly after his baptism he felt called to preach but did not commit his life to the ministry until 1924. He was ordained in July, 1925, by the Daisy Baptist Church, where he served his first pastorate. He then pastored Mannford Baptist Church in Pawnee-Creek Association. Three times he pastored Mountain Home Church, and Lona Church twice, Fairview twice and Hoyt three times. He served Whitefield, Star, Rocky Ridge and three times at West Liberty---all in Haskell Association. He served as moderator, 1947-50 and clerk 1943-44 in Latimer Association. He pastored Boynton and Hitchita in Muskogee Association.

He became pastor of Panola Church in Latimer Association and continued there until July 1, 1951, when he was called to be missionary in Latimer Association. While he served as missionary he held 45 revivals and preached 877 sermons. There were 137 professions of faith. He was one of the most loved missionaries in the history of the association. He served faithfully until his death, November 1, 1955. His warm interest in every person he met, his kindly smile, his radiant love for Christ, his strong convictions in the Baptist faith, and his zeal for winning the lost to Christ were topics of conversation by friends and acquaintances when God, in His wisdom, called him home.

His funeral service was held at the First Baptist Church, Wilburton, with Rev. J.T. Lucas in charge, assisted by Rev. Donald Enis. He was buried at the Lutie cemetery just east of Wilburton.

Submitted by Delmer Allen

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October 17, 2009
Durant, First Baptist Church

Michael Dershem, Society President, opened the 2009 annual meeting of the Society with reading Exodus 17:14 and leading in prayer.

"Great is Thy Faithfulness" was led by John C. Burns, accompanied on the piano by his wife Janet.

Greeting to the attendees was given by the pastor of the church, James Robinson. He stated that the church was glad to be a part of the Society meeting, and glad we came to "this area."

Dershem made an appeal for help to man the Historical Commission/ Society booth at the BGCO annual meeting November 9-10, 2009, at Moore, First Baptist Church.

Business Session

(These items were discussed and approved.)

2010 Society Annual Meeting - Eli Sheldon, Historical Secretary, announced, following discussion with the Society President and Commission Chairman, the Society would meet at **Pawnee, First Baptist Church, October 16, 2010**.

Distinguished Service Award – Michael Dershem, Chairman, announced the winner of the Distinguished Service Award was **Joyce Shelby**. She is master of many talents shared with the churches she has served, as well as Capital Baptist Association. The presentation of the certificate will be made

during the annual meeting of the BGCO, November 10, 2009, at Moore, First Baptist.

Gaskin Church History Award – Wade Robertson, member of the church history award committee, announced that **Watonga, Trinity** was the winner of the best history. The author of the history is **Galen Brinson**, a member of the church. Presentation of the certificates will be made during the annual meeting of the BGCO, November 10, 2009, at Moore, First Baptist.

Historical Commission Officers – Jerry Walker, chairman of the nominating committee announced the new officers for the Commission were Charles Henthorn - chairman, Jody Hilliard – vice chairman and Freida Sheldon – secretary.

The Handbook – Jody Hilliard discussed the few revisions to be contained in the new *Handbook.* Most changes are simply updating to new terminology. The revision will be voted on at the March, 2010 meeting of the Commissioners.

The Historical Secretary, Eli Sheldon, gave a report of his activities over the past few months. More than 18 churches with anniversaries were visited, three associational meetings attended to present various certificates, and 10 other historically related events. Plans are being made to erect an Historical Marker for the Philadelphia Baptist Church on the Blue Baptist Church property. A damaged E.E. (Hot Dog) Lee marker at Falls Creek will be refurbished and re-erected. In addition, Sheldon has begun a two-year project to write a history of the work among ethnic Baptists in Oklahoma. This will include Native American, Hispanic, Asian, Eastern Europe, and Afro-American Baptists. Among the items received in the Archives this year is an portable Estey organ (circa 1900) first used in Ft. Gibson, First Baptist in the very early 1900s.

*Society officers for 2*010 – Michael Dershem, president, reported nominees for 2010 were Jerry Walker (moving from vice president to president), Dan Wimberly as vice president, and Freida Sheldon as

secretary. Curtis Dixon made the motion to accept the nominees. The report was accepted.

"Victory in Jesus" was led by John and Janet Burns.

Eli Sheldon spoke on the 400th anniversary of Baptists utilizing a power point presentation.

Michael Dershem closed with prayer.

Break – During the break we met in the Gaskin Heritage Room of the church where Kelli Elliott spoke on the stained-glass windows in the auditorium. The last part of the break was the cutting of the 400th Baptist Anniversary cake in the fellowship hall.

Oklahoma Baptist Hall of Fame Inductions – Curtis Dixon, member of the Hall of Fame committee presided during the monograph presentations:

Thelma Arnold – monograph written by Fern Corley and presented by Carolyn Ellenbrook
Eugene Hill – monograph written and presented by Curtis Dixon
Sue Howell – monograph written by Robert Haskins and presented by Del Allen
Walter McGhee – monograph written and presented by Del Allen

Charles Henthorn closed the meeting with prayer.

The attendees were dismissed for lunch and a visit to the Three-Valley Museum.

Submitted by
Freida Sheldon, Ministry Assistant
Gaskin Baptist Archives and Library
Historical Society Secretary

2009 CHURCH HISTORY AWARD

The winner of the 2009 Church History Award is the Trinity Baptist Church of Watonga.

The history was written by Galen Brinson, a member of the church.

Mr. Brinson, and his wife Pat, originally joined the church in 1971. After a brief move out of the area, they returned as members in 1997.

Bro. Galen is the current music director, a Sunday School teacher, and a deacon in the church. The history was taken primarily from over two hundred articles and papers from files at the church, as well as from oral histories and library sources.

Trinity Church began in 1958 with 82 members and first met in the Cohlmia building. The building was a former pool hall so the church became known as the "Pool Hall Church".

Land for a new building was purchased in 1959 at 6th and Highway 8 (known as Clarence Nash Blvd.) from Mr. and Mrs. N. J. Kline. Several improvements have been added, but the church is still at the same location.

The church has a history of good pastors, and is still a vibrant part of the community.

Bro. Carrol "Gill" Gilliland is the current pastor. The pastor states in the history that, "Visiting in the community and presenting the Gospel is a top priority for our church."

The writer, Galen Brinson, is employed by an insurance company in Oklahoma City, and commutes to Watonga on weekends. The research and writing was time consuming owing to his work away from the area.

The Brinson's have three children and three grandchildren.

This award is given to the church which submitted the best church history during the prior year.

The Editor

2009 DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD

The winner of the Historical Commission's 2009 Distinguish Service Award is Joyce Shelby of Oklahoma City.

Mrs. Shelby is well-known for her willingness, skills, and spiritual abilities in faithfully serving the Lord in whatever capacity she is asked to participate.

She began her denominational service as youth director for the Dickson Baptist Church in 1960. She was the first woman to hold such a position in Oklahoma.

She has served four churches as youth director, and three churches in the area of education, administration, and outreach.

Joyce also has served as a board or trustee member of the Baptist Foundation of Oklahoma, the Oklahoma Christian Education Association, and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

Other duties have included being a faculty member at Glorieta, a curriculum writer for the Baptist Sunday School Board (now Lifeway), Director of Church Relations and, later, Placement Director at Oklahoma Baptist University, Secretary of the Baptist Educational Music Association, a team member for the BGCO Associational Sunday School Conventions, on the Tanner Celebration Committee, event co-chairperson of the BGCO Special Needs Task Force, a member of Capital Baptist Association ACTeam, consultant with the BGCO, and adjunct professor for both OBU and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Her secular places of service include President of Board of Directors, Mid-Del Youth and Family Center; President, Traumatic Brain Neurological Task Force; President and Vice President, First Stone Ministries; President and Vice President, Oklahoma Rehabilitation Council; Member of SIP, Capitol Hill High School; Member of Task Force on Youth and Family Issues, House District 101; Member of Governor's Advisory Council on Traumatic Brain and Spinal Cord Injury; Member Task Force on Handicapped Concerns; Member KFOR Channel Four TV Station Advisory Board; Member of Board of Directors, Oklahoma City Metro Alliance for Safer Cities, and many more.

Joyce is married to Coy Shelby, and they reside in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. They have two children Kimberly Pickett (and husband Michael) of Oklahoma City, and Corky Shelby of El Reno, 3 grandchildren, and 9 great-grandchildren (all boys).

Joyce Shelby's life was best described by Robert Hinson, former pastor of FBC, Midwest City, in a letter to Glenn Brown who was then the editor of the *Baptist Messenger*. He stated, "You know has her friend that she is a workaholic – never says no – always volunteers – has a penchant to spread herself thin, and never takes a vacation."

She is well-worthy of receiving this 2009 award.

The Editor

HAPPY BIRTHDAY BAPTISTS

by Eli Sheldon

This paper was presented at the October 17, 2009 meeting of the Oklahoma Baptist Historical Society.

Let's Celebrate Our Birthday!

According to many Baptist historians 2009 marks the 400th Anniversary of the Baptist Church.

You might recall, the spring 2009 *Oklahoma Baptist Chronicle* reprinted the excellent article entitled "Ten Suggestions for Celebrating the 400th Anniversary of Baptist Beginnings" by Charles W. Deweese. Dr. Deweese is the Executive Director of the Baptist History and Heritage Society, and the article was printed with their permission.

It might be of interest to know that most Baptists (if any) didn't celebrate the 300th anniversary. In addition, not everyone looks to the year 1609 as the beginning of the modern Baptist church.

The Old Landmark Movement

Back in the late 1890's very few questioned when the church started. Most Baptist's "knew" we started at Jerusalem about 30 A. D. and our church could be traced back throughout history. That view was highly regarded by many and was rooted in the old Landmark movement of the 1850's.

Robert Baker, known in the mid-1900's as one of the foremost authorities on Baptist history, called the Landmark Movement the "greatest internal crisis" of the nineteenth century.

It has been over 30 years since this writer has heard anyone state emphatically the old Landmark hypothesis of our beginning. That person, interestingly, was a Southern Baptist pastor's wife here in Oklahoma. That, of course, also means I haven't spoken to any Landmark Baptists since that time. There are still some pockets of Landmarks around our nation. As another aside, the Lifeway Book

Store still carries Joe Odle's little booklet entitled *Church Member's Handbook*, which clearly states the successionist theory.

One writing that students still ask me about is the old *Trail of Blood*, by J. M. Carroll. While it was well accepted when first released, many have found it to be historically inaccurate (unless you want to identify with some very questionable doctrinal stances throughout church history). It is always fun to look at Dr. Carroll's charts, but historically one would prefer clear and accurate presentations. It is also of note that Carroll's little book wasn't published until 1931, which was after his death.

While the old Landmark movement as a definite place in Southern Baptist history, that is basically where it needs to stay.

The Whitsitt Controversy

William W. Whitsitt, professor of church history and later president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, published some articles in the 1880's which stated emphatically that Baptists began in the early 1600's. His work entitled *A Question of Baptist History,* published in 1896, set forth his conclusions quite clearly.

The general reaction among Baptists was extremely negative and Whitsitt was forced to resign in 1898. Among Southern Baptists the controversy continued well into the 20th Century.

His work, however, did not go unnoticed by many Baptist historians. The time had come for a more in-depth analysis of our beginnings.

Baptist's Beginning

There are two more modern schools of thought as to when Baptist's actually began and what theological influences contributed to that beginning.

Many, like Whitsitt, hold that Baptist's began in 1609 with John Smyth in Amsterdam, Holland. This view tells us that Baptist's came out of the **Separatist Movement** in England. Smyth progressed, as many did in that era, through the stages of being Anglican, to Puritan, and then to Separatist.

On what bases should this man and his church be called Baptist?

By the very nature of his breaking from the Anglican Church there was no church hierarchy to follow. This church was, therefore, congregational by necessity. The second connection with modern Baptists was that he had come to the conclusion of believer's baptism. This, however, was not by immersion.

From our modern perspective, would we consider a church Baptist based on these two factors? If so, any denomination today that has a congregational polity and practices believer's baptism (whether by sprinkling or not) could also be regarded as Baptist.

The second school of thought is the Baptist church started through the influence of the **Anabaptist Movement**. This view states there were congregational type church groups which practiced believer's baptism by immersion, and this was the original source of today's Baptists.

From the early 1600's some church leaders occasionally spoke of "dipping" as the biblical mode of baptism, but it wasn't until about 1640 that a firm decision made this a consistent reality. In 1640-41, the "Kiffin Manuscript" records the account of Mr. Richard Blunt being sent from England to the Mennonites in Holland to study why some of the Netherlanders were immersing. The well documented conclusion was to immediately accept and practice believer's baptism by immersion. This then, according to some historians, is the real date of the church's beginning.

While we might say Baptist's began in 1609, it seems more appropriate to accept the thought that the establishment of the Baptist Church was a process rather than a date. One might conclude the process began in 1609 and concluded in 1640-41.

A church this writer once pastored began as a mission point with a Sunday School in 1921. The mother church purchased the original Sunday School materials and two families who lived in the area began the group. After that, the sponsoring church never needed to help. Within two or three years the group was running well over one hundred, had a church building, had a radio broadcast, and had a pastor and deacons in place. They were financially self sustaining and had started various mission projects. It wasn't, however, until July 1928 that the group officially constituted into a church. One might ask if this church begin in 1921 or 1928? They celebrate the later date, but that doesn't negate all the work, the souls saved, or the ministries prior to the official date.

More important than a date is the knowledge that we, as Baptists, know what we believe, stand for those beliefs, and conduct ourselves in a manner that is the closest thing we can find to the New Testament church.

It is time to put this matter to rest, and cut the cake.

Happy Birthday Baptists!

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H. ALTON WEBB
1923 – 2009

Historical Society President – 1981

H. Alton Webb, longtime Oklahoma pastor and denominational worker went to be with the Lord, August 22, 2009.

Alton was born in Anson, Texas, and in 1945 married Virginia Phillips at Waco, Texas. He is survived by his wife, of the Anadarko home, one daughter, Karen Waits of Mustang, one son David Webb of Cordell, three grandchildren, and several other relatives.

Bro. Webb received a degree in hospital administration from OBU and his master's degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas.

He served several churches as pastor in both Oklahoma and Texas.

He held the position as assistant administrator at Oklahoma Baptist Hospital, Miami, and as administrator at both Perry Baptist Hospital and Lackey Manor Baptist Retirement Center in Oklahoma City.

For 17 years he served as Director of Missions for the Concord-Kiowa Baptist Association, and was elected president of the Association of Director of Missions in 1983.

He was a special friend and helper to the Oklahoma Baptist Historical Commission, having served several terms on the commission.

Among his places of leadership he occupied the position of President of the Oklahoma Baptist Historical Society in 1981, and Chairman of the Oklahoma Baptist Commission in 1987.

In 1998 he received the Distinguish Service Award from the Oklahoma Baptist Historical Society. He was chairman of the Baptist Heritage Sermon Award Committee and also the Gaskin Church History Award Committee.

Alton Webb was a civic leader wherever he pastored or worked, and was a member of the Lions Club of America.

While Alton will be missed, the results of his influence and labor for the Lord among Oklahoma Baptists will be long remembered.

The Editor

Memorial Gifts

On September 8, 1998 by vote of the Historical Commission, a memorial fund was established whereby a gift of $25 or more may be made to the Gaskin Historical Archives and Library Forever Fund in memory of a deceased relative or friend.

James Ball, Claremore;
Given by Lemuel Ball

Margie Ball, Claremore;
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