

# THE OKLAHOMA BAPTIST CHRONICLE

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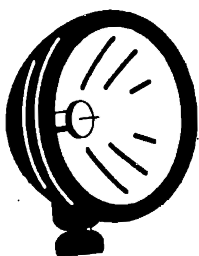
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# ***Spotlight on***

## **THE ARCHIVES**

It might be nice to bring the readers up to date on the archives. Several changes have occurred over the last couple of years.

First, many of you know of the name change of the Gaskin Archives. The name was officially changed last year to The J. M. and Helen Gaskin Baptist Historical Library and Archives. This was to honor Mrs. Gaskin who was quite often the recorder, secretary, and indexer of the materials in the earlier days.

Most of you also know that in December 2010 the archives were moved back to the Oklahoma Baptist University Library complex. The materials are now basically where they began in 1955. An earlier agreement of 1955 established the collection and provided housing for the historical items at OBU. The agreement was made by Dr. T. B. Lackey, Executive Secretary-Treasurer of the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma, and Dr. John Raley, then President of OBU. At that time the materials were called the Oklahoma Baptist Collection.

In April, 1996, the collection was moved to the Baptist Building for various reasons. The primary factor seemed to be a matter of security of the materials. Dr. J. D. Dowdell was archivist at the time and reported items missing. Whether materials were misplaced, loaned out and not recorded, lost, or pilfered (as some believed), is now only speculation. Another lesser factor may have been that during this period several of the Baptist archival libraries in the nation were being transferred from the Baptist schools to the state convention offices. Whether that was really wise and why that was happening is, again, a matter of interpretation. It seemed to have been a trend at the time. That factor probably was not a reason for the move to the Baptist Building.

Owing primarily to the need for additional space for the massive collections that were accumulating, and because space at the Baptist Building was needed, the collection was returned in December 2010 to the Oklahoma Baptist University Library complex. Because of the move some interesting and helpful things have occurred. First, the space provided is twice the floor space that was available at the Baptist Building. Secondly, the materials are now more readily available to the OBU students for research. In addition, there is improved security over the collection in its new location.

Dr. Richard Cheek, Dean of Library Services, and his staff are the primary caretakers of the materials. Working closely with BGCO Historical Secretary, Eli Sheldon, the accountability is greatly enhanced. While students may access the materials for research, the doors are kept locked and are only accessible in the presence of Dr. Cheek or his assistants. The beautiful library location also adds to the wisdom of the move back to OBU.

The Oklahoma Baptist Historical Commission now has an active archives committee. While the committee has existed for several years, it was difficult for them to inspect the collection due to cramped space. The result was the committee had little they could do. On May 10, 2012, the committee, made up of Commissioner Lynn Gray, and Historical Society Members Curtis Dixon and Luke Holmes, made an annual inspection of the facilities and collection. They were accompanied by Dr. Sheldon and Dr. Cheek. Not only were all things in order, the committee also spent a lengthy period testing the availability and accessibility of specific items. It was interesting to see them find the specific items they requested in a matter of moments. It was a good examination and familiarization of the Gaskin Archives.

As has been reported previously, the current primary exhibit of the archives is the J. S. Murrow printing press. The press was acquired by Murrow in the 1870s, and he most likely used the press in the publication of *The Vindicator*, a newspaper he worked on about 1879. The press was apparently also used for the publication of much of *The Indian Missionary*, an early Baptist newspaper. *The Indian Missionary* was founded in 1884 by A. Frank Ross, and Murrow became the editor in 1887. The press is now on display at the inner entry area of the OBU Library. You cannot enter the library without seeing this beautiful piece of history. While it is close at

hand, the display area is protected by chains separating the printing press from the hands of passing traffic. An interesting eight page (undated) booklet telling the history of the Murrow press was written by Anson Justice, and is available at the OBU Library or the office of the BGCO historical secretary. Oklahoma Baptists can be proud of the current arrangement and display of the J. M. and Helen Gaskin Historical Library and Archives.



Left to right – Curtis Dixon, Lynn Gray, Luke Holmes and Dean Richard Cheek





## **Oklahoma Baptist Historical Society New Members for 2011**

The following is a list of new members received in 2011. The last printing of the total membership may be found in the *Oklahoma Baptist Chronicle*, Spring 2008.

### **LIFE**

**Randal D. Ice  
Oklahoma City**

### **Annual**

**Tom Ratliff  
Wilburton**

**Martha Ray  
Pawnee**

**Oklahoma Baptist University Students**

Amanda Abernathy  
Converse, Texas

Lewis Perez  
Shawnee

Jered Bell  
Magnolia, Texas

Kati Powell  
Perry, Georgia

Ryan Faulkner  
Newalla

Kaitlyn Rothaus  
Shawnee

Tyler Geohagan  
Oklahoma City

Ben Skaggs  
Shawnee

Andrew Martin  
Shawnee

Abby Wilson  
Shawnee

Brittany Mason  
Allen, Texas

# ***THE BAPTIST MESSENGER***

## **The First One Hundred Years**

This year marks the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of *The Baptist Messenger*. While other Oklahoma Baptist newspapers have come and gone, *The Baptist Messenger* stills moves on, even now into the digital age.

No other book or source of literature can contribute more to Oklahoma Baptist History than a weekly newspaper that tells of the work, lives, and fellowship of the people called Baptist. There have been many fine books written about Oklahoma Baptists by such writers as J.M. Gaskin, L. W. Marks, Bob Ross, and others, but as soon as they are published the events of history quickly outdate them.

History is an interesting critter. While it appears as an inanimate essence confined to paper, print, and efforts of journalism, it is as alive as you and I, and is full of motion, change, and intrigue. The 100 years of the *Baptist Messenger* share the weekly dogmas and debates, tragedies and triumphs, and theologies and theodicies. Yet the publication is bound by a cover page and creased spine.

It is impossible to separate the events of the years in our religious lives with what has been printed in the *Messenger*. For 100 years the newspaper has been an instrument of God's hand to direct, formulate, and encourage the events and theologies of those same years. To tell the story of the *Baptist Messenger* is to simply tell the story of the Baptists of Oklahoma. If it happened in Baptist life, or affected our moral, ethical, or theological standards, it was printed in the *Messenger*.

One of the important recent works was the series on the publication's history, which was presented from the March 1 issue through May 17<sup>th</sup>. Dana Williamson, longtime writer for the *Messenger*, begins the story by stating, "Although the first issue of the *Baptist Messenger* was published May 15, 1912, and was the first Baptist paper

in the new state of Oklahoma, it wasn't the first attempt at a Baptist paper in what was then the Indian Territory." The article then summarized other earlier attempts at publication dating back to 1844.

### **The Beginning**

The story of the first issue is, in itself, an interesting one. C. P. Stealey, founded the paper and served as the first editor for 15 years. During this period the paper was purchased by the BGCO. The first issue, in 1912, was released at the first Southern Baptist Convention held in Oklahoma. Prior to statehood, Oklahoma Baptists were divided into various conventions or alignments, and some sense of unification was needed. The general division within the state was because of the two areas known as the Indian Territory and the Oklahoma Territory. In addition, churches within those two areas were divided as to whether they were most sympathetic toward the Home Mission Society of the Baptists of the north, or the Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptists. In many cases some churches received aid from both agencies. One early Baptist, Auguie Henry, remembers as a young boy in his teens when his beloved pastor W.G. Lucas, of Mt. View Baptist near Wister, would receive "mission boxes" from both the Home Mission Society and the Home Mission Board. The boxes usually contained clothing and other articles for the pastor and members of the church. The people could always tell when a "box" had arrived by the new clothes worn by the pastor and his family the following Sunday. When the convention formed in 1906, it recognized the autonomy of the Baptist churches in their alignments or lack thereof with the two national groups. Therefore, the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma, at its very beginning, approved of and held itself to the policy of dual alignment.

### **Help From the North**

It is at this point, that an often overlooked fact needs to be stated. Prior to the Civil War there were no Anglo churches in Oklahoma. Other than a few Anglo missionaries, all churches were Native American. Interestingly, the first Baptist church in Indian Territory was Ebenezer Station, founded in 1832 by missionary Isaac McCoy, and was made up of three ethnic identities. Of the original six members, the pastor, John Davis was a Creek (Muskogee) Indian, one

couple, Mr. and Mrs. David Lewis, were missionaries of apparently limited abilities, and then the remaining members were three African-American slaves of the Creek Indians, Bob, Ned, and Quash. McCoy never officially joined the church. All early works in Oklahoma were supported only by the Baptists of the North, since the Southern Baptist Convention was not formed until 1845. Anglos, in general, did not migrate to this area until after the Civil War. Prior to 1845, Baptists of the north were actually part of the only national Baptist organization. Baptists in America first formed in 1814, and were commonly called the Triennial Convention, since they only met nationally every three years. After the Civil War, both the North and South provided missionary assistance to the Indian and Oklahoma Territories. Dual alignment was not uncommon.

### **Territorial Concerns**

It can be assumed that territorial concerns played a part in the BGCO's ultimate decision to align itself only with the Southern Baptist Convention. In 1908 the Baptists of the north held their national convention at the First Baptist Church of Oklahoma City. Many of the members at First Baptist had migrated from Kansas, a state that had declared itself a free state. It was, in fact, at that very 1908 meeting the Baptists of the north officially organized as the "Northern Baptist Convention." This, no doubt, was a matter that affected future considerations of alignment. History tells us that, four years later, in 1912 the Southern Baptist Convention also met in Oklahoma City, again hosted by the First Baptist Church, and the first *Baptist Messenger* was issued as a part of that event. Considering the distances that both the northern and southern folk had to travel to get to Oklahoma City, one might speculate that both national conventions meeting in Oklahoma were not a matter of coincidence.

Throughout this time period, more Southerners were migrating to the new state of Oklahoma. Left to its own course, dual alignment favored the SBC. In 1907, Southern Baptists causes received \$2,200 from Oklahoma and the Northern Baptists received \$1,800. The Southern Baptist share continued to increase. In 1900, 67 percent of people in Oklahoma had come from ten southern states. By 1910 that percentage had increased to 81 percent. One factor that played a strong part in single alignment was that the Baptists of New Mexico, which borders Oklahoma at the Panhandle and had formed as a

convention in 1900, split because of continued strife from being dually aligned. The Northern Baptist Convention, recognizing their supporters were in the minority, voluntarily withdrew financial support to New Mexico. By 1912 Oklahoma was in a very similar situation.

### **Single Alignment**

The BGCO from its very beginning in 1906 showed a spirit of cooperation toward all Baptists in the two territories. This spirit was brought to a high point in 1914 when the BGCO adopted the policy of "Single Alignment" regarding the support of missionary, educational and benevolent causes. Therefore, the churches affiliated with the convention were encouraged to make all contributions to mission causes outside of Oklahoma to the Southern Baptist Convention. By this one action, the BGCO became completely and officially affiliated with the SBC.

### **Stealey's Influence**

The *Baptist Messenger* was extremely useful under the director of C. P. Stealey to present the idea of unification with the Southern Baptist Convention as a very positive action. The pen has always been mightier than the sword. The front page of the first edition, May 15, 1912, carried two articles that enhanced the benefits of giving support to the Southern Baptist Convention. The first article, by Alex W. Bealer, was titled "Oklahoma and the Convention", and began by saying, "I have been asked what this great Southern Baptist Convention means to the State of Oklahoma. I have attended quite a number of conventions and I know of the effect produced upon the people it has touched to bless." The second front page item was a reprint of an article written by the editor of the *Foreign Mission Journal* when he was pastor in Richmond, Virginia. It was titled "Triumphs in Raising Money for Missions." Both articles and the entire *Baptist Messenger* held a high view of the Southern Baptist Convention. The only parts that did not extol the benefits of the national convention were the ads. Current readers might enjoy reviewing the recently published article in the March 1, 2012, *Messenger*, telling early readers of the combined offers of receiving an iron bed or a soft rocker with a subscription to the new *Baptist Messenger*.

## **The Years from Struggles to Strength**

Once single alignment was accomplished in 1914, other matters began to crowd the pages of the *Messenger*. During World War I, 1914 through 1918, the publication took on a very patriotic position. Under President Woodrow Wilson, America began to industrialize and the economy improved greatly. The *Messenger* reflected these positive signs of national patriotism and growth. Owing to a strong recession, the first two years of publication were difficult financially, but the new sense of togetherness in Oklahoma, and the nation, helped our state grow economically. The new publication also helped overcome the previous sectional jealousies and divided loyalties that existed prior to Baptist's unification and single alignment. Likewise, Stealey's articles reflected the current issues that affected both the local churches and the Southern Baptist Convention. The "75 Million Campaign" began in 1921, and received much *Messenger* coverage. Dr. J. C. Stalcup had served Baptists in the Indian and Oklahoma Territory well before the unification into one convention in 1906. He was elected in 1906 as convention secretary (now called executive director-treasurer) and served until his resignation in August of 1916. F. M. McConnell, a Texan with unusual abilities and dedication succeeded him. In 1921, because of the economy, a number of pastors were blaming Secretary McConnell, for "over selling" the 75 Million Campaign, and for too rapid expansion of the convention operations. As one writer put it, McConnell was being blamed for the failure of the pastors and churches to make good on their pledges. To make matters worse, Alonzo Nunnery, a Landmark Baptist and publisher of *The Baptist Worker*, a paper which was in competition with the *Messenger*, insinuated that McConnell and his "clique" were guilty of mismanagement of the convention's affairs. In 1922 McConnell resigned and returned to Texas and became the editor of the *Baptist Standard*. He served with distinction as editor of the Texas paper for over 16 years. Meanwhile, Stealey's editorials on the 1925 Southern Baptist Convention were interesting in that both the Cooperative Program and "Baptist Faith and Message" were adopted during the same session in Memphis.

## **Modernists and the Movement**

The greatest controversy of those times came about due to more liberal thinkers within the nation. The "Modernists", who held to new

theologies and the materialistic theory of evolution, were getting attention nationally. C. P. Stealey, as well as almost all Oklahoma Baptists, opposed their modernist views. As a result a "Movement" as it was called, was begun to counteract the Modernists. This was often also called the Fundamentalist Movement. Most outspoken of these were W. B. Riley a Northern Baptist, T. T. Shields, of Canada, and J. Frank Norris, a Southern Baptist of Texas. C. P. Stealey and Norris were great friends. Although Oklahoma Baptists could endorse the emphasis on New Testament doctrines by J. Frank Norris, they could not endure his attempts to divide the Southern Baptist Convention. Stealey, as editor of the *Baptist Messenger*, did not escape criticism from those who felt the "Movement" had gone too far and condemned too many faithful conservative Baptists. Many considered Stealey an instigator of conflict and division. The result was a vote at the 1927 Oklahoma Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma that ousted Stealey as editor of the *Messenger*. Stealey then began publishing a paper called *The Southern Baptist Trumpet* and later organized Hudson Baptist, an independent Baptist church in Oklahoma City.

### **The Routh Years**

E. C. Routh became the *Messenger* editor in 1928 and served faithfully until 1943. Dr Andrew Potter who was then pastor at First Baptist, Enid, was instrumental in getting Routh to Oklahoma. E. C. Routh has been dismissed from the *Baptist Standard* in Texas for refusing to allow the newspaper into the J. Frank Norris fight. Dr. Potter was very proud of Routh's stance. He held that the quality in Dr. E. C. Routh that the *Standard* found unacceptable, Oklahoma found acceptable. The *Baptist Messenger* under Stealey had been involved in endless debates over Frank Norris. Routh was, indeed, a fresh new wind for Oklahoma. The dedication of Routh and other Baptists of the late 1920s and into the 1930s helped our state combat the social evils of the day.

### **The Days of Financial Questions**

Evil days were, indeed, upon us. One issue editor Dr. Routh had to immediately deal with was the matter of previous shortfall and the trust of Oklahoma Baptists to continue giving to the new Cooperative Program. A serious financial problem had occurred at the Home



Mission Board (now North American Mission Board) that cast questions on where monies were going. Clinton S. Carnes, the HMB treasurer since 1919, had embezzled \$909,461 from the board, and was nowhere to be found. On Wednesday, September 12<sup>th</sup>, at the 1928 annual session of the Oklahoma Baptist Association (now the Capital Baptist Association) meeting in Oklahoma City, the Home Mission report was given and a lengthy discussion followed. The report began by stating, "A few days ago it became known that Clinton S. Carnes, for several years treasurer of the board, had sold our board's paper to the amount of a million dollars, appropriated the money and absconded. His whereabouts are unknown and shall probably remain so." The *Baptist Messenger* had the unpleasant obligation of reporting the matter. Carnes was later captured trying to enter Canada and the HMB was able to recover about one-third of its loss. The board lost far more than money; it lost the confidence of many Baptists.

### **A Gathering of Eagles**

Meanwhile Oklahoma City was gaining strength as a center of interest in the state, and was influential in what was printed in the *Baptist Messenger*. National evangelist Dr. Mordecai Ham served as pastor at First, Oklahoma City for two years and managed to rally Baptist's interests against the worldly sins about them. City officials who failed to enforce prohibition laws were quick to feel the sharp lash of Dr. Ham's tongue, and most Baptists and the *Messenger* joined him. In central Oklahoma, with the aid of the Oklahoma Ministerial Alliance, the Women's Christian Temperance Union, and the Baptist churches, Mr. Ed Overholser had been elected mayor (circa 1915). He, in turn, appointed W. B. Nichols, chief of police. Nichols, was nicknamed the "Fighting Deacon", and warned the gamblers, bootleggers, and madams their days were numbered. The social ills and need for revival were often addressed in our state Baptist paper. To counter these negative influences, it was common in the 1920 – 30s for churches throughout the state to hold revivals called "meetings" that lasted three to six weeks, and Vacation Bible Schools of 20 days or longer.

### **The Potter's Wheel**

In 1933, Executive Secretary-Treasurer J. B. Rounds, after bearing years of Oklahoma Baptist debt, dissensions with Nunnery and

Stealey, and the heart-breaking setbacks of the early depression, stepped aside and Andrew Potter of First, Enid, became the new convention secretary. During the first seven years of Potter's administration progress was, of necessity, slow, but it was steadily improving. With Potter as secretary and E. C. Routh as *Messenger* editor and a strong supporter, Oklahoma Baptist leadership became known throughout the country as one of the most progressive states among Southern Baptists. Meanwhile subscriptions to the *Baptist Messenger* continued to grow. Editor Routh was always enthusiastic about the value of the *Messenger* to the church and Baptist families it served. Various articles were printed in the 1930s that covered why one should be a Baptist and what Baptists hold to scripturally. The result was an understanding and bonding in theology, convictions, and purpose for Baptist people.

### **The Wartime Years**

National wars have always affected Baptists in very interesting ways. As with the Revolutionary War, Civil War, and World War I, World War II also helped Baptist become unified in the face of adversity. The early 1940's brought a sense of nationalism that united Oklahoma Baptists, and the *Baptist Messenger* was able to show what various churches were doing for the war effort throughout Oklahoma. The March 22, 2012, issue of the *Baptist Messenger*, which was part of the recent 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary series, included several pictures from the wartime era. Of special interest in this issue are the photos on the cover and ads within the paper, with one final picture emphasizing "Christ is the Answer." America needed not only patriotism, but also the bold reminder that God was still in control. E. C. Routh resigned as editor of the *Messenger* in 1943 to accept the position of editing *The Commission*, the Southern Baptist's foreign missions magazine. During the tremulous war years of 1943-45, Porter Routh, the son of E. C., served as *Baptist Messenger* editor. During these two years circulation climbed from 25,000 to almost 37,000. Porter Routh moved in 1945 to the Sunday School Board in Nashville.

### **From Routh to McClennan**

Albert McClennan followed Porter Routh as editor and served from 1945-49. Again, subscriptions increased and reached 47,000 by

1947. Thus from 1945 to 1949 the publication almost doubled its circulation. During this time more photographs were included and two popular articles "The Mail Bag" and "Attendance Report" were begun. Editor McClellan once reflected on the style of Andrew Potter who was Executive Director-Treasurer during this period. He said Potter, "Had a touch of class. No meeting of a friend was ever casual, no conference call ever unimportant, no convention ever routine. A trip to the barber shop was a celebration." Dr. Potter used care in his selections of denomination employees. Albert McClellan once said Potter "grilled" him for three days before he allowed McClellan's name to be considered as *Messenger* editor. While McClellan only served as editor for four years, he is noted for having provided a good publication.

From the post World War II era into the mid-1950s the churches began to change. In the 1920s, most churches only had a pastor on salary. The lean years of the thirties helped sustain that status. With the economy booming in the 1950s more paid staff were added to many Oklahoma Churches. The 1950s also saw changes in evangelism. Bus ministries began and separate children's church sessions were instituted. Many churches began to build gymnasiums or additional family related buildings. The Southern Baptist's "A Million More in '54" campaign was one of the most successful evangelistic efforts ever conducted. The *Baptist Messenger* helped greatly by emphasizing the various church ministries and successes.

### **A Man with True Gritz**

In 1949 Jack Gritz became the editor of the *Messenger*, and began a 30 year legacy of excellent publication. He began as an editor at the age of 10 when he and a friend, Elmer Gray, also 10 years old, began publishing a small neighborhood paper in Enid, Oklahoma. One might ask what would become of these two energetic lads. Both attended and roomed together at Oklahoma Baptist University. In the 1960s while Gritz was editor of the *Baptist Messenger*, his friend Elmer Gray had become editor of the *California Baptist* paper. Surveys showed Dr. Gritz's short weekly "Just a Minute", which featured unusual people or events, was one of the most popular items in the *Messenger*. Gritz retired due to illness after serving over 30 years, the longest term for an editor in the Southern Baptist Convention.

The editors of the *Messenger* were not the only people who made the newspaper such an excellent product. Assistant editor Leland Webb was a good example. Owing to his superb abilities, Leland moved to Richmond, Va., to become production editor of *The Commission*, the magazine of the Foreign Mission Board (now the International Mission Board). How could our state Baptist paper ever replace such a man? God, in His infinite wisdom, led the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma to invite a man called Bob E. Mathews as associate editor. Mathews had won several awards, including national awards, for his coverage of the events during the Civil Rights era. He came to the *Messenger* from his work with KWTW in Oklahoma City and remained for over 34 years. His vivid photographs and commentaries during the time of the atrocities inflicted on African-Americans is a true testimony of journalistic reporting with Christian compassion amid social conflicts. He was a superb reporter and editor. Bob Mathews often told how Dr. Gritz would say, "Proof read, proof read, proof read, and when you are done, proof read again."

### **Bold and Baptist**

The issue of Baptist doctrine was a subject that Gritz often and boldly addressed. In the January 7, 1960, *Baptist Messenger* he published these comments:

Most Southern Baptists believe that baptism is a church ordinance and is proper only when it is administered by the authority of a New Testament church. Every person coming to join one of our churches by letter should be carefully questioned about his salvation experience and baptism. The spiritual welfare of each one should be of great concern. Those who have not been properly baptized should be led into a genuine experience of true New Testament baptism.

On another occasion Dr. Gritz printed an article from a state pastor who strongly supported a stance against women being ordained as deacons. The article, entitled "Was Phoebe a Deaconess?" was one

of several items that helped begin discussions regarding acceptable biblical interpretation by churches and associations.

The ministry of the *Baptist Messenger* was enhanced even more during the 1970s. As reported in the recent April 22, 2012, issue of the *Messenger*, a cassette tape ministry was begun during this time. The visually impaired could now hear the newspaper read by way of electronics. Pocket recorders also aided reporters in getting facts more quickly and being able to reproduce those exact quotes.

### **The Conservative Resurgence**

With the retirement of Dr. Gritz, the convention welcomed the coming of Richard T. McCartney. He served as editor from 1979 until 1987. It was during this era that the issue of biblical inerrancy dominated the Southern Baptist Convention scene. The *Messenger* throughout this time sought to give accurate and honest reports of the SBC conflicts. What was reported never really pleased everyone. The extreme conservatives cried for more news from their perspective while the moderates and liberals cried foul when their views were not dominate. It was a difficult time for editing the paper. But not all was lost in the fray. Not only did the *Baptist Messenger* keep the readers well informed, it was one of the few Baptist publications that increased in subscriptions during these times. While most of the folk in the local churches either could not understand the conflict or did not see the relevance to their local church, the pastors and denominational people fought the fight. In many cases a pastor would lead his church in one direction, quite often away from total support of the Cooperative Program, while his people were unaware of the issues. With the controversies came increased interests. That has always been the historical pattern of events, whether it has been a local church conflict, a denomination, or an issue of national consequences. Baptists, like many others, sometimes use conflict as a spectator sport. For example, in a local church conflict, if a meeting is called to “fire” the pastor, various things happen. People who were not attending (and may have not been there since the last firing) will come for this “special event.” Some faithful church folk will stay home because they have seen this happen before in their church, and it makes them sick. It seems the twenty plus years of conflict in the convention could be likened to a person who feels nauseated and knows they will feel better if they can get relief, but often doesn’t know what might be the exact cure. All these matters,

because of their news value, became part of the *Baptist Messenger* publication. From a historical perspective those were difficult but very interesting times. History, because of its very nature, is often enhanced by conflicts and change. Baptists seldom have dull periods of history. From a publication view point, the circulation increased to a peak of almost 121,000, the highest it has ever been before or since the conflict.

In 1987 McCartney accepted a position with the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission in Fort Worth, Texas. In his last editorial, McCartney wrote, "The Baptist system works best when people receive adequate information, whether the news is good or bad. We have tried to keep you informed. Even when you disagree with the opinions of the editor, or with the contents of news stories, you can express your disagreement by writing to the *Messenger*. That's what keeps information flowing and helps democracy to function. I am pleased to have had a small part in making the system work in Oklahoma."

While this writing is too limited to mention all *Messenger* employees, two longtime workers of this time period need to be mentioned. Fern Hurt retired as associate editor in 1984 after 37 years of faithful service. The same month, David Truby, of the *Messenger* printing staff, retired after 32 years.

### **Brown's Diplomacy Handles the Times**

Glenn Brown followed McCartney as *Messenger* editor, and served in that capacity for ten years. Brown had been associate director of planning and promotion prior to accepting the editor's position. If you are a longtime reader, you may be privileged to have in your files a copy of the May 7, 1987 issue of the *Messenger* which celebrates the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the paper. Another major person of the *Messenger* staff retired during this time. Kenneth Jones, press foreman, ended 38 years with the *Messenger* in 1989.

The 1990s brought a change in the Southern Baptist Convention as well as in the views of Oklahoma Baptists. The SBC had experienced several years of conflict around what had been termed by some the "inerrancy controversy" of the Bible, but many "side" issues had also surfaced. Many times the "labeling" of individuals occurred based on their perceived theological leanings. Of interest

was when a moderate or liberal was asked what theological persuasion they held, they would invariably reply, "I don't believe in putting labels on people." When a strong conservative was asked the same question they would always reply, "I am a conservative." The ultimate result of the SBC conflict (which not only went into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, but in some areas still lingers), was the withdrawing of some churches to form the more moderate group called the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. This was the first time in Judeo-Christian history that a moderate group pulled off of the main body. In every Old Testament occasion on into modern church groups, the "remnant" (the most conservative followers) always had to withdraw from the main body. For an interesting comparison, think of all the early colleges that were founded by Christians in America that have now become almost anti-Christian in their position. American Christianity has always had the challenge of remaining dedicated to God in subsequent generations.

To the regular Oklahoma Baptists, that is those in the pews, the great problems of the SBC still seemed somewhat far off. Even though the *Baptist Messenger* had the continued obligation to report the national Baptist news, whether good and bad, most local churches still functioned as they had the prior Sunday. The local folk still believed the Bible, trusted Jesus, and wanted to keep peace in their church.

### **The Murrah Building and a Messenger with Faith**

In reality, the Murrah Building bombing on April 19, 1995, affected most Oklahoma Baptists far beyond the SBC conflicts. While some rural areas of Oklahoma often seem to have lain aside the occasion from over 17 years ago, the scars are still seen in many homes and areas of central Oklahoma. Few churches in the Oklahoma City area were spared the pain of the death or injury of a church member, friend, or extended family. Even now some firefighters and police personnel, who were involved in the clean-up or rescue efforts during the aftermath, experience mental, physical, or emotional problems.

Through all this the *Baptist Messenger* offered hope, love, and a sense of God's ultimate control in the times ahead.

## **The Years of Yeats**

In 1997 John L. Yeats succeeded Glenn Brown as editor of the *Messenger*. Yeats has been described as a steady personality with a great sense of humor and a sharp mind for news. He came to Oklahoma from Indiana where he had been editor of the Indiana Baptist newspaper. He once compared the *Messenger* to a baseball diamond. "Generally you have content, distribution, and advertising as the three bases. I would add home base as advancing the Kingdom of God." In addition, he put a good emphasis on the need of prayer. Bob Mathews, who was well-known throughout the SBC, retired as associate editor in July 1998. He had served over 34 years, and his knowledge and insights were regarded as almost irreplaceable. He was involved in 1713 issues of the *Messenger* and had the longest tenure of any associate editor in the SBC. Mathews kept up with 500 or more pastoral moves every year for the staff change column, produced the BGCO handbook, and had responsibility for the publication of over 180 church special pages per week.

John Yeats' well-led editorship of the *Baptist Messenger* closed in 2005 when he accepted the position as director of communications for the Louisiana Baptist Convention. While the *Messenger* had experienced many changes including relocation of the presses, various formats, four-color printing, and a cover wrap, it still remained a publication that brought the best news to Oklahoma Baptists. When Yeats left the *Messenger* the paper was, and still is, the most widely circulated weekly publication in Oklahoma.

## **Changes of the Times**

The position of editor then made a couple of fairly quick changes. Ray E. Sanders held the position from 2006 until 2008 and Douglas E. Baker served as editor in 2009 and 2010. During these years the individual tastes and influences of these men could be seen, especially in the editorials, and the paper still kept its great informative structure.

Sanders is remembered by many for producing a weekly radio program featuring himself and Bob Nigh as co-hosts. Nigh's deep voice was especially pleasing to hear as the show was broadcast over KQCV and by podcast on the Internet.



One of Doug Baker's major contributions, from a historical editor's viewpoint, was his excellent articles based almost weekly on some aspect of Oklahoma Baptist history. The articles were often longer and more historically or theologically in-depth than the regular reader might like, but they were well received by most historians. While their terms as editor were not lengthy, both men contributed to the informative work of Oklahoma Baptists.

Dr. Anthony Jordan, executive director-treasurer since 1996, some years ago said, "Across the years, as the controversy among Southern Baptists increased, many state papers focused on the fight. Their pages were filled with stories detailing the arguments, accusations, and counter-accusations, and unchristian actions of fellow Southern Baptists. The *Messenger* has sought to give abbreviated accounts of these actions without filling its pages with them. In these years of turmoil, some state convention news journals were so full of battle news that the good news of the work of God's people got lost. I am glad we have not allowed that to happen." In these last 100 years the *Messenger* has always served to unite, inform, and lift up the people of God.

### **A New Beginning**

Brian Hobbs accepted the position as *Messenger* editor after his election during the 2011 BGCO annual meeting. He had worked at the BGCO prior to that as communications director. His presence and pleasant personality has given the convention a glimpse of what will, no doubt, be a long and fruitful ministry. Prior to his coming, and during this short period, the *Baptist Messenger* has become a newspaper of the future. The banner (headline) for the cover story of this year's May 3<sup>rd</sup> issue states, "Messenger leaps into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century with Changes." Indeed, we as Oklahoma Baptists can now experience the *Baptist Messenger* from new perspectives. Mobile devices, iPads, podcasts, and every other future electronic device, will be a method of the *Baptist Messenger* to reach new people and more people for Jesus Christ. Beginning with the May 17, 2012, *Messenger*, the publication has a new look that is both appealing and informative. To anyone interested in history, the *Baptist Messenger* is only beginning to show what it can be for the future of Oklahoma Baptists. Much research has been considered in making the current newspaper the best it can be for the age we encounter.

There is no good way to end an article such as this one. History goes on and even as this edition of the *Oklahoma Baptist Chronicle* is published new historical events are occurring. It is at this point that we need to change the nature of the writing.

In the first week of May this year, the historical secretary of the BGCO had the privilege of sitting down with three of the major players of the *Baptist Messenger* team. By oral interviews he received some insight of what their ministries on the *Baptist Messenger* staff involved. The interviews were not long, but each one, in its own way, gives the reader a glimpse of those who produce the *Messenger*. There are eleven other employees on the *Messenger* staff, and each contributes expertise in specific fields. These newer folk aid in production, art, graphics, audio-visuals, social media, print coordination, advertising, and subscriptions. Each of their areas requires multiple facets of work with computers, the Internet, and other technological skills. The three persons interviewed were Bob Nigh, Dana Williamson, and Brian Hobbs. The following is only a few remarks received from them.

**Historical Secretary Eli Sheldon in an interview  
with Bob Nigh.**

Q: I know you are now managing editor. How long have you worked with the *Baptist Messenger*?

A: I've worked here for 13 years. Prior to that, I worked for *The Amarillo Globe News*, the *Marlin Daily Democrat*, the *Hereford, Texas Brand*, and the *Journal Record* and *Friday* newspapers in Oklahoma City. I also worked in communications with the Oklahoma City Public Schools, the OU Health Science Center, and OSU- Oklahoma City. I have been a sports editor, managing editor, advertising manager, news editor, and have done a variety of writing – sports, general news, business, medical, education, and finally religion.

Note: On display in his office were several awards he had received, indicating a man of great writing skills.

Q: What has been the most memorable experience with the *Messenger*, either good or bad?

A: The September 11, 2001 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in New York City I would list first. Going to Thailand and In-

Indonesia after the 2004 tsunami would be second. I was endorsed by NAMB (North American Mission Board) as a chaplain and went to New York City with five other chaplains from Oklahoma, including Lelsie Sias, Sam Porter, Jack Poe, Paul Bettis, and Joe Williams. The Southern Baptist Convention's Disaster Relief Chaplaincy efforts really began with its response to 9-11, led by the ministry of Oklahoma chaplains.

Q: I understand these Oklahoma Baptists were the first people called to come to New York, owing to their previous experience at the Murrah Building.

A: Yes. It was evident from the minute we stepped onto Ground Zero. People saw the name "Oklahoma" emblazoned across the back of our yellow jackets, and they knew we were kindred spirits, if you please; we had a sense of what they were going through from what Oklahoma City had experienced following the Murrah Building bombing in 1995.

Q: What has been your most memorable article or series you have written for the *Messenger*?

A: Probably the 9-11 articles.

Q: What has been your most rewarding experience with the *Messenger*?

A: Helping to understand how important it is to support those who have been through tragedies and to lift them up with prayer. Our Disaster Relief Teams do such a good job.

Editor: The Disaster Relief Teams are divided into several units. The "chain saw" teams go in and remove the initial branches and trees. The "mud-out" teams clean the homes and buildings after floods. The "feeding units" prepare and serve hot meals and purify water. The chaplains accompany each team and work along with them.

Q: Who has been the most memorable person you have worked with at the *Messenger*?

A: John Yeats. His dedication to God and to his family and wife, Sharon, is exceptional. He always had an effervescent and optimis-

tic quality and attitude. He was really innovative. When you felt down, he could get you up. He was up all the time.

Q: Is there anything else you would like to add?

A: I have been where I have needed to be throughout my career. God has given me innate abilities to write and use the English language well and to help others do the same thing.

### **A Visit with Dana Williamson.**

Q: Dana, how long have you been with the *Messenger*?

A: I became associate editor of the *Messenger* in 1993. Before that I worked in public relations for the convention. So I've been here a total of 43 years.

Note: Dana's office has one section of a wall full of awards and certificates. We discussed some of her awards then I asked her a second question.

Q: What has been your most memorable experience, either good or bad?

A: Probably what affected me most was the 1991 plane crash which killed four of my close friends—Mary June Tabor, Paul and Judy Magar and Jim Woodward. Mary June was the first to befriend me when I started work; Paul was my minister of music at Oklahoma City, Olivet, and I worked with Woodward in covering Falls Creek and the Singing Churchmen of Oklahoma.

Note: This crash occurred in January 1991 as they returned from a concert at Woodward, Oklahoma. James Woodward was Director of the Music Department at OBU. Paul Magar was Director of Worship and Music Ministries for the BGCO, and June Tabor was employed in the convention music department.

Q: What has been your most rewarding article or series?

A: It's hard to pinpoint just one out of hundred of articles, but I think those that affect me most are the ones about children who are ill or families who have experienced the loss of a child. It's amazing to

hear about the faith that goes along with these events. One in particular I remember was an 8-year old boy named Cody. He was a huge OU football fan, and was privileged to be on the sidelines of some OU games and attend practices. He was visited by OU coach Bob Stoops, his wife, Carol, and quarterback Jason White, the day before he died, which was right in the middle of an OU football game. He was a child with amazing faith.

Note: Dana Williamson in 2003 received the national BCA (Baptist Communicator Award) for her articles on the boy Cody.

Q: What has been your most rewarding experience at the *Messenger*?

A: I'm rewarded daily just by doing what God called me to do. I never wake up and think, "I wish I didn't have to go to work today." It's been a joy to tell the story of Oklahoma Baptists.

Q: Who is the most memorable person you have worked with here?

A: I've been privileged to work with some great journalists. Bob Mathews has to stand out as the most memorable, because that's just who he is. I've often said I learned more from Bob than from four years of college. Another hero is Norman Jameson, who was here only a few years, but who, with his skills, sense of humor and dedication to God and his family, made an impact on me.

### **An Interview with the New Editor Brian Hobbs**

Note: Bro. Hobbs was elected editor by the BGCO board of directors in the fall of 2011 and was announced as editor in the November 2011 BGCO annual meeting. It is easy to tell he is a man who understands the technological world in which we now live and to which the *Baptist Messenger* is going.

Q: Tell me a little about your qualifications as editor.

A: My background and education is in communications and marketing. It was as an undergraduate student at the University of Oklahoma where I first developed a love for writing. I served seven years as marketing director for a public policy organization in

Oklahoma City and then as communications director for Quail Springs Baptist Church. It was long a dream of mine to have an article published in the *Baptist Messenger*, so when the group had me do freelance work, such as covering the 2009 Southern Baptist Annual Meeting at Louisville, Kentucky, it was a real thrill. To step into the role as editor for the *Baptist Messenger* is a huge honor.

Q: What has been rewarding to you so far in your *Messenger* work?

A: I have really enjoyed doing the articles for the *Messenger*. I feel privileged to be part of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. I am like a man put in the front of a parade that is already going on. It is so humbling and rewarding.

Q: What are your goals for the *Messenger*?

A: We want to enhance and build on the time honored traditions of the printed *Messenger*, but still want to provide the digital version. We are a “niche” publication. We have a newspaper that fills the needs of Oklahoma Baptists. We can reach these people in ways no other publication can come near doing. I have nothing but good things to say and gratitude for anyone involved in the first 100 years, and we can build on that foundation. I am grateful and positive about our legacy.

For a complete listing of sources for this article, please contact the office of the historical secretary, BGCO.

The Editor.

## NECROLOGY

January 1, 2011 – December 31, 2011

**Basden, Brandon**, 35, died November 19. He was the son of retired Oklahoma pastor Jon Basden. He was a former youth minister and was a triage specialist at Tulsa Behavioral Health Center.

**Behymer, Glenarvon**, father of Norman Behymer (Minister of Music at Council Road Baptist Church), died September 25.

**Blevins, Dexter**, 91, pastor of Norman, Trinity from 1964-80, died August 2. He retired from the Army and National Guard as a major after 20 years service. He pastored in Texas and Arkansas before moving to Norman.

**Brown, Eula “Jean” Stith**, 79, wife of retired *Baptist Messenger* editor Glenn Brown, died July 26 at her home in Fort Worth, Texas. She was an accomplished church musician, playing the organ, piano, marimba, and a piano teacher. She served in Oklahoma Baptist churches for nearly 50 years

**Cox, Lawrence**, 74, retired director of missions in Johnston-Marshall Association for 16 years, died May 2. Among other activities, he led mission trips to Guatemala, Brazil and Russia.

**Cross, Ralph**, father of Shannon Cross (BCM Director at Tulsa Community College, Northeast), died November 18.

**Day, Richard Alan**, 62, pastor of Edmond, First for the past 25 years, died following a motorcycle accident February 16. Day was an author, columnist, member of the OBU board of trustees and served on numerous boards and committees of the BGCO and the SBC. He was a native of Louisiana.

**Deal, Denise**, 55, (BGCO Finance Team) died May 16 after battling breast cancer.

**Densman, James L.**, 62, pastor of Davis, First, died June 18 at the MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston. Prior to moving to Davis, he was pastor of Hollis, First from 1990-1999.

**Eddington, J.A. "Jay"**, 78, died July 23 in Bixby. He retired from Tulsa, Sequoyah Hills in 1994 as minister of education and administration, and was serving as a building consultant for the BGCO at the time of his death. He was a special consultant to the Sunday School Board's (now LifeWay) Church Training department.

**Forester, Mae Tichenor**, 83, retired secretary with the BGCO and wife of the late David Forester (DOM for Caddo Association), died August 18.

**Gideon, Rodney**, father of Blake Gideon (pastor of Inola, First), died August 8.

**Hall, David C.**, died February 23. Hall was a pastor of churches in Oklahoma, a member of the board of trustees for NAMB and the Annuity Board, and assisted in writing the Oklahoma liquor laws.

**Hall, Marvin Henry**, 92, died May 27 in Oklahoma City. Prior to joining the Baptist Foundation of Oklahoma in 1965, Hall served four churches as pastor. In retirement, he and his wife, Lois, established the Annie Lodoskie Moore Scholarship for OBU students in her mother's memory.

**Hall, Patti**, 74, a survivor of the 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma, died November 7. The subject of several feature articles in the *Baptist Messenger*, Hall suffered through 22 surgeries following the bombing.

**Hays, Bob**, 86, died June 1. He was the father of Mary Bauer (BGCO Executive Assistant). Hays was a pastor, school administrator, and a part-time music/education minister.

**Hays, Olive Frances**, died November 2. She was the mother of Mary Bauer (BGCO Executive Assistant). She was a secretary at Midwest City, Sooner, and worked 15 years in the religious education department of the BGCO. Hays was the last secretary to ring "Big Bertha," the bell that called campers to class at Falls Creek Baptist Conference Center.

**Helmich, Martha Jean Down**, 85, wife of retired Oklahoma pastor and director of missions Robert Helmich, died. Services were held November 19.

**Howry, Joe**, 84, died September 27. A native of Earlsboro, he served as pastor of several Oklahoma churches, and was a case worker for the Department of Human Services Child Welfare Department from 1980-92.



**Jones, Kenneth (Kenny) Wade**, 84, died August 24. Jones was a long-time employee of the BGCO. He began his career as a printer at the *Shawnee American* newspaper, and worked at OBU in the *Baptist Messenger* Press shop. In 1954 he moved to Oklahoma City to work as a linotype operator for the *Messenger*, retiring as supervisor of the BGCO print shops in 1989.

**Kirby, Della Alene Brown**, 97, died October 29. Kirby worked for the BGCO as a secretary from 1959-76. She worked in the Baptist Foundation for five years and in the executive office 12 years.

**Leavelle, J. D.**, 82, pastor of Wilson Baptist Church, died June 23. He served as pastor of churches in Texas, New Mexico and Oklahoma. He preached in international crusades in Venezuela and Malawi, Africa.

**Ledbetter, Frankie Lou Hunt**, 69, wife of Oklahoma pastor Ron Ledbetter, died October 12.

**Melton, Kathryn Evonne "Kathy"**, 55, wife of Charles Melton, pastor of OKC, Mayridge, died April 25<sup>th</sup>. She was a native of Seminole, a published writer, and served alongside her husband where he pastored.

**Milburn, Vonna Sue**, 79, widow of Lowell Milburn, who served as director of the Child Care Department for the BGCO, 1970-87, died December 4.

**Montgomery, Walter**, pastor of First Baptist Church in Slick, Oklahoma, died November 12.

**Moore, Bettie**, 88, died May 27. A BGCO retiree from the *Baptist Messenger* Office, Bettie served for 26 years under editors Jack Gritz, Richard McCartney and Glenn Brown. She was a charter member of OKC, Village Baptist Church.

**Moore, Wan E.**, 76, retired minister of education and outreach at Nicoma Park, First, died December 4. Moore worked for 25 years as personnel director and loan officer at Park State Bank in Nicoma Park prior to joining the church staff in 1989.

**Morris, Elizabeth Mae**, former employee of the Home Mission Board for many years in Oklahoma, died December 7.

**Olds, Joseph Don “Joe Don”,** 77, died September 26. Olds served as pastor of nine churches in Oklahoma and also served as BSU director at Northeastern A&M College in Miami.

**Petty, Peter Lawton,** 76, died May 24. Petty pastored three churches in Oklahoma, and served as DOM in two associations before serving in the Arkansas Baptist Convention’s missions department.

**Pidgeon, Thelma,** mother/mother-in-law of Dixie and Phil Holeman (DOM for Northeastern Baptist Association), died on May 10.

**Pilgrim, Jack C., Jr.,** 63, pastor of Sharon, First, was killed in a car accident August 25. After serving in the U.S. Air Force 8 years and in law enforcement in Oklahoma for 8 years, he entered the pastorate and served for 30 years.

**Pittman, Kenneth Odell,** 81, a staff member at Del City, First Southern, died November 13. After retiring from Tinker Air force Base in 1985 after 30 years of service, he served First Southern until present. He was the father-in-law of Keith Burkhart (BGCO Family and Men’s Ministry Specialist.)

**Post, Robert,** 85, died July 24. Born in Paterson, New Jersey, and educated at Moody Bible Institute and Julliard School of Music, he served as pastor of Tulsa, Glenwood for 20 years and was cofounder of WGBD radio station in Dominica, West Indies.

**Ragsdell, Bonnie,** mother/mother-in-law of Marsha and Russell Cook (DOM for Pott-Lincoln Association), died June 19 after a very long battle with Alzheimer’s Disease.

**Ratliff, Marie,** 83, wife of retired minister Tom Ratliff, died November 5 following a long bout with Alzheimer’s.

**Richardson, Connie Lee,** 62, daughter of Russell Richardson, former state pastor and denominational worker, died July 21 after a long battle with cancer.

**Russell, Florence,** mother of Kerry Russell, (BGCO CFO), died September 13.

**Shelby, Coy Edward**, died January 23. He was the husband of long-time education and youth minister Joyce Shelby. He was part of the Oklahoma Baptist Child Care Disaster Relief Team.

**Stewart, Dorine Hawkins**, 93, died August 9. She was Baptist Student Union director for then Oklahoma A&M from 1943-45. She served as a missionary in Brazil from 1945-76 when she resigned to marry Buford Stewart.

**Stogsdill, J.R. (James Raymond)**, 89, died January 19. He and his wife Mary Blanche were missionaries of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board (now NAMB) appointed in 1964. He was active in the Oklahoma Baptist Historical Society, and served as a member of the Oklahoma Baptist Historical Commission.

**Stone, Maskell "Max" Lee**, 92, wife of retired pastor George Stone, died May 22.

**Upchurch, Forest Aldon**, 93, director of missions in Frisco Association from 1973-86, died August 4. After surrendering to the ministry in a fox-hole in North Africa in 1942, he served as pastor of three Oklahoma churches, as well as churches in Nebraska, Wyoming and New Mexico.

**Welch, Walter D**, died and funeral services were January 16, 2011 in Duncan. He pastored several churches in Oklahoma.

**Wiginton, James Kyle**, 49, of Friendswood, Texas, died May 24 of an aggressive brain tumor. He was the son of Travis (long-time Oklahoma pastor) and La Moyne Wiginton.

**Young, Virgil**, husband of Betty Young (retiree from the BGCO Finance Team), died September 28.



# 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;  
Given by Lemuel Ball

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