

**FIRST BAPTIST
MERIDIAN, MISSISSIPPI**



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MERIDIAN, MISSISSIPPI

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Contents

Each Section Is Indexed Separately

- A. History
- B. History of First Baptist Church, Meridian
- C. First Baptist Church
- D. May 1974, Training Union Lecture
- E. June 1974, Training Union Lecture

HISTORY

The First Baptist Church, Meridian, Mississippi, organized in 1839 with a few members, has grown through the 145 years to a place of leadership in all of the Southern Baptist Convention.

The present Sanctuary is the fifth building in which the congregation of the church has worshipped. The first one located near Bonita was erected in 1839; the second on Twelfth Street and Sixteenth Avenue was built in 1854. During the War Between The States, 1861-1865, the church building was taken over by military authorities and used as a warehouse. It was in such a condition that it could not be used as a house of worship at the close of hostilities and the congregation sought other facilities.

At that time the property on which the church is now located was purchased and a frame building was erected. In 1872 the third building erected was a substantial two-story building with steeple and bell tower. In 1892 it burned just before the evening service one Sunday in May, and the building was completely destroyed. Plans for rebuilding were immediately set into motion and later that year the fourth building was completed. In it the congregation worshipped until June of 1951, when it was demolished to make way for the present magnificent Sanctuary.

HISTORY OF THE FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH MERIDIAN, MISSISSIPPI

The First Baptist Church was organized in 1839 at the Oakie Valley Baptist Church in what is now the Bonita community. During the first two decades of the life of the church, the congregation was characterized by the frontier spirit of the typical Baptist Church of this era. The pastors (or "Elders") were itinerate preachers, who traveled widely on horseback, served several churches at the same time, subject to an "annual call," and had little formal education.

The church split in 1849 over the question of whether or not to associate with other churches for the cause of the missions. The faction opposing missions died out in a few years. The faction opposing missions died out in a few years. The faction advocating missions continued as a living group until the present day.

In 1856 the church relocated in the newly established town of Meridian and changed its name to the Meridian Baptist Church. At the close of the Civil War the black membership withdrew from the church to form the New Hope Baptist Church of Meridian. In the late 1860's the church moved to its present site and erected a building, established a college, and published a weekly Baptist newspaper, distributed throughout the state.

Progressively, the pastors were more educated and experienced through the years. The church continued to grow
(continued on next page)

and exercise the Christian influence in Meridian. After the turn of the century the name was changed to the First Baptist Church of Meridian.

The present auditorium is the third to have been erected at the same location. In the last two decades the church has expanded its buildings to house the multiple ministries which have been launched in recent years. The current pastor, Dr. Beverly V. Tinnin, and his staff, Rev. David W. McCubbin and Rev. John T. Laughlin, are in their fifteenth year of service at the church.

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

The First Baptist Church of this city was organized in July, 1839, under the name of the Oakey Valley Baptist Church. For ten years, it seems, uninterrupted harmony prevailed. But early in the year 1849 there was dissension. Dissatisfaction had arisen in regard to the inconsistency of members making and retailing ardent spirits, there were differences existing upon the subject of ministerial education, and a division was the result. The majority of the members withdrew and reorganized as the original body. The question of missions no doubt also had something to do with the withdrawal as the minority branch of the organization became "anti-missionary" and dwindled away within a few years.

Elder W. P. Carter was pastor at the period of separation; Richard McLemore, deacon; and J. B. Yarbrough, clerk.

The house of worship was east of Sowashee, about three miles from where the Courthouse now stands in Meridian, and near the north end of what is now the City Reservoir at Bonita. A proposition was made in July 1851, to move the church to some point northwest of the Sowashee, but it was not favorably considered at that time.

In December 1853, Elder Carter resigned the pastorship of the church and was succeeded by Elder Isaac Spinks. At a conference held September 30, 1854, it was resolved to move the house of worship to the vicinity of McLemore's Cemetery.

committee reported by the next conference that "they had selected a site to build upon, and had procured a title to said lot, containing one acre of ground." A frame house 30x40 feet was erected on the lot, and services held regularly therein until the outbreak of the War Between the States.

Elder N. L. Clarke served as pastor from 1856 until 1859. At a meeting in 1859 the name was changed from "Oakey Valley" to Meridian Baptist Church.

Elder Clarke is said to have saved East Mississippi to the Baptists and for the kingdom of God more than any other man. He was a man of sterling qualities, deep piety, unswerving loyalty to truth and duty, and had fine qualities of leadership. Prior to his death in 1906 at the age of 95, he had organized or aided in the organization of about 100 Baptist churches. Clarke Memorial College was the fruition of the dreams of his friends.

When war came, the confederate authorities occupied the church building "as a military necessity" for the duration of the war - first as a hospital, then as a depot for commissary stores, and lastly as an ordinance room. At the date of surrender it was so much out of repair, with doors and windows gone, that it was considered unsafe as well as unfit for purposes of worship. While the church was unable financially to do the proper repair work, just then it was decided to sell the house, but retain the location and build thereon again as soon as convenient and practicable.

Meanwhile a number of Baptists from other points had moved to Meridian. They were anxious to meet statedly for worship, and there being no suitable building accessible, determined to put one up nearer to their homes. This decision was made by those who were not then connected with the church here, and without consultation therewith. Levi Hurlbutt entered into negotiations with Mr. Ragsdale and secured a location which Mr. Hurlbutt donated for, as he then supposed, a new organization. Members of the old church, hearing of the movement, proposed that said brethren unite with them until restoration of peace to the country, and as they could not get possession of their own house, they would meet with the town brethren at theirs. Such is the origin of two church sites being held by the denomination in this city. (This statement is taken from a history of the church written in May 1870 by L. A. Duncan.)

The strip of property which Mr. Hurlbutt gave was located on what is now 26th Avenue and extended from 7th to 8th Streets. (At that time 26th Avenue was known as Mississippi Street, and 8th Street was Garland Street.)

Elder J. R. Graves visited the city in the fall of 1864, and for want of other quarters, preached under an oak tree, near the corner of 8th Street and 26th Avenue. The congregation was large, and liberal subscriptions were made towards securing a meeting house. A little later a building in old Marion was bought and moved down, but it was not ready for use until the

month of the surrender. Elder W. W. Keep and Mr. Hurlbutt did much in building the new church.

The Sunday School was organized in 1865 with seven members, and with L. A. Duncan as superintendent. A number of federal soldiers attended for several months, constituting the first Bible class. By 1870 the Sunday School had 500 members, and it was estimated that nearly 1000 had been connected with it during the five years.

Elder Solomon Williams was called as pastor in November 1859. In 1865 Elder J. B. Hamberlin was called to assist Elder Williams in the pastoral duties of the church, and 1867 he became pastor.

Because of the destruction by Federal Troops, there were no longer any schools in the city. The Baptist Church, therefore, organized the Meridian Female College in a building just west of the church on 8th Street. Elder Hamberlin was President of this school. Although its name indicates that it was a college for females only, this was not the case for it took students from the primary grades on up, both boys and girls. Although many records have been lost and it is not known how long this school operated, we do know it was still in operation in 1882. Among names connected with that of the school is that of former Mayor W. W. Shearer, who was President of the Board of Trustees in 1868.

The membership of the church had included a few negroes who had been former slaves. In 1866 those negro members were

given letters of dismission and they formed the New Hope Baptist Church, still located at 26th Avenue & 13th Street.

Elder J. L. Lloyd served as pastor in 1869. Elder Theodore Whitfield became pastor in 1870.

During the pastorate of Elder Whitfield, the church was incorporated under the laws of the State of Mississippi. In 1871 construction was begun on the fourth church building. This was a two-story brick building with steeple and bell tower, located on the corner of 7th Street and 26th Avenue.

The bell in this church was rung every day at the same time, as was that of the nearby Catholic Church. It was said that the people in the neighborhood listened for these bells in order to set their clocks and watches. The story is told of one little boy, Claude Broach Hurlbutt, who was curious about the bell. One day he climbed up in the belfry, rang the bell, and then when he started back to the ground found he could not get down alone. It took the efforts of several of the neighbors to get him out of the belfry.

Elder Columbus Smith, a preacher of rare eloquence and ability, served as pastor from 1872 to 1875. Elder J. C. Foster served the next two years. He was followed by Elder W. B. Crumpton.

It was during the term of service of Elder Crumpton that Meridian had the dreadful yellow fever scourge, and his service to the stricken and bereaved during that time made him long remembered by the townspeople.

Elder C. M. Gordon succeeded Elder Crumpton. He also served at the same time as president of the Meridian Female College. He is described as an Apollo in physique, with the graces and manner of a Chesterfield, sound in doctrine, and a preacher who laid great stress on the doctrine of salvation by grace. Unfortunately, it was during his pastorate that a good deal of dissension arose in the church, which finally resulted in the withdrawal of a large group of members who organized a new church known as Calvary Baptist Church, which was located at 6th Street and 20th Avenue.

Up to this time, the pastors were designated as "Elder" but in 1879 the new pastor was called "Doctor". It was then that Dr. J. W. Bozeman began his long and notable pastorate which lasted until his death in 1895.

From its very beginning the church had been "mission minded". It is reported that during the first year of the State Mission Board, this church was the only one to make a contribution. In 1875, a young man, William Joshua David, who had been converted under the ministry of Elder Hamberlin, went out from this church, under the auspices of the Foreign Mission Board to serve as a missionary to Nigeria. This field had been closed to missions approximately ten years before due to the ill health of the missionary, Mr. Bowen, and due to Civil War both in this country and in Nigeria. Mr. David made three attempts to go before the Board was able to send him.

Some years later he returned to Meridian to again join his home church. In 1891, he, along with several other leaders of this church, saw a great need for a church in the east end of Meridian, so they peacefully withdrew and organized this new church, Fifteenth Avenue Baptist Church, with Mr. David as the first pastor.

During Dr. Bozeman's pastorate there were other evidences of a missionary spirit, for one Wednesday evening at prayer meeting \$187.00 was raised to build a Baptist Church in Brazil. Under his ministry, the first Woman's Society was organized in 1881 with Mrs. Eliza Gray, President, Miss Jennie Brown, Secretary and Mrs. Minnie Broach, Treasurer.

It was during Dr. Bozeman's ministry, too, that tragedy struck. One Sunday night in May 1892, just before the evening service, the church burned to the ground. The weather had been warm and the furnace unused for several weeks. It is presumed that in this interval sparrows had built their nests in the chimney, and when a sudden cool spell hit in May and the furnace was lighted, a spark struck this nest and resulted in the destruction. A new organ had recently been installed and some teenage boys felt they couldn't bear to see that beautiful new instrument destroyed. These boys, who were Frank Heiss, his brother Henry, and Jim O'Leary, gathered up all the hose in the neighborhood, then tried to help the fire department by climbing on a fence and playing the water on the organ, but to no avail.

Lew Carter was a little boy of six or seven years, and a member of the Sunday School at that time. He had \$5.00 and after the fire that same night, he gave the pastor this money as the first contribution toward erecting a new church. The second contribution was made by a girl's Sunday School class of which Mrs. Frank Heiss, then Elodie Carter, was a member. They gave a "mite" party on the lawn of her father's (T. C. Carter) home, charging 10cents per person admittance. Crowds came for they took in the "large" sum of \$11.00 that night.

Later that year a one-story brick building with bell tower and steeple was completed, and the name of the church changed to The First Baptist Church. It was a number of years later that the choir loft, organ, baptistry and Sunday School annex were added. Mr. I. Marks, a prominent Jew of Meridian, presented this new church a gorgeous brass chandelier for the auditorium. This was in two tiers; later, when the rear of the auditorium was opened the lower tier was taken off and made into two small chandeliers for the new section. During the first third of the twentieth century, the auditorium was redecorated and new lighting fixtures installed. The beautiful chandelier, now in three parts, was presumably stored. When members again wanted it a few years later, it had mysteriously disappeared and no trace has been found of it.

Dr. R. A. Venable, a former president of Mississippi College, followed Dr. Bozeman as pastor in 1895 and served until January, 1907. He was a great scholar and excellent speaker.

His pastorate was characterized as a period of quiet and steady growth.

Following Dr. Venable came the beloved Dr. T. J. Shipman, who served for ten years. It was during his ministry that Mrs. Alex McRaven marched into the sanctuary just before he started preaching. She was followed by several dozen children. At that time all the children under the junior age group were gathered into one small room for Sunday School. That room could no longer care for the large number of children. The congregation was challenged to do something about the situation, and under the leadership of Dr. Shipman, a new Sunday School room was built. He died in the midst of his greatest usefulness and popularity June 30, 1917. At his funeral the church was filled, not only with members of the First Baptist Church but with people of all denominations. "Never was a pastor of any church more universally beloved. The mention of his name awakens the tenderest response in the hearts of all the people of the city. Never did any minister have more of the Shepherd's heart than the beloved Tom Shipman. A generation here literally rises up to call him blessed". (From a brief history written in 1922 by Dr. L. R. Christie.)

In March 1913 came Dr. R. J. Bateman. Handsome, picturesque, and eloquent, he attracted great crowds. For a year, also, he was president of the Meridian Baptist College. This was the former Beeson College which a group of local Baptists had acquired. This college enterprise proved to be impracticable,

so it was decided to sell it to the Northern Methodists who wished to establish a college for negroes.

Dr. L. R. Christie succeeded Dr. Bateman in January 1922, serving until August 1926. His was a religion, not of theory, but of practice, for he lived the God life at all times. A new Sunday School building was erected during his stay, but more important was the influence he had on the young men and women of the church. He was also active in many civic endeavors and was beloved by the entire city. At a dinner given just before his departure, he was introduced as "Father Christie, Rabbi of the First Baptist Church". Truly an indication of cooperation between the religious groups of the city.

In October 1926, the church called Dr. J. H. Buchanan of Paris, Tennessee. He accepted and began his ministry on December 1, 1926. This was shortlived, for on March 1, 1927, he returned to Paris, feeling that he had left an unfinished task there. Even though short, his pastorate left an impact for good on the congregation.

Dr. Norman W. Cox began his pastorate on June 15, 1927, serving until September 15, 1931. During this time, the membership grew in numbers and strength. Additional property was purchased to make room for a growing Sunday School, and there was large giving to the church and missionary causes. With the consent and approval of the church, Dr. Cox spent much time in evangelistic work, preaching in many meetings and churches.

Dr. H. C. Bass became pastor on Sunday, December 6, 1931, serving until November 15, 1938. During his ministry the church had some of its greatest revivals and heard out-standing Baptist ministers of the country. When Dr. Bass arrived, the country was in the midst of the depression, the church was in debt, and collections were small. But under his leadership, the church weathered the depression and met all its obligations, finally being able to burn its bonds in a victory ceremony.

In February 1939 during the period that the church was without a pastor Evangelist Gipsey Smith, Jr., conducted a series of revival services in the First Baptist Church.

On Sunday, April 2, 1939, the church met in conference and called Dr. Norman W. Cox for a second pastorate, which he began on June 1, 1939, and held until February 1951, when he resigned to become Executive Director of the Historical Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention. These eleven and one-half years were eventful years, and years because of World War II, happy years because of the growth of the church.

In spite of building additions, buying and using adjoining property, the Sunday School was bursting at its seams, and the auditorium was getting too small to hold the congregation. At an all-church banquet at the Shrine Mosque in January 1940, nearly 500 members of the congregation stood in response to a question asked by Dr. Cox, "All who will contribute five dollars toward a fund with which to build a new Sunday School

building, please stand." The entire group had to stand for just at that point Dr. Cox had the orchestra play "Star Spangled Banner". The fund started in jest, perhaps, but to Dr. Cox it was serious, and within a few months nearly \$5,000 had been put in the treasury. Except for one concerted effort in 1949 to raise \$12,000 the building fund was given voluntarily. Ground-breaking ceremonies for the new Sunday School Building at the corner of 8th Street and 26th Avenue were held on June 6, 1949. On Mothers' Day, May 8, 1949, the building was occupied with special dedicatory services on June 26, 1949, the 110th Anniversary of the church. The new Educational Building with its furnishings cost approximately \$248,000.00, and was entirely free of debt when the congregation moved in. The adjoining sanctuary at the corner of 7th Street and 26th Avenue was started in June 1951, and completed about a year later.

During the second pastorate of Dr. Cox, property located between Grand Avenue and Roebuck Drive was purchased for a Fellowship Center. Here a small lake for swimming was constructed, a cabin was built, tables provided for picnics, and other recreational facilities were added. It was hoped that this would be used particularly by the young people of the church. When the facilities were not used to their fullest and a chance came some ten years later to sell the property, the church voted to take that action.

For many years music was provided by a paid quartet of mixed voices, supplemented by a few volunteer choir members. During

Dr. Cox's second pastorate, changes were made and instead of the paid quartet a Minister of Music was employed, with volunteer members composing the choir. This has grown from one choir, of adults, to six choirs today ranging in age from tiny tots of three and four years to the adults.

Dr. Cox was followed in July 1951 by Dr. Walter L. Moore who served until December 15, 1959. Under his leadership the church grew numerically, financially, and spiritually. His work with the young people was outstanding, for many under his guidance volunteered for Christian service. Dr. Moore was one of the most consecrated of all the pastors this church has known and considered one of the really great men of the denomination, not only by Baptists but by those of other faiths.

During Dr. Moore's ministry, two mission churches were established, one at Meehan and the other at Lauderdale. For several years a group went from First Baptist Church to Meehan each Sunday to teach Sunday School classes. That mission is now an independent church.

After Dr. Moore's departure, the church had no regular pastor for almost a year and one half. Mr. P. A. (Red) Michel was Minister of Education and he stayed on for about a year to help lead the congregation, with Dr. Leo Eddleman, President of the New Orleans Seminary, serving as Interim Pastor. But Mr. Michel felt the call to the "Preaching" ministry and was ordained by the church. On November 30, 1960, he left to become pastor of the Baptist Church in Charleston, Mississippi. Dr. Eddleman

had other commitments which prevented his coming every Sunday to hold services, so Dr. Lowry Compere, President of Clarke Memorial College in Newton, Mississippi, became, in his words, "Interim Interim Pastor". In addition to coming for the Sunday services, he also conducted Prayer Meeting on Wednesday evenings after Dr. Michel's departure.

Committees were set up to see that every phase of church activity functioned. Through the work of consecrated laymen and lay-women, the church continued with no noticeable diminishing in interest. One of these laymen was George Ethridge, Chairman of the Board of Deacons. He spent so much of his time around the church office that the secretaries began referring to him among themselves as "Dr. Ethridge". One day in a Church Council Meeting, one of the young ladies forgot and addressed him as "Dr. Ethridge", much to her embarrassment and his amusement.

A pulpit committee worked long and hard during these months, trying to find just the right man as Pastor.

On May 1, 1961, Dr. Beverly Tinnin arrived to begin his pastorate. On August 15 of the same year, Rev. David McCubbin, Associate Pastor and Minister of Education and Rev. John Laughlin, Minister of Music and Youth Director, arrived. Under the leadership of these fine men, the church continues to grow.

In addition to serving as Minister of Music, "Brother John" (as he is called by most people) is doing excellent work with the young people. He is assisted in this work during the summer

months by a Summer Youth Director.

The officers and teachers of the Sunday School meet in the hour between Family Night Supper and Prayer Meeting each Wednesday in the various departments for the purpose of studying together the next Sunday's lesson, as well as to discuss departmental plans. During this same period, the Girl's Auxiliary, Royal Ambassadors, and some of the children's choirs meet. For those who do not belong to any of these various groups, there is an "Others" class conducted by the Pastor, at which time lectures or quizzes about the Bible or other subjects are given. The present Sunday School Superintendent is Dr. M. L. Flynt, Junior.

For a number of years there has been a class in Sunday School and in the Training Union for the deaf people of our city. Miss Mary Wolfe comes over each Sunday from Clarke College to interpret the sermons for this group. These people take an active part in the services, "singing" along with the rest of the congregation. On occasion, they have presented a special number for the services, presenting their message of song in sign language.

During September 1962, the sanctuary was repainted and beautiful stained glass windows depicting the life of Christ were installed.

When more Sunday School space was needed during the second pastorate of Dr. Norman Cox, it was decided to use the parsonage, at that time on the corner of 8th Street and 26th Avenue as

Sunday School building. Instead of building a new parsonage, it was decided to give the pastor a monthly rental allowance. This procedure continued until the latter part of Dr. Moore's pastorate when the church built a new home in Magnolia Gardens for the Minister of Education, and bought a house in Northwood to be used as a pastorium. This house was sold during the period of having no pastor. In July 1962 a beautiful new residence on Country Club Drive was completed for the pastor. About the same time a house was bought in Druid Hills for the Minister of Music.

With continued growth, there comes a cry of "more room needed" so after many months of meeting and working the Building Committee presented plans for a new brick building to be erected on 8th Street for Sunday School rooms with a floor of one wing to be used for recreation. On October 17, 1962, the church members voted an appropriation of \$370,655.36 to cover the cost of this building plus some needed changes in the present building, and the installation of an elevator. Ground-breaking for this new building is scheduled for November 4, 1962.

On October 21, 1962, the budget for 1963 amounting to \$184,715.29 was adopted. This is the largest budget in the history of the church. Of this amount, \$50,000.00 has been allocated to the Cooperative Program and \$40,000.00 to the Building Fund.

It is impossible to mention all those people who had a part in helping First Baptist Church to grow through the years.

There are a few whose part has been outstanding. One of these was William Harris Hardy, who was a member during the last half of the nineteenth century. Although the actual dates are unavailable, we find that he was President of the Mississippi State Baptist Convention for six consecutive years, and Vice President of the Southern Baptist Convention for one year. For many years he was Superintendent of the First Baptist Sunday School, and also taught the Adult Bible Class. Many ministers visiting the church, hearing of his novel (then) teaching method, attended his class. He was the first to introduce the lecture system in teaching.

Perhaps no one person had an influence on more teenage boys in Meridian than the beloved Mrs. Annie Chiles who died in 1950. For sixty years she taught these boys in Sunday School, and many of them have become leading business and professional men. She used nature to interpret the Bible and relate Christ to her boys. She drove an ancient Dodge automobile for many, many years and it was her pleasure to load this car with her boys and take them on nature hunts or picnics. When she was not taking these boys somewhere, it was her pleasure to again fill the car, this time with elderly ladies, widowed or lame, who otherwise could not have had the opportunity to ride around the countryside.

L. Alexander Duncan was ordained deacon in 1864 and became church treasurer. He was the first Superintendent of the Sunday School, and it was he who left a record (written in 1870) of the early church.

The late Dr. and Mrs. John A. Hackett, parents of Oswald Hackett, were outstanding members around the turn of the century. Before her marriage, Mrs. Hackett served at her own expense as a city missionary in New Orleans. After she and her husband moved to Meridian, she worked with the women of the church in all their undertakings. Dr. Hackett had been pastor of three of the largest Baptist churches in the south, and came to Meridian to edit the Baptist Record. His family joined the First Baptist Church, left it to help organize Fifteenth Avenue Baptist Church, and later came back to First Baptist Church. On his 90th birthday, October 13, 1922, he was invited to preach in this church and was presented ninety silver dollars by friends in the congregation. It is said that he was still strong and vigorous for a man of that great age, and his sermon that day went on and on, practically wearing the congregation out. But they stayed with him to the very end of the long sermon.

Albert S. Bozeman, Sr., 98 years old, is known as the Dean of the Deacons, having been a deacon of this church for sixty years. He still helps teach the Baraca Class for men. For thirty years he served as Superintendent of Sunday School, and was Church Clerk for a time.

John Robert Whitaker was a deacon from 1918 until his death in the summer of 1962. From 1925 until he resigned in 1958 at the age of 84, he was a teacher of twelve-year old boys. It had been estimated that over one hundred boys were converted

under his leadership. His is the unique record of being present with lesson prepared every Sunday since September 15, 1927, until the Sunday before his death. A few years ago, he even got up from a hospital bed to preserve that record.

The late Miss Eunice Harris served as organist from time to time, over a total period of thirty years. Part of that time she was also choir director.

Another outstanding musician was Mrs. Mamie C. Crumpton, who served as organist and choir director for approximately ten years, beginning under Dr. Bateman and leaving soon after Dr. Cox started his first pastorate.

Following Miss Harris's resignation in March 1946, Mrs. Valerie Bosarge became organist, and continues in that position at the present time.

Descendants of many of the early members are still active in the First Baptist Church. Among these are B. J. Carter, James Frilick and Mrs. John W. Weems, descendants of Richard McLemore; Frank Heiss, Mrs. Carrie Fitzgerald, Mrs. Hannes Broach Flynt and her two sons, Mrs. Betty Broach Dear and her children and Miss Jeanne Broach, descendants of Levi Hurlbutt; Albert S. Bozeman, Sr., Albert S. Bozeman, Jr., Mrs. Ross White and her children, descendants of Dr. J. W. Bozeman (Drs. Flynt, Mrs. Dear and Miss Broach are also descended from Dr. Bozeman); Mr. Lawrence McRaven and Miss Rebel McRaven, great-nephew and great-neice of Mr. L. A. Duncan.

During the second pastorate of Dr. Cox, two of the young women of the church went out as Foreign Missionaries, Miss Georgia Mae Ogburn and Mrs. Dorothy Gilbert Hicks. Both went to the country of Chile. Mrs. Hicks has now come back to the United States and is now working in a Spanish language publishing house operated by the Foreign Mission Board in El Paso, Texas.

Among the young men who have been ordained by the First Baptist Church into the ministry are Dan Cameron, Tom Douglas, Perrin H. Cook, Ernest L. King, Earl Crawford, Jack Causey, Walter L. Moore, Jr., and P. A. Michel, of which the last two named are still continuing their studies.

The late Edwin McMorries, father of Mrs. Lawrence McRaven, was for a long time the Church Treasurer. He was also President of the First National Bank. During this period, the church was without a pastor. Someone asked Mr. McMorries what was to be done about getting a new preacher. His reply was, "I don't know what the rest of you are going to do, but I am going to do Nothing. The church is \$1500.00 overdrawn at the bank and until that is paid I will not try to find a pastor." The people immediately got busy and paid the overdraft, and then went to work to find a preacher.

There were lean years and rich years, and many ways were taken to raise funds with which to operate the church. The women gave rummage sales, ice cream suppers and other activities. In February 1946, "God's Plan of Giving" in raising the budget

was instigated. This "plan" was following the Biblical injunction to "bring all your tithes into the storehouse". This is proving the best way to raise funds.

From a tiny beginning, the First Baptist Church has grown to a large organization. The main building, plus several nearby houses and parking lot that the church owns, is worth approximately three quarters of a million dollars. It has programs for all age groups, from the Cradle Roll through to the golden age. Cradle roll workers visit the mother and her new baby the day the little one is born, and additional workers follow the child through all stages of life on into adulthood. This training is carried on through the Sunday School, Training Union, Brotherhood, and Women's Missionary Union. There is an accredited kindergarten for pre-school children with Mrs. L. C. Spencer as the first director and Mrs. Russell Connelly as the present director. A library provides good reading material for all age groups. There is a prayer room, open twenty-four hours a day where the lonely or troubled can come for a period of quiet meditation. In recent summers a Summer Youth Director has been provided to help the young people of the church find wholesome means of recreation as well as teach them to better serve as young Christians.

An efficient office staff, hostess, maids and janitor, plus many, many members of the congregation who give freely of their time and talents help this organization continue to grow in its work of winning lost souls to Christ.

AS OF 11/2/62

INDEX

Bass, Dr. H. C.	11	Hardy, William Harris	17
Bateman, Dr. R.J.	9,19	Harris, Miss Eunice	19
Bosarge, Mrs. Valerie	19	Heiss, Frank	7,19
Bowen, Mr. (missionary)	6	Heiss, Henry	7
Bozeman, Albert S., Jr.	19	Heiss, Mrs. Frank	8
Bozeman, Albert S., Sr.	18-19	Hicks, Mrs. Dorothy Gilbert	20
Broach, Miss Jeanne	19	Hurlbutt, Claude Broach	5
Broach, Mrs. Minnie	7	Hurlbutt, Levi	3,4,19
Brown, Miss Jennie	7		
Buchanan, Dr. J. H.	10	Keep, Elder W. W.	4
		King, Ernest L.	20
Cameron, Dan	20		
Carter, B. J.	19	Laughlin, Rev. John	14
Carter, Elder W. P.	1	Lloyd, Elder J. L.	5
Carter, Elodie	8		
Carter, Lew	8	McCubbin, Rev. David	14
Carter, T. C.	8	McLemore, Richard	1,19
Causey, Jack	20	McMorris, Edwin	20
Chiles, Mrs. Annie	17	McRaven, Miss Robel	19
Christie, Dr. L. R.	10	McRaven, Lawrence	19
Clark, Elder N. L.	2	McRaven, Mrs. Alex	9
Compere, Dr. Lowry	14	Marks, I.	8
Connelly, Mrs. Russell	21	Michel, P. A. (Red)	13-
Cook, Perrin H.	20	14,20	
Cox, Dr. Norman W.	10-	Moore, Dr. Walter L.	13,16
13, 15,20		Moore, Dr. Walter L., Jr.	20
Crawford, Earl	20		
Crumpton, Elder W. B.	5-6	O'Leary, Jim	7
Crumpton, Mrs. Mamie C.	19	Ogburn, Miss Georgia Mae	20
David, William Joshua	6-7	Shearer, Mayor W. W.	4
Dear, Mrs. Betty Broach	19	Shipman, Dr. T. J.	9
Douglas, Tom	20	Smith, Elder Columbus	5
Duncan, L. Alexander	3,17,19	Smith, Gipsy, Jr. (Evangelist)	11
		Spencer, Mrs. L. C.	21
Eddleman, Dr. Leo	13		
Ethridge, George	14	Tinnin, Dr. Beverly	14
Fitzgerald, Mrs. Carrie	19	Weems, Mrs. John W.	19
Flynt, Dr. M. L., Jr.	15	Whitaker, John Robert	18-19
Flynt, Mrs. Hannes Broach	19	White, Mrs. Ross	19
Foster, Elder J. C.	5	Whitfield, Elder	5
Frilick, James	19	Williams, Elder Solomon	4
		Wolfe, Miss Mary	15
Gordan, Elder C. M.	6		
Graves, Elder J. R.	3	Yarbrough, J. B.	1
Gray, Mrs. Eliza	7		
Hackett, Dr. & Mrs. John A.	18		
Hamberlin, Elder J. B.	4,6		

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH
MERIDIAN, MISSISSIPPI

NOTES TRANSCRIBED FROM A TAPE MADE BY JOHN ARMISTEAD
AT TRAINING UNION
MAY 19, 1974

Tapes 1, 2 and 3 Defective

Just to remind you, in the first session we covered a period of time from 1839 to 1865 or 1866 and in my thinking I no less classify this as the frontier period. We were a country church and we've reiterated that. In the church we built up a membership of almost 60 members when it came to town, but nevertheless for some years it was still a country church.

Last week we covered a period of time from '66 or '65 up until the year '79 and during this period of time Meridian Baptist Church, as we were known, becomes in every sense of the word, I guess you might say, a town church. We're still not up town too far but our character has changed quite a bit and a lot of that is, of course, because of the type of ministers that we've had. During the frontier period we had had highly, how should I say it, highly uneducated but I don't know if that's the proper way to say it, let's just say, men who were farmers who preached for a time. During this next period of time, up until '79 during the reconstruction era, we began to have men who are much more sophisticated in their education. They are much more erudite, they have greater range of experience, but these men are not primarily here to pastor our church. They only give it their part time duties and their part time efforts. Rather, they're here to administer the Meridian Female College which is a Baptist college. But in the year '79 we have a man who comes, Dr. Bozeman, J.W. Bozeman, who (CONTINUED NEXT PAGE)

comes to give his full energies & his full efforts to the church. I say this is the beginning of another era because most of the pastors we've had before this time were here on their way to somewhere else. This was a, you might say, a stepping stone, a stopping off place, or something like that. They didn't come to invest their life's ministry in our church, at least not judging by the length of time they stayed here which was anywhere from six months to two or three years. Dr. Bozeman, however, comes for sixteen years. And most all the pastors hereafter with the exception of two are going to stay for, say, a minimum of ten years. Dr. Bateman, I believe, only stayed three and Dr. Cannon stayed six months, but that's another story. Now Dr. Bozeman, as I said, was a man of great education and great experience. He was from Alabama and he'd gone to the Central Institute there in Alabama for his, say, college prep. He attended the University of Virginia, was ordained in '64 and then he pastored a lot of little country churches before coming back down to this section of the country and to Mississippi where he was pastoring at Aberdeen. It's interesting that Dr. Z. T. Leavell's contemporary account of the time puts it this way, that the Aberdeen church had not sufficient strength to demand Dr. Bozeman's full time and consequently he was teaching school and pastoring several other churches during the ten years that he was there, but he was doing an outstanding job to such an extent that during the year '78 the University of Mississippi asked him to come up and deliver their commencement exercise address, which he did, and the University then awarded

him the honorary doctorate degree. Bozeman thus becomes the first man that we have as a pastor who has a doctorate degree, albeit it's an honorary degree, some of the other men who pastored here before him went on later to get honorary degrees but he was the first one to have an honorary degree. It's interesting to note, I'm sure Dr. Tinnin won't mind too much if I just throw this in, all of our pastors after Dr. Bozeman do have honorary doctorate degrees and til we come to Dr. Tinnin who is the first one we have with an earned doctorate degree which puts him up on a plateau of erudition a little bit higher than the rest of us. So Dr. Bozeman did come. He's different from the other men that have been here previously too. He's quite involved in the state Baptist life - the life of Baptists throughout the state of Mississippi. In the year '70 he had preached the annual introductory sermon at the State Baptist Convention. So he's highly looked upon by the other ministers and the denominational leaders. I would like to read just briefly a contemporary passage of Dr. Z. T. Leavell who is describing what Dr. Bozeman looks like. Now I have a picture of Dr. Bozeman right here, you can't see it too well, it looks a little bit like Robert E. Lee. He is the last minister that we had with a full beard up until the year 1974. Dr. Leavell says, "Dr. Bozeman is short of stature, has dark eyes and hair, had a quiet manner at the pulpit, is reticent in company is blessed with four sons and two daughters, who, with his wives, have been helpful in his ministry and an honor to his name." Now by way of explanation he had only one wife at a time, but as there was a high infant mortality

rate in this era, there was also a high wife mortality rate and he went through three or four. Now, many things I realize Dr. Bozeman says, that he was a very quiet man, but a man that apparently had that quiet dignity that people respected quite a bit. Now he comes to Meridian and Meridian has already built this imposing building, 45' by 83'. It's two stories, the sanctuary being on the upper story and the lower floor for the Sunday School teaching. Sunday Schools had been developing primarily for children in mind during this era of the latter part of the 19th Century. Meridian was a booming town in this period of time. The population while Dr. Bozeman was here moved from 4,000 just up to around 10,000 to 12,000 depending on what census you read, becomes the second largest city in the state. A decade later will become the largest populated town in the state. Times were more stable. This is an era of the redeemers, of L.Q.C. Lamar, when he had put into operation his politics of fusion, as he called it, by splitting the black and white Republicans and joining the black Republicans with his white Democrats and appointing many black people to certain offices in order that he consolidates politics in Mississippi and he rises up to be a great and powerful figure, but all through the seventies, remember, Meridian has been a rough and tumble place by virtue of the fact this was the reconstruction era. But beginning with the eighties we have a stable political climate and it becomes safe to walk the streets once more. It's a period of time when Meridian begins paving its downtown streets with bricks, they're laying in sewerage system, the first electric (continued next page)

railroad is being set up for street cars. Meridian up until this time has been primarily an agricultural center but now it is going to diversify and become a lumber industry center as well as agriculture. It was during this period of time when Meridian is re-building or actually building the Victorian gingerbread houses, which there are so many are gone now but they still lie in the downtown area Meridian; this is a change in Southern architecture from the colonial type for some of the people are sort of fusing the colonial architecture with the gingerbread look. Downtown no more frame buildings can be built but only brick buildings and so when you walk around the old districts of Meridian you see these buildings which were built in the eighties and nineties because then the ordinance had been passed. Young people for diversion like to get on a winding road going north of Meridian in their wagons sometime through the mud and go way, way out 3 miles or more until they come to a place where a man by the name of Barker has a wagon yard where farmers spend the night on the way to Meridian. Down in a little hollow on the other side of his house there's a spring that bubbles out of the roots of a poplar tree and he built a dance pavillon there and so the young people ride out that road to go to the dance pavilion and to have a good time and the road, of course, becomes known as Poplar Springs Road or later Poplar Springs Drive. The little hollow was right behind the Poplar Springs Drive Methodist Church. His house was right about where the Heritage is now or right about 39th Street. By the year '82 our college that we were running was in trouble.

The reason is that reconstruction period had set up a public school as I mentioned last time and the public schools then were becoming so successful and we Southerners forgot that we didn't start them. We were building old Big Central up here where the Confederate hospital had been during the Civil War and then a Confederate Cemetery. We've moved those graves, built Big Central and later, of course, it was torn down and the teenage canteen was built, but the public schools then began to supply the need of educating children in Meridian so our college went out of business and closed down in '82. By 1885 we had 243 members. ...also closed down in '75. I forgot to mention that last time. We had figured that we had educated or rather had brought up most all the orphans. This wasn't really true, but the orphanage ran out of money and they still had 105 orphans to find homes for. They were the orphans of Conference(?) veterans. Our church though was really taking a part in the Baptist Convention life in Mississippi during this era. Actually when you read many of the writings that are talking about Baptist life in this era, writings that are coming out of people who were pastoring in Central Mississippi and in Western Mississippi, they say there is not much cooperation with the Baptists in East Mississippi and I have been ferreting in trying to find out exactly what the causes of tension are and I'm beginning more and more to see what the tension was about between East Mississippi and Central Mississippi where, say, Jackson, Clinton, would be and South Mississippi. But nevertheless we were quite active on convention life as a whole. In fact, we were so active that this little Baptist (continued next page)

paper we had here in Meridian called The Southern Baptist which was competing with the Baptist paper that J.D. Gambrell had started in Clinton called The Baptist Record, the competition was so severe that our paper began to inch up a little bit and finally the convention decided let's consolidate the two so they brought The Baptist Record over here to Meridian. Meridian got the location and Clinton got the name, called it The Baptist Record. It was published here in Meridian with J.D. Gambrell as editor. In the late nineties, '98 in fact, it was decided to move the paper to Jackson. The reason, one of the primary reasons that we were so deeply involved in convention life or Baptist life on the state level as we never had before during this period of time that the basic reason can be summed up in one name, W.H. Hardy. He was probably one of the most outstanding laymen that this church has ever produced. He had been a captain in the Civil War and like most men with the rank of captain or better he maintained his rank until he died after the turn of the century. He was an attorney, an imposing, impressive man, being six foot tall, he was extremely eloquent. He was called by one writer of the last century as the most eloquent speaker that Baptists had ever produced in Mississippi. He came to Meridian in the year 1872 something of an entrepreneur with the idea of establishing a railroad from New Orleans to Meridian. Meridian already had a railroad down to Vicksburg but he wanted to build one from New Orleans to Meridian and everybody thought this was really a foolish idea because it meant you would have to build a bridge across Lake Ponchartrain, but Hardy thought (continued on next page)

it could be done and he did it. He was a man I said who was an entrepreneur, he could spot the need of services when he came into a community and then he could roll the funds to supply these needs. Consequently, when he came to Meridian in '72 he saw we didn't have any gas lights, everybody had to have gas lights, so he set up a gas light company which supplied the lighting for a lot of homes and for the offices and businesses and for the streets of Meridian. Meridian, he felt didn't have an adequate bank so he established the Meridian National Bank. He was outstanding as a Mason, he became the grand master of Masons of Mississippi. He decided to build another railroad from Meridian down to the Gulf in order to get the lumber out of the Meridian area. And so he started building this railroad. About 80 miles south of Meridian he thought there was a need for another little town so he built a town and he named it after his wife who was on our church roll for this era. Her name was Hattie Hardy, so he called the town Hattiesburg. When he got down to the coast he was calling this railroad the Gulf and Ship Island Railroad. His plan was to build a rail-road all the way out to Ship Island over the Gulf, but he decided this wasn't really feasible, that it was more practical to channel in from Ship Island in to the shore, but he needed another town. So he built another one and he called in Gulfport. Now, I've just mentioned some of the other things that he was doing. He was also a great leader in our church and a great leader in the state convention life of Baptists during this period of time. For ten years he was a trustee of Mississippi College and he was also president of (continued next page)

the Mississippi Baptist Convention for six years, from '80 to '86, and during this period of time he was also vice-president of the Southern Baptist Convention. He was, in the history that Dr. R.A. McLemore, probably our foremost Baptist historian in the state at this time had written, along with a section written by our executive secretary, Earl Kelly, calls W.H. Hardy one of the two giants of the eighties and nineties in Mississippi Baptist Life. The other giant, of course, was J.D. Gambrell, the man who was our executive secretary of the state and was later to become president of the Southern Baptist Convention. He was the editor of The Baptist Record and, as he put it, he would go right almost to the beginning of the early 1900s to do missionary work in Texas and to become a Baptist leader there. These two giants looming on the horizon were going to have a great clash in this church, right here. Because, I think, Hardy was president he managed to have the State Convention meet in this church about three out of the six years that he was president. At 92, however, he wasn't president any longer but he was a man of tremendous and powerful influence. A great controversy had been looming on the horizon of convention politics and it was going to be decided at the '92 convention to be held in our church. The problem was this - Mississippi College. They had run into financial difficulty and they hadn't paid their faculty for almost a year. The president over there they thought, the president had only been there for about a year now taking Dr. Webb's place who had died, they didn't think he was doing a very good job. His name was Dr. R.A. Venable. Hardy wanted to move (continued next page)

the college to Meridian. He got the citizens of Meridian to put up \$50,000 which would bail the college out of financial trouble. He got a man in this community to say he would donate twenty acres of land to build the college right here outside the city limits. The convention was just about ready to make the move to save the college and Hardy stood up and he made a tremendously impressive speech to have the college moved over here to Meridian. On the other hand J.D. Gambrell stood up and he made an equally impressive, maybe a little bit more impressive, speech about why the college should stay in Clinton. And so the convention at that time decided not to remove the college but rather to wait a little while. They fought about this through The Baptist Record, article after article, debating on one side or the other for about three years and finally J.D. Gambrell almost desperate for money to save the college and keep it in Clinton went up to Chicago where he talked with a dedicated Baptist layman up there who agreed to give Mississippi College enough money to bail her out of trouble and that Baptist layman, of course, was John D. Rockefeller. So he bailed out Mississippi College and Mississippi College stayed in Clinton and Meridian was somewhat miffed. And during this period of time the president of Mississippi College had sided with Hardy and the Meridian group, Dr. Venable, So in '95 the Board of Trustees is going to oust Dr. Venable in Mississippi College. Well, that's getting a little bit ahead. This convention met early in '92. In May of '92, about this time, they had a cold snap. Some of the little old ladies that morning in the church service must have said it's too cold in

here, you ought to build a fire, so they built a fire. They assumed that perhaps during the spring some birds had built nests in the chimneys; consequently when they came back to the evening services the church had burned down. Meridian only had a volunteer fire department at that time and, of course, they were using horse-drawn wagons. I'm sure some of you may even remember some of them. I'm moving into a period of time I know that becomes living history for a great many of you. Well, the church burned down and there's nothing like a great catastrophe such as this to unify and solidify a people and so God's people here in this church came together right away and began rebuilding the church. Children gave what they saved in their piggy banks, adults reached deeply into their pockets, the entire community, in fact, responded to the rebuilding of the church at which time they built the church that many of you remember. However, it didn't have when they rebuilt it a baptistry, a choir loft or a Sunday School annex. The Jewish Synagogue which had been down where Tutor and Semmes Pharmacy is now which before that has Albright & Woods and before that was, what was the name of that big tall building, Mize and Woods. Jewish Synagogue had been down there and they had to move because of the people parking there on Saturday when they were trying to have services when all their mules was causing too much so they decided to move their synagogue up the street and I'm not sure but someone told me that the chandelier that we eventually put in this church that Isaac Marks gave us came out of that old synagogue. This church (continued next page)

had a chandelier that many of you remember. As yet we've had no confirmation of exactly what happened to it but we do have several strong suspicions. One of them is that it was just given back to the Jewish people and some of them sold it to somebody else but I know that many of you wondered what happened to that beautiful brass chandelier that was cut up in pieces of scrap the church. Well, the church membership now had moved up quite a bit, to 375. Dr. Bozeman was not a very old man, maybe old for that day and age, 62, and in 1895 he died. It was a massive funeral, all the ministers in town participated. The church was without a pastor and there was a man in Clinton without a position, Dr. R. A. Venable. So our church remembered Dr. Venable with a great deal of favor in that he had wanted to move the college to Meridian. Dr. Venable then was called to become our pastor. His period of time at Mississippi College had indeed been stormy. He had run into so much controversy that when he came to Meridian I'm sure he was seeking a quiet pastorate and to a great extent he achieved that. He was a big man from what I read, over 200 pounds. Let's see, here's Dr. Venable, but I think that picture was probably made several years after he came here 'cause he wouldn't have been quite that old when he came here. He died in '33. (lady said he was pastor two different times in Hickory. Johnny said he would mention that part of his life in just a minute.) He had graduated from Mississippi College and very strategically had married the president of Mississippi College daughter, Dr. Webb, and pastored several small churches and then he went up to First

Baptist Church of Memphis and he was there for ten years. He was the most outstanding layman, of course, with J.R. Graves, ordained minister & leader in our denomination during that period of time. He then came to Mississippi College in '91 when Dr. Webb died. He was the heir apparent. And then, of course, I talked about the stormy time he had at Mississippi College and he came here in '95. Well, he was still recognized by the entire convention as an outstanding man. He was asked at this period of time to preach the annual sermon at the Southern Baptist Convention. And then we ran into Martinism controversy in Southern Mississippi around the year '97. Martinism started in the Mississippi association in southwest Mississippi. There were some preachers, a man in particular by the name of Martin, who had begun preaching in the churches in such a way, basically without going into it in great detail, he was telling the people 'if you have doubt that you have been saved and if you do not have the fervent spirit that I have you are not a Christian and you need to come to me to be baptized' and they were coming by the scores to be rebaptized. Well, the Baptists throughout the rest of the state did not like this at all, this rebaptism. A great controversy then began to wage and in those days they like to debate things so they tried to establish a great debate with Martin expressing his views and then the leaders of the convention looked around for a man to express most, views of Southern Baptists and they selected Dr. Venable. Dr. Venable had had all the controversy he wanted. He said thanks but no thank you and so he ignored the controversy (continued next page)

and, of course, eventually the convention condemned it. He stayed on in Meridian then until 1907, he resigned, or rather he said he was retiring but he retired into the presidency of Clarke College and pastored several small churches (man said he pastored in Decatur about 1917). He pastored many small churches around here, he had a home here and lived here until his death in '33. I think he got all the controversy he wanted in the '90's and he was very, very intelligent as reflected in . . . (a lady said his home was where the steak house is and something which I could not understand). I'm going to run on now, I'm not going too much further and wrap it up. Dr. Shipman, of course, came, an elusive man; other than the fact that he had a doctorate degree I don't

know anything about his background except that he was from Virginia. I'm sure that many of you remember him, were baptised by him and was a man who was dearly loved. He pastored our church for ten years, he built the Sunday School annex. Then his health failed and he went to Richmond, Virginia, where he died. Here was our third pastor who died in office and we had every minister in town almost come to the memorial service that was held here because he was actually buried in Richmond and spoke at that service, Protestant, Catholic and Jew. He was a greatly loved man. 1917 through this era really through this time marks the end of an era in our church life. Briefly I'm just going to mention what the church life was about during the nineties. Our ladies were holding bazaars and carnivals to raise money. They played rook when they gathered together for their W.M.U. meetings and they discussed (continued next page)

such weighty subjects as in the year 1898, "speaking to strangers in our church was discussed and we decided that it would be well for each member to speak to strangers when she thought it proper". It was a period of time when the W.M.U. could still appropriate seventy cents to buy Christmas turkey for Dr. Shipman.

With the money they were raising they bought the pulpit furniture. They decided that it wasn't so nice for everybody to drink out of the same communion cup so they paid \$52.00 to buy communion cups for the church, individual cups. They cleaned the carpet, they kept paying the salary of the organist. In 1906 they got upset that the church was so dirty and they appointed a committee to talk to the deacons about it if they could do something about it. Our church was still exercising discipline during this period of time, some of you may remember it. We spoke of it as withdrawing the hand of fellowship. We did that when someone joined a church of another denomination and at least one time in 1916 we withdrew the hand of fellowship from someone for conduct unbecoming -- I won't mention who it was, it might be someone's father. In 1916 the church officially changed its name, though for about 20 years we'd been calling ourselves unofficially First Baptist Church, and everybody else had but we finally decided to officially change the church to First Baptist Church. In 1918 we established the rotation of deacons and in 1918 we bought Beeson College which we helped for a few months, decided it was not feasible and let it go. Dr. Bateman came in 1918 and I'm going to break off there. It's the end of an era I say because during (continued next page)

this period of time, the eighties, the nineties and the first 14 years of the twentieth century, people believed in inevitable progress and everything was getting better, the world was getting better, we were involved in prohibition, national prohibition, state prohibition, local prohibition. This was the time when the YWCA, YMCAs, were formed, all the temperance unions, all our missionary societies, Sunbeams, YWAs and all that and this was the time when the United Daughters of the Confederacy was formed, King's Daughters and every kind of school you can think of. An era of progress. And our church when you read contemporary accounts of the time reflects an aura of progress and optimism that the world is on the upsurge. Then 1914 came in Europe and 1917, 1918 in this country and anyone who didn't lose their idea of progress and optimism then certainly lost it in 1929 which brought us back to a period more - a different kind of reality. I'm going to cut off there. We're out of time but I think this is the end of an era and maybe at a later time we can come back and pick it up from there.

5TH TAPE

Briefly I would like to remind you of what we talked about last time so that we can contrast that period with the period we are going to talk about tonight. Now tonight is really a diversified period of time. I am attempting tonight rather hurriedly without quite the rambling around I have done previously to cover almost as much ground or, say as much period of time in this one (continued next page)

session as I covered in 3 sessions previously so you can see we are going to move along at a rather hurried pace so that we can bring this to a conclusion tonight. But last time we were talking about the period of the 1880s, '90s, first two decades of the twentieth century we spoke of the general overall theme in our country and among our people as being that of a feeling of optimism, feeling of inevitable progress, sort of a happy, bright outlook on everything, business was prospering, etc., and these were the days when the church had moved to the forefront to be one of the leading Baptist churches in our convention and in the state Baptist life. It was the time when Dr. Bozeman was pastoring in the '80s and early '90s. Dr. Venable came to pastor, remember, and then Dr. Shipman who died and we're moving now on up to 1918 was where I broke off last time after briefly mentioning that Dr. Robert J. Bateman had come to be pastor. I'm talking about living history for many of you that some of you were baptized by the men that we are going to be talking about tonight. Dr. Bateman came from a church in Troy, Alabama, in 1918 and he was an extraordinary man in many ways though I can't find much concrete information about him other than what people say, like he was very smart, was very handsome and he was a very great leader, etc., but as yet I have not been able to ferret out some basic information about his background. He was a very eloquent speaker and, of course, I do know something about the history of his ministry after leaving this church, well I'm going to mention what kind of orator, what kind of preacher he undoubtedly was. He came here in 1918 and at

that time the church was trying to get back into the education business and Beeson College, as many of you remember, my grandmother was a graduate of Beeson, who was in our worship service this evening, and maybe some of you know people or your mothers or someone did at least. Beeson, named after Dr. Beeson, went out of business in 1918 and our church bought the college which at that time originally was started where the Scottish Rite Cathedral is now that burned down in 1903 and moved out to what use to be known as College Heights where some of you may live around Highland Avenue. We bought that college in 1918 when it had gone out of business. Dr. Beeson had left and with him that dynamic leadership. We didn't have anybody particularly to give it that kind of leadership so we kept the college for a few months. Dr. Bateman was president of the college but his heart was not in being a college president, his heart was in being a pastor so we than sold the college to the Northern Methodists who were going to establish a school for Negroes. Well, Dr. Bateman when he came here our church had been moving in the realm of increasing membership, having nice facilities, etc., of having a greater outreach in ministry, but we still had sort of a haphazard organizational structure within the church itself and Dr. Bateman began to sort of tighten up the organization of the church so that the resources of the church, both financially and in terms of person power would be more effectively used. Prior to this time we'd only had church conferences once a year. Now theoretically the church went into conference every time someone was received for membership and we were to take a vote on membership. Theoretically we went into (continued next page)

conference, but actually it was only a conference as we would know a business meeting that we have every month. It was only held once a year. At that time we had a report from the Sunbeams, a report from the Women's Mission Societies, a report from the men's organizations and the Sunday School, etc., the BYPU, and so forth and so on. Well, he moved the conferences to once a quarter which was quite a renovation. He also brought in another renovation and that was to rotate the Board of Deacons. At that time we only had seven deacons and we elected them for life and once they were elected and ordained they served until they died. So he decided to rotate deacons on a period of time where they would serve three years and then go into inactivity until they rotated back on. Consequently, he ordained at that time enough deacons to have seven deacons serve on a three-year basis so he had to ordain a whole bunch of deacons at one time. Attendance boomed; as we mentioned, he was quite an orator, quite a master of the English language and people began to flock to the services. One indication of the attitude of the people toward the pastor and toward the church was that in these three years that he was here the giving to the church, the offerings quadrupled, because the people were so happy with the church and with the way the church was ministering. In the last nine months of his pastorate there were 112 additions to the church. On the average there was three professions of faith during this period of time every Sunday. Now it came as quite a shock to the church when in 1921 Dr. Bateman announced that he was resigning to go, as his letter of resignation (continued next page)

said, to a larger field, to First Baptist Church in Ashville, North Carolina. The church appointed a committee of one hundred people. It amazes me and terrifies me to think of serving on a committee of a hundred people. Actually it was an ad hoc committee which was going to be for the pastor. See, initially, he announced his resignation and he asked for a motion for somebody to receive his resignation and someone made a motion that his resignation be refused and so the church voted to refuse his resignation and so then he retired to the parsonage over here and said we'd better think about it and they had this committee. Actually, it was sort of a volunteer committee and that's the reason it swelled to a hundred. They came back and asked him again to reconsider but after a week's time Dr. Bateman said he definitely felt God's leadership in the matter and that he was to leave. So then the church went into consideration of a new pastor. In those days we didn't have a functioning pulpit committee as we do today at least they did not work in the same manner. The floor of the church was thrown open to nominations and about ten men were nominated to be pastor by various people in the church who had visited various people in various places or had heard of pastors and so we had an election and it was determined that a man receiving less than ten votes would go out. The man we elected, by the way, at that time in 1921 refused the call. So then we went back and had another election and this time Dr. Luther Rice Christie from Georgia was elected to be the pastor. Dr. Christie came here. He was another remarkable man, but he (continued next page)

began to continue the work that Dr. Bateman had started of sort of tightening up the organizational structure of the church so that we could be more efficient in the way that we used our time and our resources so that we could have a more effectual ministry in the Lord's work. The Sunday School was increasing in this time. These were boom days for Sunday School so an additional Sunday School annex was built on to the, since the annex had already been built, the church that was built in '92. Dr. Christie, and I'm very indebted to him personally, had a keen sense of church history. Consequently, he began to try to gather together all data that he could find of church records, etc. They didn't extend much beyond his own time, he couldn't find anything pass 1910 and we've been able to go back about 20 years farther in regards to original records at this time, but Dr. Christie did something again for which I am very indebted in that he interviewed and recorded what was said of some residents of Meridian who had been members of this church since its founding as the Oakie Valley Baptist Church and had kept these things and he even compiled a little three-page church history. He moved the church into having monthly conferences which was a sort of a innovated thing. Around the turn of the century the church had only numbered around 400. By the time that Dr. Christie, largely as a result of the ministry of Dr. Bateman, the church membership was now over 1300. The Sunday School average attendance according to the associational letter which we filed with the Lauderdale Baptist Association during this time was around 700 for the year. Again, these were boom days for (continued next page)

Sunday School and in the decade to come our Sunday School was to drop to a much lower figure, but at this time things were going quite well. In 1926 Dr. Christie felt the call of Ponce de Leon Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia, and so he left us. Then we called another interesting man. Some of you may remember him, but you can't remember him no more than briefly because he was only briefly here. A man by the name of Dr. John Hall Buchanan. He came to us from a church in Paris, Tennessee. We called him for a salary of \$5400.00. He served from December 1, 1926, to March 1, 1927, for a grand total of three months which was undoubtedly the shortest tenure of any pastor that we've ever had. The people loved him. Maybe this was a honeymoon with the pastor, you know there's a certain length of time you have a honeymoon with a pastor before you have time to cross swords with any church minister and so the church regretted very, very much that - - why actually it was in February, he'd only been here two months when he announced his resignation to be effective on March 1, and in his letter of resignation he regretted very much, he said, the fact that he undoubtedly had made a mistake and I'm not sure how the church took that. What he meant by making a mistake we assume that he meant that God actually had not been in the call to come to the First Baptist Church and so he left. And then we have perhaps one of the most remarkable men to serve our church, to come on the scene in this century, and that was Dr. Norman W. Cox. Many of you remember him. Dr. Cox had been educated in M . . . University in 1917 and received his Master of Theology degree from Southern

Seminary and his diploma which we have, by the way upstairs in my office right now, is a very remarkable document in that we have Dr. Broadus and Dr. A.T. Robinson and Dr. Sampey and many of the foremost scholars in Southern Baptist life, their signatures are all on this little diploma and there are only about seven professors at Southern Seminary at that time. They . . . at First Baptist Church in Savannah, Georgia, before he came here. But he got a raise in salary from what they'd been paying the previous pastor, up to \$6,000 now plus a home and Dr. Cox demanded one month's vacation per year. Now Dr. Cox was something of an evangelist and so the church was very lenient in allowing him to go out as often as he saw fit which was pretty often to preach revivals. I feel like I know more about Dr. Cox than most any of the other pastors because he left me a wealth of information, all the carbon copies of all the letters that he ever wrote while he was pastor here. I'm sure he would be turning over in his grave were he to know that I was reading all his correspondence, private and church. It's interesting to look at the Messengers during this period of time. Messengers during Dr. Shipman, Dr. Bateman, Dr. Christie, all had little bitty Messengers, about this size, you know, and suddenly Dr. Cox comes and we have a Messenger about that size and Dr. Cox was sort of like a promotion man and liked to do things in a big way. We had real big Messengers and because we had big Messengers, you know, we had printing costs. We had during 1927 little issues invariably in every issue of the Messenger, which (continued next page)

would state, 'we are certainly indebted to our advertisers for we wouldn't be able to publish the Messenger without them'. One of them, I just copied down three of the advertisements from one of the 1927 Messengers, Mr. H.G. Pogue advertised that he had a lot of fine coal and wood that was available to people. The Saenger Temple Theatre was advertising Joan Crawford in her first talking picture. James F. Webb assured everyone that he had "silent service". The budget of the church was at an all time high for this era, up to \$32,000, and I'm sure some of you remember that during this time one of our now teenagers and older member of our church, Caroline Cochran, was serving as Educational Director. Periodically other churches would call Dr. Cox, according to the church minutes, and he would announce to the church that he was considering a call to another church. Of course, that would be a very frightening thing, about every other month the pastor turns around and says a certain church has called me and I'm in prayer seeking the Lord's leadership, would you pray with me and the church would always begin to reassure Dr. Cox that they loved him and after awhile he would announce that God had told him to stay. However, in 1931 Dr. Cox did answer a call to First Baptist Church in Mobile, Alabama, the church I used to go to the R.A.s at, so I know something about that church. And then one month later, the church didn't waste any time calling a pastor, they called Dr. H.C. Bass. He came from the West End Baptist Church of Birmingham. He was here for a number of years, 7 years. I'll sort of scoot through his era because there is no sense opening old wounds or discussing

old things that took place during Dr. Bass's tenure as pastor. I would like to mention that in 1932 shortly after he came Dr. Venable, who was by now getting very old and living here, was called the pastor emeritus for life. He died a few months later. This was at the time of the depression, of course, when a man used to come on the radio and assure us that we had nothing to fear but fear itself. I often wondered how much he really ever had to fear about hunger, losing his house and things like this. He was a man in another financial bracket, of course, but he had a rapport with the American people. But times were hard. As they were hard for the laymen, they were hard for the church. The church budget was reduced from \$32,000 during this period of time to 1935 when we had a budget of about \$16,000. The pastor's salary which had been \$5,000 when Dr. Cox was here, Dr. Bass was here was reduced to \$3200. One of crises that faced this church during this era was that our bank where we had all our money folded and for a period of about three months we weren't sure what we were going to do for money and all our money was lost or something and we were going to have to try to be sure that everybody got paid, and be able to pay the pastor and pay the secretarial help and pay everybody else. It was kind of a hard time. In 1935 we sort of showed that we were keeping pace with the thinking of Baptists throughout the convention when we passed a resolution in the church saying that we would accept people for membership if they had been baptized by immersion by other evangelical churches and, of course, we still practice that today as do almost all Southern Baptist churches.

One cannot ignore the petty controversy. I'm well aware of it and I'm sure most of you are that it really ripped the life of the church during the latter days of Dr. Bass's ministry. The church was hard pressed financially and I can't help, from reading his records, that leads me to believe that something of his problem and the problems of the church financially, and of course, it was something that everybody was caught in and couldn't be helped. One little side note that I might mention, in 1937 we finally decided to stop paying the choir. From then on we would have a volunteer choir, couldn't afford to pay a choir any more. Of course, we continue that practice today, but in 1936 the deacons did candidly come forward and all but three signing the resolution requested that the pastor turn in his resignation. The resolution was voted down, of course, 263 to 141. About a year and a half later the deacons made the motion again and this time it was voted down but the margin was much closer, 351 to 335. Well, that's not but 16 votes and that's not a great margin of confidence expressed in the pastor so Dr. Bass in June announced his resignation to be effective in December which is sort of unusual. Most people announce resignation when they are going to leave in two weeks or a month but he was giving six months notice. Well, he did leave, but Dr. Cox who seem to fit in First Baptist Church like a hand in a glove when he left here and went to Mobile First Baptist had, well that's another story, but he had not run into the same smoothness of compatibility of the people that he had here at the First Baptist in Meridian and consequently during

this time he had gone on to the Fifth Avenue Baptist Church in Huntington, West Virginia. Dr. Cox had received the call that the church had been split, that we'd lost a lot of membership to other churches, it was a boom to the other churches but bad for us and so in 1939 then Dr. Cox came back to this church and as no one else could he brought the church back together. As I said, he was something of a dreamer and from his correspondence a very practical dreamer. He had dreams but he also had ways of implementing his dreams and he was something of a man very much in tune to promotion and being able to do things on a practical level. He saw the inadequacies of our physical facilities, the church, the house itself, and so he laid plans for this building which with about \$19,000 raised we began to build. The rest of the money was raised before the building was actually complete. These were boom years when the building was being built, of course. The economy was booming during World War II and right afterward, we were out of a depression and in a war economy which had more jobs and more money, etc. He also laid plans for a new sanctuary and in his correspondence I see Dr. Cox picked out everything from the fuse to the light bulbs himself personally. Of course, we've made a lot of changes in what was his taste in the meantime, but as things wear out we replace them. But nevertheless he basically picked out most all this stuff himself; of course, he consulted with other people but he handled the correspondence himself for each individual item. Dr. Cox was an out-standing man on the statewide level as well as here in our church.

He was president of the Mississippi Convention in 1945 and 1946. In 1949 he preached the annual sermon in the Southern Baptist Convention. He was the first Baptist since 1897 from Mississippi to do that. Of course, the one in 1897 had also been a pastor at our church at the time he preached that sermon, Dr. Venable. During this period of time I'm sure you remember the church fellowship center out here by Grand Avenue, some land, a little lake, but we didn't have a program to run it, I can say that from an activities program point of view, so after ten years we decided it wasn't feasible and wasn't being used and we sold it. During this time we really had for the first time a full time minister of music and had a diversified choir program developed, such as we have now, children's choirs, young people's choirs, adult choirs. Dr. Cox also introduced in 1946, I say introduced, he emphasized in ways that had never been emphasized before that God's way for raising money was through tithing and, of course, we were a long way then from the era when we had had bazaars and we had had carnivals, etc., here at the church in order to raise money. Now Dr. Cox resigned here not to go into a pastorate but to become executive secretary to Southern Baptist Historical Commission and under his dynamic leadership it published The Encyclopaedia of Southern Baptists. It was published under his leadership and, of course, by this time Dr. Buchanan who had been here for a brief time was now working for the historical Commission also on that committee. Well, I'm in very recent history now and moving right quickly along, in 1951 Dr. Walter L. Moore came and he came

actually, the plans had been laid for the sanctuary, the sanctuary was not built, and a year after he was here the sanctuary as we know it now was finished. Dr. Tinnin mentioned tonight that Red Michael was honored an honorary doctorate today. He was the minister of education during this time. Dr. Moore as I remember him and as I'm sure you do for I was in the Boy Scouts here in the church during that time under Bill Tatum, was a very quiet, unassuming man, very dignified individual, highly intelligent and the kind of person that you would like and by no means pushy and would certainly be the antithesis of what Dr. Moore was all about. When he left in 1959, during the 18 months we didn't have a pastor, the church called Dr. Leo Elderman who was then president of the New Orleans Seminary to be interim pastor here. Dr. Elderman was also interim pastor at the same time at Calvary, Jackson, so we had Dr. Lowry Compere who supplied here very much during that time. Then on May 1, 1961, Dr. Beverly Tinnin came to be our pastor and shortly after he came in August, Brother David and Brother John came to our church and they have been with him now for over a decade. That's a very unusual thing that they have stayed this long. Not that, let me hasten to add that that's not as bad as it sounds, but I was thinking about it this week as I was reading a denominational report that was discussing the lack of longevity among our ministers of music, education ministers, activity and all other ministers in the church beside the pastor, the fact that most of these men in such positions only stay for four years on the average and then they move on and that the (continued next page)

concept is that it takes the president of the United States two years in office almost to be able to get his program organized and if it takes, say, one of these men two years to get his program organized, he spends another two years and then he's gone. Well, the fact that they have been here this long, and I'll say this even if Dr. Tinnin is present, I'm sure it is directly in proportion to the high calibre of leadership that he is able to exert. The fact that men and ladies who work with him are treated not as medial subservients but as co-workers and we appreciate that and I am sure that is precisely the reason that people are able to get along with him as beautifully as they do. I read about them, these other pastors, I won't tell you who, but they'll be here two or three weeks and then the whole staff turns over which means a personality clash undoubtedly, but I can't imagine Dr. Tinnin's personality clashing with anyone. He came to us from First Baptist Church at Henderson, Texas. He had been a native of Shreveport, Louisiana. His father, as all of you well know, was a great leader in Louisiana Baptist life and he was editor of the Baptist paper in Louisiana so Dr. Tinnin had grown up in Baptist life and had had it bred into him you might say. It's remarkable that he did not rebel against it, I suppose, as so many children of ministers seem to do. I'm very fearful of that now with my little boy, probably grow up to be a Zen-Buddhist or some-thing, you know, total rebellion. He was educated in Louisiana College and afterwards, of course, you know he served in the Marine Corps as a pilot and was elevated to the rank of captain.

Now after his military service Dr. Tinnin went on to complete his Bachelor of Divinity and his Doctor of Theology degree at New Orleans Seminary. He was there for a study of theology, this was all after college, of course, for six and a half years. Now I mentioned before that he was our first pastor to have an earned doctorate degree. The fact also remains that the time he spent in seminary was over twice as long as any of our previous pastors. He wasn't repeating courses or anything, he was just learning twice as much and we're very indebted to him. He's a community leader, I can't say too much, he's sitting right here, and you're all aware of the renovations that we've had in our building, what we call our new building now. Of course, it's over ten years old now I guess so it's our newer building, but in addition to this, during his tenure we've seen the church come into a more diversified program of ministering and of reaching out and even in his presence I'll say that I'm sure that there's no other man that I could serve under as I can under him because he's a compassionate individual, he's very intelligent and he is willing to do anything. Someone said once, not so long ago, that I think was a very good statement summing up or about Dr. Tinnin and not summing up, he can't be summed up, but they said he was a servant of the servants and, of course, that's true, you know, this is what a Christian leader is, it's the. . . and I think this is certainly a quality of Dr. Tinnin. We've seen 135 years in our church history and I think that certain things run through (continued next page)

it, I won't amplify all of them, to say that we can be assured that the spirit of God has been with us through the high ground and through the low ground, through the good times and through the hard times and that His spirit has always smiled on us and He's given us a rich and deep heritage upon which to continually draw for the ministry and for the faith that we have today

Thank you very much.

INDEX

Barker	5A
Bass, Dr. H. C.	22A, 23A, 24A
Bateman, Dr. Robert	2A, 15A-19A, 21A
Beeson, Dr.	16A
Bozeman, Dr. J. W.	1A-4A, 12A, 15A
Broadus, Dr.	21A
Buchanan, Dr. John Hall	20A, 26A
Christie, Dr. Luther Rice	18A-21A
Cochran, Caroline	22A
Compere, Dr. Lowry	27A
Cox, Dr. Norman W.	20A-25A
Crawford, Joan	22A
Elderman, Dr. Leo	27A
Gambrell, J. D.	7A, 9A-10A
Graves, J. R.	13A
Hardy, Hattie	8A
Hardy, W. H.	7A-9A
Kelly, Earl	9A
Lamar, L. Q. C.	4A
Laughlin, John	27A
Leavell, Dr. Z. T.	2A-3A
Lee, Robert E.	3A
McCubbin, David	27A
McLemore, Dr. R. A.	9A
Martin	13A
Michael, Red	27A
Moore, Dr. Walter L.	26A-27A
Marks, Isaac	11A
Pogue, H. G.	22A
Rockefeller, John D.	10A
Robinson, Dr. A. T.	21A
Sampey, Dr.	21A
Shipman, Dr.	14A-15A, 21A
Tatum, Bill	27A
Tinnin, Dr. Beverly	3A, 27A-30A
Venable, Dr. V. A.	9A-13A, 15A, 23A, 26A
Webb, Dr.	12A-13A
Webbm James F.	22A

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH
MERIDIAN, MISSISSIPPI

NOTES TRANSCRIBED FROM A TAPE MADE BY JOHN ARMISTEAD
AT TRAINING UNION
JUNE 1974

I've just finished these sessions down in the other training union on our church history and it's a project I've been working on for some time, some of you might have known it, probably most of you didn't know it, but for a couple of years I've been digging, sometimes almost literally, trying to bring together enough records to begin to see some of the picture of the history of the First Baptist Church. We were talking about Miss Robel (McRaven) a while ago. Her family, of course, for over a hundred years has been involved in the life of our church and though she may not have many relatives around today she had had a great many kinspeople, her father, mother and others, who have been involved in the life of our church as I'm sure many of you have. Part of what I'm going to be talking about tonight is a period of time that I have very scant information and I have been trying to reconstruct the picture of our church during this era through primarily external sources outside of what we have here in our own church because all we have are, say, some recollections that people are writing. One of them, Alex Duncan, who was a great uncle of Miss Robel was writing about the year 1910 recollections that he had about the founding of our church. That's well and good, but I'm still searching diligently for what we call primary sources, sources that are contemporary with the events as they were transpiring. Nevertheless I think that I can begin to give you some sort of a picture as I ramble on through this session tonight for (continued next page)

the period of time that I would call the "frontier period" or ' the beginnings" and I think all through our study of our church's particular history we can see how the providence of God has been here and God's blessings have been smiling upon this church and His Holy Spirit has been leading it all the way from its founding until this time. Now, tonight I'm going to pick up in the 1830s, the genesis of our church, and continue on to about the year 1865 at which time we have the Civil War or, if you please, the War Between the States or, if you please, the War for Southern Independence as Southern writers around the turn of the century were calling it or, if you please, the way it's listed in the National Archives, the War of the Rebellion. So any way whatever you call it, I'm going to call it the Civil War even though there was nothing civil about that war as I examine it. It's a much briefer title than all the other euphemisms of the conflict in our country. Now, to talk about the beginnings of our church or to talk about the church in history at any time is to talk a great extent about culture. I don't mean culture by someone, to talk about culture, those people with culture who are sophisticated in terms of art and music and literature, but I am speaking of culture in its more correct and proper meaning. We can't talk about the church, generally speaking, without talking somewhat about the culture. To understand the culture it helps us to understand the church. The church, of course, being composed of a body of people, a Christian body of people. There's a real paradoxical relationship between church and between culture. Often and the way it should be, of course, the church is a shaper, a molder, of the people's culture, (continued next page) -2B-

but quite often the reverse is also true, that the culture is a shaping force in regard to the church and I think we'll see that through and through, both days. Well, I'll have to give you a little bit of the background of the history of this section of the country because the starting of our church starts with the history of the white man in this section of the country. You may be familiar with Mississippi history and if you are not I'll just sort of run through a few little points. In the early 1800s, of course, this area of east Mississippi was still Choctaw land under the treaty that the government had with the Choctaw Indians. Farther on to the northwest in part of Mississippi was Chickasaw land. The settlement of white people in Mississippi had begun around the area of southwestern Mississippi, say, starting out from southern Louisiana, Natchez, Vicksburg and somewhat arching up into central Mississippi but they didn't really come over into this area of east central Mississippi because this legally was Choctaw land. White people weren't supposed to be here. Well, white people looked over here very hungrily at this land with its hills and said 'we sure would like to live on that land' and some of them began to come in anyway and though the Indians didn't rise up on the warpath, nevertheless, they resented very much the fact that the white people were beginning to settle in this area. Very, very few people though were settling in this area and finally pressure was brought to bear upon Congress and, as you probably remember, the year 1830 Andrew Jackson asked the Choctaws if they would to please deed this land to the United States government and they would give them some nice land in the west and if they (continued next page)

wouldn't please do it we would send down forces to make them please do it and so the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek up around what is Noxubee now the tribal chiefs of this area signed a treaty which gave this land to white settlers. That was in the year 1830 and almost immediately white people began to flock into this region of central eastern Mississippi and west Alabama. Most of these people came down from the Carolinas. It is significant to remember that, that Baptists who came down to this area and the Methodists were from the Carolinas. Consequently, they had some-what of a different cultural background than people who had for several years now, several generations, been living down in south-western Mississippi and for this reason it was not until really the late 1800's that the Baptists in Mississippi, east and west, were able to get together. We had more in common with our Baptist friends down in southwestern Mississippi. This was the frontier. Don't get the image by any means that this was a region of great and grand plantations with a great master overseeing a large plantation of many, many slaves and him sitting back drinking his mint julep and watching the cotton grow because it just was not so in this region of the country. This region of the country did not have very many elements that one might call cultured in the other sense of the word or civilized. It was a rough and tumble era. People wore rough clothes. They acted rough, carried weapons, knives and guns, and without a great deal of law enforcement in this area, matters of discussion were settled in other ways. So we come to this particular region of Lauderdale County in the late (continued next page)

1830s, the white people had begun to settle in the region and primarily they had settled over here in the community of Marion. I'm sure most all of you know where Marion is. Well, in the early 1830s Lauderdale then became a county and Marion became the county seat, the largest town in the county, the only town of any size that had a couple of score of people. Now, there was another little knot of people hardly enough to be a town over here in the community of Bonita in the late 1830s. This whole tract of land started here at about 26th Avenue, right out in front of us, running on back for a long way, across all of what is now down-town Meridian. It was a 700-acre tract of land owned by Richard McLemore who had gotten this deed from the United States government. Well, the people, I'll talk a little more about them since you know the kind of people who were here. They were the ones who founded our church. Richard McLemore had a large tract of land. He was exceptional. Most of them had small tracts of land, most of them lived in log houses and then later on during the 1840s and 1850s they began to build these dogtrot houses. How many of you know what a dogtrot house is? You've seen them out in the country. It's a house that has a breezeway, it looks like, down the middle and the sleeping quarters actually on one side and primarily they ate on the other side. This then became the next type of architecture. Had no great plantation homes in this region as I said before, or very few finer houses. These kind of homes began to be built after the Civil War. People began to make their money off lumber and railroads, but that's another story. At any (continued next page)

rate, the average farmer in this area if he had any slaves at all had between one and six slaves and an observer through east central Mississippi from Virginia was very aghast when he came through here and saw the relationship between the slave and between the master, this region as opposed to, say, in the delta where there were large, sprawling plantations all along the Mississippi delta-land, say, running on down to Vicksburg and all the way back up through the delta, because he came and he spent the day with his family here in east central Mississippi and he not only saw the man go out into the fields side by side with his wife and his children and side by side with his slaves and work the field, but when evening time came they all came in to one room in the house and sat down together at one table and had their dinner together. Now that was the sort of relationship between the master and the slave and these people who had the slaves because they only had very few. It wasn't practical for a man to sit back and watch his one slave work and he couldn't afford, of course, to have some slave simply be a cook, etc., but they were sort of integrated into the family as it were. These people, these frontiersmen, few of them having slaves, these Baptist people over here in Bonita for the most part lived in that community though it wasn't town, came together around the year 1839 and they were Baptists and they said 'let's form a church', and you're probably familiar with the Bonita Water Works. Somewhere near the north end of that reservoir they built a church house and they called it the Oakie Valley Baptist Church. Nobody around here today seems to know anything about

Oakie Valley. I have a feeling that I know where Oakie Valley is, it's probably under the reservoir. That was probably a family's name originally and the reason that the name has been forgotten is that the water has been there so long. Nevertheless, they started the church there. Now, I want you to have somewhat of a picture of what a Baptist church was like in the 1830s, 1840s and the 1850s in this section of Mississippi. As I said I have no contemporary records of our church through this era, but I think that it is safe to assume that what a church was like in Marion or what a Baptist church was like in Quitman or what a Baptist church was like in Wahalak, Mississippi, up in Kemper County, would be what our church was like. Very few people, frontiers-people, small farmers and a few slaves. Of course, the slaves would have been members of the church, too. I'll get to that a little bit later. I made a pretty good find here a couple of years ago. A lady called up here and said she had some old books that she was going to burn in one of the outhouses, er - buildings, but er, er, a few will understand. This was not being used as a Sears catalog, so, thank goodness, so I went out there and rambled through and did come up amid all the debris and junk with a couple of excellent finds and one of them was, theoretically, the long, lost minutes of the Wahalac Baptist Church which was located in Kemper County. This church began around the year 1833 or in the year 1833 which was just a little bit before our church began. They disbanded shortly after the Civil War, a period of time that we'll get to, when people were moving out of Kemper County because

of the farm and land situation and relocating to a great extent down in Lauderdale County. Now, these records of this church, I've just picked a few at random, I say at random though they are somewhat sensational, I do that for this reason - to contrast it with the kind of business conference we have once a month on Wednesday night and I'm sure you would, our church as large as it is, its type of structure that it would involve over the years, try to settle most of our decision making in the form of committees on which most of you serve and to which you are elected by the church body. These earlier churches settled everything on the church floor. So I'm reading them from the Wahalac, anybody know where Wahalac is? The postmaster knows. Not too far from here up in Kemper County. There is a church there now but it is not connected with this church. OK, so. . . This particular incident the church is dealing with as a matter of discipline, the church exercised discipline on its members in those days. It seems that one of the church members, a man by the name of Brother McCaleb, had been involved in an altercation with another member of the community, not a member of the church, and he was asked to justify himself before the church which he did, but the church as was the custom then had appointed a committee to go out and check into the matter themselves and bring a report to the church to see what the church should do. The committee to whom was referred the case of Brother John T. McCaleb, and by the way everybody in the church is called brother and every woman is called sister and the pastor during this era is called elder, Bro. John T. McCaleb wherein he stands (continued next page)

charged by himself of fighting but enters a plea of justification before your body report your committee having sought all the information they could find, the facts are as follows, namely, on the evening of the 5th of August at a social party of the people of Wahalac and vicinity a difficulty arose between Bro. McCaleb and Mr. William C. Wilson in relation to the use of the violin. Bro. McCaleb wishing to exclude the use of the instrument from the room when some angry words passed. Bro. McCaleb struck said Wilson with his fist and after some further altercation Bro. McCaleb admits he drew his knife under the impression that said Wilson continued to use his and says that it was not his intention to use his provided Wilson did not use his. Bro. McCaleb admits that he might have struck him with his fist while he had his knife in his hand but he thinks he held his knife in his left and struck him with his right hand. The above facts and the opinion of your committee show Bro. McCaleb to have been wrong. First, in suffering himself to be drawn into a difficulty and angry collision to say nothing of the impropriety or propriety of professing Christians attending such places of fashionable amusement. Two, he was very wrong in attempting violence upon a fellow human except in selfdefense. And it goes on to say that the committee urged Bro. McCaleb to understand that a Christian was to be governed by the laws of Christ rather than by the laws of chivalry. The church thereupon entered a motion and it was seconded that Bro. McCaleb be churched as it was called where the hand of fellowship was withdrawn from him. Our church exercised this practice even up to (continued next page)

until right after or right before World War I, but we'll get into that a little later. Now, here's a, by the way, the person kicked out of the church, OK, can come back later on with fruits of repentance and try to reinstate which the church may or may not. Whenever a reference in here is used and the name, just the first name is given, you can assume that it is a slave. Usually with a church roll the slaves were listed, well, only the first name, then property of so and so. In this instance, he's just called Luke. The committee in Luke's case, and here again a committee had been appointed, they appointed a lot of committees in this church, the committee in Luke's case being ready made the report which was read and which was received and the committee discharged. They reported from all the evidence they could obtain they believed him to be guilty of the charge of occupying a portion of a woman's bed not his wife's and by consequence of lying because he had denied the truth of it and also contempt and disrespect for the committee in the case, fellowship being called and moved and Luke was excluded from the fellowship of the church which was done. No new business, old business, meeting adjourned. And they have the signature of the moderator. So a man had to watch his step because somebody was out watching him and they would go after him and they would. . . him. Charges were often being made against other members. I remember reading in another record of, or in fact, in this book, so and so had seen so and so drinking down at such and such landing and then they would have a big argument about it and seek out witnesses. Of course, they had to have a couple of (continued next page)

witnesses to verify it. OK. Now here we've come into another meeting. Another business meeting. This moves on though quite a bit later in the history of the church, almost to its conclusion, the year 1866. After a sermon by our pastor, Elder James M. Nicholson, the church met in conference. The door of the church was open for the reception of members but none availed themselves to the opportunity although a considerable religious interest was manifested. New business being called for Brother Willis arose and stated that it was currently reported that Brother Thomas. . . was guilty of the crime of bigamy. Brother Thomas denied the charge whereupon the moderator appointed a committee of three to investigate the report on behalf of the church. Tragically, for our interest, the church dissolved before the committee could bring its report. Now, these ministers, who were they? They were uneducated men. For the most part they were frontiersmen themselves, they were farmers, they were small planters, they preached occasionally. Sometime they would have ten churches and they would, say a church like our church which only had a tenth-time pastor would only meet once every ten weeks or sometimes they wouldn't meet on a Sunday or the Sabbath as they called it but meet some time during the week whenever the itinerary preacher could ride around and preach. They got an annual call. The deacons were elected for life but the preacher was subject to having his contract renewed once a year, usually in the fall when he was elected for the coming year. Every year. This happened even up until this century. The church would decide whether to recall the preacher for another year. The churches were usually located near what was (continued next page)

called "living water". Having studied the topological maps of this area, I can't see any truth of size that over here near the reservoir they could have baptized in. Those little tributaries aren't deep enough except maybe Sowashee. It would have been too far from Okatibbee to have baptized there. This was long before Baptists considered that it was all right to immerse in a pond. That was anathema. Popular were protracted meetings which were forerunner of our revival. This was where the church would have a meeting twice at least, maybe three or four times a day. Of course, the preacher would come and he would preach and be the same preacher, but also popular during the 30s, 40s and 50s were what were called camp meetings. This would be where four, five or six churches would come together to some resort area like the Noxubee River and they would build brush arbors there, poles in the ground, and they would lay leafy limbs across the top which would keep off the dew. They were usually held in August because, of course, those things wouldn't keep off the rain and they couldn't have them during the winter time because the roads just about immobilized everybody with mud during the winter time. So they would have these camp meetings and the camp meetings became very popular, as I said, several churches would get together, they would have several preachers. All these Baptist preachers, very few of them educated, and they would preach all day and all night, but there were other diversions and this is why camp meetings came into disrepute. For instance, they began racing. One man would say, "My horse is faster than your horse!" And so they would run (continued next page)

around the camp. After a while somebody would say, "Well, I betcha so and so's horse is faster than so and so's horse" and so racing like was the "Camptown Racing" became quite popular. Certain men would come and sell wares near the camp meeting and it almost developed into a carnival atmosphere. And they had problems with the men who were selling alcohol there and some of the members being filled with the spirit other than **The Spirit** and so camp meetings went into disrepute and Baptist churches did withdraw from them. Now blacks were included in the congregation as I mentioned earlier. It was for a very good reason. It was against the law for blacks to meet in their own churches - they had no churches of their own. In the southeast here as opposed to say the northeastern part of the south not the north east, but the northeastern part of the south, up through the Carolinas, particularly the border states like Kentucky, Missouri, which never passed these kinds of laws, the states here in the deep south passed quite harsh laws against slaves because of its great fear in this time of slave uprisings as had already broken out in some parts of the country and so the Mississippi Code of 1857 has a couple of pro-visions here: All meetings or assemblies of slaves or free Negroes or mulattoes mixing and associating with such slaves above the number or five, including such free Negroes and mulattoes, at any place or public resort or any meeting house or houses in the night or at any school for the purpose of teaching them reading and writing either in the day time or at night under whatever pretext shall be deemed an unlawful assembly. And it says that the justice of the (continued next page)

peace only needs to suspect that such an assembly is taking place before breaking it up. Now, it goes on to say that nothing here is to be construed to prevent any master or employee from allowing a slave to go to a religious worship service provided that the worship be conducted by a regular ordained minister or attended by at least two discreet and respectable white persons appointed for that purpose by some regular church or religious society. Now, part of the catch here is the 'regular ordained minister', because, you see, the slaves - it was against the law to teach them to read and write and consequently they could not actually read the Bible and so it would be very difficult to have a slave be a preacher if he couldn't even, say, read. I've read of slaves being preachers on the plantation and perhaps this was true on occasion but somewhere along the line somebody broke the law because they taught that slave how to read and write which was against the Mississippi Code. Free - this is again Article 84 of the Mississippi Code of 1857: Free Negroes or mulattoes were exercising the functions of a minister of the gospel on conviction may be punished by any number of lashes not exceeding 39 on whipping. So, as you can see, people felt more comfortable not allowing the slaves to gather by themselves but rather having them in their own churches. Throughout eastern Mississippi where we are, our churches did not have more slaves than white people though this was the case in the Baptist church in Clinton, the Baptist church in Vicksburg and almost every Baptist church in the delta where there were almost, say, three or four times as many slaves in the (continued next page)

churches as there were white people. The slaves, of course, left immediately following the Civil War and formed their own churches. Our black people left this church and formed New Hope Baptist Church which is right up the street. The church exercised a great deal of civilizing. There was a civilizing force in the community during this era and as I said there was little law enforcement. Now, 1849, this whole era, and you see the. . . picture of what our church was like, it was like any other Baptist church in this area during that time. The church split. A man by the name of W. P. Carter was pastor. I can find no information about him and consequently I believe he was probably an itinerant preacher, that he was not a full time, say, trained minister and that's the reason that the historical commission of our denomination and the Mississippi Historical Baptist Commission have no record of his name, but he was our pastor for this era. The church split that was in Bonita over four issues and I will briefly run through them. One was ardent spirits. That's alcoholic beverages. You see, Baptists had not consolidated their interest in liquor at this time. It was still a controversial question on Baptists whether it was right or wrong to drink. A little earlier time Baptist ministers in the 1700s up in the eastern section of the country, particularly around Philadelphia where Baptists started in this country, were often paid in barrels of beer, in pigs and chickens and in big bundles of tobacco. The inventor, as it were, of bourbon whiskey, as you probably read in the paper not long ago, was a Baptist minister. So Baptists had not a real firm stand on (continued next page)

this position as they were to develop as did many other denominations through the late 1800s. As a matter of fact when you check the minutes of the Mississippi Baptist Association all the way to the period of the Civil War and after the Civil War resolution year after year will be brought up to condemn alcohol and year after year it will either be tabled or voted down because there were just too many Baptists who did not believe it. Actually, it was the retailer or ardent spirits that was concerning the membership. Another thing that was a matter of dissension was called missions. Part of the church believed in missions and part didn't. It would be. . . to say that Baptists in this era, some of them were what we call particular or Calvinistic in background. They believed that God was going to save whoever He was going to save and there was nothing you could do about it. See? So naturally this doesn't give much impetus to missions. The other group believed more in the universal or general salvation or predestination that any man who responds to Christ potentially is saved, any men who respond to Christ could be saved, and this is the philosophy that we have. This other group of Baptists by the way died out. Needless to say, they wouldn't believe in missions and so when they all died off, there was nobody around to carry on. The matter of associating was also a concern, whether or not you should join with other churches. The group that believed in missions believed you should join with other churches around the area in order to propagate or to finance missions. Education of the clergy was another matter. A lot of Baptists didn't believe (continued next page)

in educating the clergy and some of them did. So the church split and went out here about three miles, where we don't know, and formed another church. The church had one pastor and that was Elder Carter and one deacon, Richard McLemore. The church wanted to get down to business with missions so in the year 1852 the Oakie Valley Baptist Church, out around here somewhere, where we don't know, formed the Bethlehem Baptist Association with all the little churches and all the towns around this area. Now a year later the church called a new pastor, Elder Isaac Spinks. I don't know anything about Isaac Spinks either, but I'm still looking for his name everywhere I can. And a year after Isaac Spinks became pastor the church moved down here by McLemore Cemetery. Now McLemore had this large tract of land and his house at that time, before he moved up here on 7th Street, his house was down there across from what is now the McLemore Cemetery. How many of you know where that is? OK, good, historical landmark. He brought a woman down here with him from the east who died, an old lady, and he buried her out in his back yard and so some other people wanted to bury people, too, and so rather than take up good plowing land they began to bury them all in one little plot of land and the church built a frame building 40'x60' and at this time though almost all church memberships still lived out in the country. It wasn't really a town of Meridian per se. There were two entrepreneurs that came here, a man by the name of John Ball from the Hawk and a man by the name of Louis Ragsdale from over in Alabama, and Ragsdale bought most of McLemore's land from about down here

near where McLemore Cemetery is up here to 16th Avenue. John Ball brought the rest of his tract of land here and both of them were going to start a town, you see, and Ball had a store that was over here behind, probably behind Firestone, where Firestone is now. Well, I'm not going to get into a great deal of discussion about how they, their plans for developing Meridian other than to say that this was the impetus for men to begin, their families to begin moving here. There were more families who lived in what was then developing in Meridian than were in their church. Only about four people from the church lived in this community and the other fifty of them lived out there in the country somewhere. In the year, say right after they came to Meridian, in the year 1856, the church called N. L. Clarke and he's the first man that's a historical figure that we know anything about. We call him our pastor. We're very proud that he was such a great man. Clarke County is named after him. Clarke College is named after him. Of course, he like all these other early pastors that we list a little bit later on never list us in their biographies. We claim them but they never claimed us. We weren't something you claimed on the biography when you were trying to impress people in Baptist biography, but I can figure out, we say he was here in 1856-1859 and actually he was though he was pastoring at Decatur. This book published in the last century of our Baptist Preachers reads, "For eight years before the war he took missionary work in connection with his pastoral work - new form of missionary work - giving from two to three weeks of his time each month and riding at least (continued next page)

350 miles to work. (Of course, that's horseback as this book was, presupposed, written before the time of automobiles.) And preaching at least 20 times in the month and sometimes oftener. This missionary work carried him into Kemper, Leake, Scott, Smith, Neshoba, Simpson, Covington, Jones, Jasper and Lauderdale counties." So, we were part of this missionary work and he was coming here, maybe once a month, and conducting a service down here in this little church by McLemore Cemetery. Oakie Valley had long since lost its geographical designation of church and so in the year 1859 we changed the name of the church to the Meridian Baptist Church, a name which it was to have up until the turn of the century or at the turn of the century. In 1859 Solomon Williams came and then around the year 1861 after he was here the Civil War broke out. Solomon Williams is another illusive figure. I can only assume that he was an itinerant preacher and perhaps a frontiersman and a farmer. During the war this was a hard time for this area. Meridian as a town wasn't very much and we had just three or four little frame stores down here in the region of, say, Front Street and hardly any houses around at all. All these old houses that we've got around here were built long after the Civil War and the little building that got done by McLemore Cemetery was considered to be a military necessity. The reason was there just weren't very many buildings around that you could take. You couldn't take somebody's home and these businesses for the most part were essential businesses and you just didn't have any entertainment to speak of, so the church was considered

superfluous. . . by the military so they took it over as a military necessity and they used it for a hospital for a while before they built a Confederate Hospital up here where the Teenage Canteen is now or was, now it's a Senior Citizens Center. They had a hospital and graveyard up there. Of course, they moved the graves later on but that's getting ahead of ourselves. The congregation if they met at all during these war years met in private homes. Solomon Williams, of course, was still the pastor and the war finally came to an end around the year 1865 and suddenly a lot of people were in Meridian. Meridian was a pardoning center. In order to get pardoned for having fought in the war if you were in this region you had to come to Meridian to the military headquarters, the federal government's headquarters, to get pardoned and you swear allegiance to the federal government and you were franchised, at least for the time being before a radical reconstruction anyway, and then you could go home. Well, the military then gave us back the building, but the windows were gone, the doors were gone and part of the time they stabled horses there and it was not considered a very safe place or fit place to conduct worship services and so the church were sort of casting around for a place to meet, had fifty-four members at this time, I believe, four of them lived in town, the rest lived out in the county. The pastor is nowhere indicated that he's even around during this era. You see, people would come to Meridian because court houses had been burned down throughout this section of Mississippi and the records had been (continued next page)

burned with them and all the land is in dispute and people have no money, there's great, great starvation in the south, white and black, and the United States government is sending down food-stuff and distributing them in areas like Meridian and with one interesting little story we'll conclude for tonight because it bears on the reconstruction of our church which now says no building, people are scattered around, and all the young men are dead or wounded, the land has not been tilled for five years, it's in terrible shape, homes have been burned down, Sheridan (Sic) has wired Washington, "Meridian is no more" - after he had burned the few little stores and houses we had. A man by the name of W.W. Keith has been from Missouri and he came down to Vicksburg before the war and when the war broke out he found himself a southern sympathizer and so he joined the Confederacy as a chaplain. His health broke down and so they made him principal of a female academy at Canton. I don't know that being a principal of a female academy is the best way to restore one's health, but nevertheless the war came to an end and the academy was closed and Keith came to Meridian casting about seeking some employment, a way to, again, he was an ordained minister, but he had no church and there were no churches functioning to a great extent, he had a quarter in his pocket, a wife and six children, and he went to apply at the Union headquarters for his ration of food provisions. Later in the day as an Union officer was looking over a list of requisitions, he saw the name Keith. He asked his orderly, "Is this man a minister?" and he said, "Yes. He said, "Well, send for him."

And when Keith came he found that the officer in charge was indeed a young man that he had baptized as a boy up in Missouri in a church that he was pastoring there. The officer then gave Keith all the provisions that his family needed and more and asked Keith if he would organize a Sunday School class, now Sunday School was being done up north, it wasn't being done down here in the south: for some of his men. So Keith began to teach a Sunday School class. These Baptists who were, you know, used to having services once a month, once every six weeks, or something like that, said, well, it wouldn't be so bad to go to the Sunday School with all those yankee soldiers and so they began to gather about Brother Keith as he began to teach the Sunday School class. And so I'm going to break off there and next time we will begin moving into an era where the church gets real big and can build a building like this, 45' x 83' right here on this plot of land. Thank you so much.

Tonight we're going to cover the period of time roughly from the close of the Civil War to around the year 1879 and I'd like to briefly just hit the high points in a minute or so of what we talked about last time. As Harvey mentioned, now I'm pre-supposing that we all understand that God's Spirit is working through the church all these years or I think that any church where-in the Spirit of God is not residing would die out because it would not be carrying forth God's plan, but as we can see through (continued next page)

the ups and downs through this whole period that God's Spirit has indeed been with our people because he has blessed us in many ways and blessed our ministry and many people have come to him through the ministry of this church. This first period that we talked about last time is really a frontier period, a rough and tumble time. I read you excerpts from church minutes that showed how the people having night fights and this sort of thing. The pastors, I think I used the word 'uneducated' last time quite often, now sometimes these men were uneducated in the sense of having no learning at all, you know, just like a lot of the other frontiersmen. Oftentimes they were educated, say, like other people of that day which didn't mean a college degree but probably about our high school equivalency, but they were laymen - they weren't laymen - they were ordained, but they had no more ministerial education than the laymen in church and I've been perusing some of the books that these men would get as a commentary on the scriptures, etc., like I'm sure many of you have in order to help them as they prepared the messages. Some of them were farmers themselves and lived in the area and others were itinerant preachers or missionaries who travelled many miles on horseback and perhaps who pastored ten or twelve churches at one time. Most of them stayed for very short terms. The church was a civilizing force in the community, or in the area, exercising discipline by churching people as it were, withdrawing the hand of fellowship. Protracted meetings and camp meetings were popular. The membership of these churches, virtually all these churches, our church (continued next page)

and others, were composed of both whites and blacks before the Civil War and then in 1849 the church had split and this shaped the character of our church to some extent because the part that was pulled away from was antimissionary and we were missionary. In 1854 the church moved to Meridian but was still called Sowashee at that time by the railroad but Meridian did become the official name at the pushing of John Boyle and then we came to the period of 1865 when the church which was then meeting in a little frame building, 40x60 foot, over here by McLemore Cemetery - have any of you found out where it was since last week? - does everybody know where it is? Well, be sure you see it. It's all overgrown and I'm sure you won't know exactly what it is, but our church was right across the street, this way, this is west, right across the street from McLemore Cemetery. At the end of the war the church was unsafe. OK. Now, in 1865 that membership was 54. Only seven of the people lived here in Meridian and the rest of the people lived out in the county. They'd ride in on horseback, etc., when the church had services which before the war had not been very regular, maybe once a month. There was no Sunday School program or any other form of program in the church. After the war Meridian began to get houses built up in this area. There were more and more people who lived out around here whereas before the war more people had lived down in what is now East End. A lot of other Baptists had moved to the area during the war when our church was not actually functioning, functioning very regularly, and after the war they wanted to form a church and so one man who had been (continued next page)

a Baptist deacon by the name of Perlman entered into negotiations with Lewis Ragsdale for this strip of property, basically from our sanctuary, about the length of our sanctuary, because until recently we didn't have property, wasn't much deeper than that, running all the way across to Garland Street. This was Garland Street down here what is now Eighth Street and 26th Avenue was called Mississippi Street and this Seventh Street down here was called Church Street. So this strip of property between Garland and Church was called Mississippi Avenue and the Baptists who gathered here and Hurlbert and Ragsdale thought they were building a new church, a new organization, but the people from down here at the old church who didn't have a minister even, they came up and they said, 'well, why don't we get together and build a building and we'll just meet together until 'peace is restored' was the phrase used. In other orders, this was after the war but things were still up in the air, see? It was topsy-turvy. People had lost their property, court houses burned down, they couldn't prove they owned anything, so forth and so on. Well, they brought a building from Marion. You know, Marion was a much older community than Meridian and I wondered for a long time why they didn't just buy some lumber and build a building, but the reason was most of the mills had stopped operating during the war and lumber was tremendously expensive so it was much more inexpensive just to buy a building somewhere and tear it down and bring it over here and build it back up. No, about this time our church loaned this man we talked about last time who assisted the church in getting (continued next page)

started, W. W. Keith, remember the chaplain who had come here to Meridian, etc., had been a former pastor of one of the northerners in command, he organized with some other men an orphanage at Lauderdale Springs and this was primarily Baptist laymen who were working to get this orphanage started. The orphanage was founded for the children of parents who had been lost in the war, fathers and mothers who had been lost in the war, and they had around two hundred to three hundred children up there at Lauderdale Springs at this Civil War orphanage. Now in the meantime Richard McLemore who had been in this church down here before did not like the fact that they built a church all the way up here on this hill. It was a long way, it was over a mile or so, to come all the way up here by horseback up this muddy little rise right here to get to church so he built another church, a frame building, where Dement Printing Company is right now on that block and some of the church members would go back down there, you know. The church actually was meeting in two different places. Sometimes they would meet here in the morning and meet there in the afternoon. It's not very often that a church has two sanctuaries, you know, and they just sort of alternate between, some members here and some members there, and that continued for a long time. I'll just mention briefly what happened to that building. In the seventies our church had a lot of dissension which it was prone to have for many years and so a lot of the members said, well, we own another building so we'll just go down there. So they went down there and formed another church and called it Calvary. In later years they moved down here

to the 41st Avenue Baptist and then they moved up to 8th Street again and went back to the original name of Calvary. That was formed in the seventies originally. They in turn sold the building to the Christian Church congregation. They met in that building until they built their building that's on 23rd Avenue here. In 1865 the Baptists also got together and decided that we needed a college because during the war all education had stopped. There were no schools meeting of any kind and so we needed a college and so they called it Meridian Female College and they called a man who came to be the principal of the college by the name of J. B. Hamilton. Now Hamilton was a minister as most college principals were in that day. He had been educated in . . . College. He graduated there in 1856. Of course he had no actual functions, Baptist seminaries at that time, Southern Baptist Seminaries he like most all of our ministers through this era were educated in Baptist seminaries in the north. He went up to Rochester Theological Seminary and he graduated from there and then he became a chaplain. He came here, it was very unfortunate for the church because he like so many who would follow him as being principal of the college would at the same time serve as pastor of the church. You might say that all of them didn't preach, but suddenly they had trained ministers. Before this they had never had men who learned to handle Greek and Hebrew and various other things that facilitate interpretation of the Scripture. So, Hamilton became principal of the college. Now, it wasn't really a college. It (continued next page)

was a college after some fashion but it started at the first grade, primary grades, you see, and it went all the way up through what would be college and it was Meridian Female College but it was coeducation. These kind of things are kind of hard to understand. Well, the church wanted to get this college started and so again we went to Marion to get the buildings and for \$4,000 bought a dormitory and for \$3,500 we bought a regular classroom building and for \$1500 we had them torn down and built here. Now Hamilton, as I said, became **p**astor and he was a very industrious man so he also started a weekly newspaper called **The Christian Watchman**. Later it would be changed to **The Southern Baptist**. This paper was in tremendous competition with **The Baptist Record** which was started in Clinton a little bit later on. During this period of time in 1867 while Hamilton was pastor we had a young man who was baptized in this church who had been born here in Meridian by the name of William J. David. I don't think we should forget him because he grew up in this church, was baptized here and he went on to become a foreign missionary. (What relation was he to Nannie David? Her father. Was it her father or her brother? I'm not sure, but I think it must have been her father. Miss Nannie David was over there as a child so he must have been her father, and then she went back as a missionary.) Well, he went to Africa and he had three wives - different times - and finally his wives in Africa died, they all died. The Mission Board didn't want to send any women to Africa anyway. They had grave doubts of wisdom of a woman missionary going to Africa, but the Board (continued next page)

induced by the earnest petition of Reverend Mr. David resolved that he and his wife might go as soon as funds were provided and so funds were provided and after they got over there, well, it was pretty bad - she lost a child the first year and the second year she got a fever and died so I guess the Board was right after all. Africa was kind of a rough place to go I imagine for a man as well as for a woman, but anyway I don't think we ought to forget Brother David. After his health eventually failed in Africa he came back here to Meridian to pastor and help get started the Fifteenth Avenue Baptist Church. Now in 1869 a man by the name of J. L. Lloyd became pastor. We don't know anything about Brother J. L. Lloyd. I assume that he was with the college but I haven't found anything to substantiate that. By the way, this Hamilton who resigned in 1869 because his health broke - he was pastoring the church, principal of the female college and he was the editor of a paper - his health broke down so our Mississippi Baptist Commission decided to send him down for a little vacation on the gulf coast and so he went down there. We had no Baptist churches down there at all and so he began to work to establish churches in Biloxi and Pascagoula and these other towns and largely because of his work the entire Baptist work on the gulf coast was established. In 1870 a man by the name of Theodore Whitfield became pastor. This is Brother Whitfield. He was a young man, obviously, a handsome young man and he came here to be pastor. All of our pastors at this time were bewhiskered men in some various form or another and Whitfield, again, was a very educated man. He came to (continued next page)

Meridian to run the college, he'd been educated at the University of North Carolina and Newton Theological Seminary in Massachusetts. He had also been professor of Greek at the University of Missouri and so he came here to edit this paper, to run the college and to pastor. Now, we have to remember what era of time this was. This was the year 1870. In the early 1870s here in Meridian, like throughout Mississippi and the south, were very turbulent days. You see, immediately after the war for a couple of years nothing much happened in the south except that the north was sending down food and they were using their federal forces primarily to distribute food but after about the year, I think it was 1870 or 1871, the United States Congress in all states that had not been admitted to the Union they had to do one thing to be readmitted to the Union basically and that one thing was to ratify the 14th Amendment and Tennessee was the only state that had ratified the 14th Amendment and so Tennessee again readmitted to the Union while Mississippi and all the other southern states who had refused in their state legislatures to ratify the 14th amendment, which was the equal rights amendment Congress then passed a radical reconstruction act and divided up the south into six libartary districts and so then the occupying forces came in full strength and the people down here didn't care for that too much and initially in this time the conflict between the whites and the blacks in this community and other communities was very hard. We had a tremendous race riot here in the year 1871. It all started when a black man by the name of Compton was on trial at the old court house (continued next page)

that burned down, down here where our present court house is, and in the midst of the proceedings he proceeded to pull out a pistol and he shot the judge right through the forehead which killed him and then Compton jumped out of a window and they chased him down the Front Street where they killed him. Because most of the blacks of the community had been meeting up at the New Hope Baptist Church discussing how they were going to counter-act the Klan activities, Klu Klux Klan activities, which were very active. Klu Klux Klan, by the way, was holding their meetings down here where Kate Griffin is now, a big old building that John (sic) Boyle owned, and so everybody rushed up to the New Hope Baptist Church and burned it down and ran the minister out of town. These were turbulent days. It was not safe for women or children or even men to walk the streets. Now, they always say it's not safe for a woman to walk the streets. I figure if it's not safe for a woman it's not safe for me either. These are not safe days to walk the streets, but there were some signs of progress and we'll see the demise in that what they thought was progress. The city decided to pay twenty-five cents to anybody who would plant a tree, and so people began to plant little oak trees, little old bitty seedlings. If you've seen any pictures that were taken during the 1880s, you'll see all these little old seedlings about this high planted up and down all these streets around here in Meridian and now most of them are dying and we have to cut them down, the large oak trees, at this time. These were turbulent days and then Brother Smith came, Columbus Smith, in the year 1872.

Our pastors still are not staying for any tremendous length of time. Now Columbus Smith, by the time we get into Whitfield and Columbus Smith we're reaching men who can make a mark on the Mississippi Baptist scene. Consequently, they're written up in this little book that was published in the last century called simply Mississippi Baptist Preachers and I'll read you about Columbus Smith. "As a man he was of low stature, light hair, blue eyes, rather florid complexion, broad mouth, prominent nose with large dilating nostrils when animated, he was of a nervous temperament and suffered much from indigestion." This is Lloyd Forbus's book which is a collection. The article by the way was written by Captain W. A. Hardin, whom we'll get to and who was a layman of our church at that time. Columbus Smith didn't impress Captain Hardin very much. Now, we'll continue with our Brother Smith so that you'll get the full picture of him. He was not a good pastor in the common conception of the word. "He was too much given to communing with himself and with his God. He hadn't much time for what was called pastoral work, that is, visiting among the people and making himself agreeable and popular." He didn't last long however because he died while he was pastoring here in 1875.

'asides' This is J. C. Foster and the church apparently had had all the educated ministry that they cared about with Columbus Smith because they went back to call a man who was not educated. I guess the uneducated minister could be sociable they thought and educated ministers spent too much time with his books and with his God and not enough time being popular. Now in 1873, I (continued next page)

was ahead two years, I want to give you a picture of what our church life was like. In the meantime we had developed after the Civil War when these educated or trained ministers had come in, we began to develop programs, like Sunday School, Training Union, and things like this, but this is a photostatic copy of the city directory of 1873. It has a little description of what our church life was like. The regular exercises observed by the church through each week are: Preaching on Sunday at 11:00 a.m. and at night by the pastor; Sunday school at 9:00 a.m. on Sunday; School singing in an address at 4:00 p.m. at the church, on Monday night; and prayer meeting at the church Wednesday night, church prayer meeting conducted by the pastor; Thursday night meeting at the church was singing and studying the Sunday School lessons under the direction of the superintendent; and on Friday night traveling prayer meetings at different houses in various portions of the city conducted by laymen of the church. The church has five ordained ministers. Now, all these ordained ministers by the way are teaching school. The school had six teachers and 34 members of the board of trustees. Now it could have really been rough to teach in a situation like that. The church and congregation contribute regularly to the cause of missions, to the orphans home and to the education of some young men at the Clinton College. The salary of the pastor is regularly paid each month and congregations who are quite large, frequently throw in the house. Now, in the year 1873 the church had outgrown its little frame building and built this edifice which was 45 x 83 feet.

You'll have to get up close to see it. We're very fortunate that this picture was taken. It's the only picture in existence that I know of of that church and if you'll notice carefully there is snow on the ground so somebody thought that it was nice to take a picture of the church in the snow, but the church is in the exact. . . that our sanctuary is right now yet the front of it, and it took me a long time to figure this out, is facing what is now Firestone, see. There were houses down that way. (That's the church that burned - right and this was built in 1873). So, this church was actually built while Columbus Smith was pastor. The little excerpts in the city directory that I was reading listed Columbus Smith as the pastor at that time. Now, in 1877, as I say, I don't really know much about J. C. Foster and neither does the Convention Historical Society or anybody else, I'll just have to keep digging, a man by the name of W. B. Crumpton came to pastor this church. This is an old picture of Crumpton, I mean, he was an old man, taken probably around 1910 or something like that. When he came here in 1877 he was a much, much younger man and so I wish we had a contemporary picture of him but that's the only one that we had. I couldn't find anything of our Columbus Smith for a long time and then finally I found an autobiography that he had written. You see, after he left Meridian he left the state and, consequently, Mississippi Baptist Preachers and many other sources that we searched through just didn't mention him, so I'll read to you about. . . topic, "My Ministry in Meridian, Mississippi". "It was not a great city but city enough for (His)

purpose, meaning God in me. Eleven years after they made their contribution - now, I've skip a little part about this - our church gave some money to Mississippi College designated as a scholarship in the late 1850s and the college in turn gave him the scholarship - OK - eleven years after they made their contribution over in Alabama on my farm in the fall of the year I got a letter. It was from Captain William H. Hardy, (keep him in mind, we're going to get to him a little later on) saying the church had called me. The salary was named at \$900.00 a year. I had not accepted one of the numerous calls from the churches. (Everybody wanted him, you know, but he liked his farm). I had just arranged my affairs so that I would not be tied down to business. Here was the chance to do what I'd been longing to do, give all my time to the ministry." So, anyway the salary was very small, the house rent to be paid out of that, but the income from the farm would splice out. (He'd be a little bit dependent on his own farm, OK, continue.) How I learned in Meridian about church troubles. I had never dreamed that a church would get into such tangles. Our prayer meetings were turned into debating societies. In Corinth it could not have been worse, only there were no scandals but factions galore." And it goes on while he was pastor here, in the year 1878, Meridian had the great Yellow Fever epidemic. Now, most everybody left the city except Father so and so, Catholic Church, Brother Crumpton and several more who worked very hard to bring comfort to the people, the doctors were overworked etc., everybody who could left, I mean, it was (continued next page)

just abandoned. Now, the epidemic lasted about five weeks, starting in late September, right at the end of September, running on through October and ending right at the first of November. Now, eighty-six people died and 382 were stricken. Now, that doesn't seem like a whole lot to us, 86 died, but it will be equivalent, according to the population of Meridian at that time based on our population today as if in a five-week period of time we had something strike Meridian and fifteen hundred people were to die and many times that were to come down. You can see the panic that ran through the town. Well, he served very valiantly during that epidemic and then, oh, I thought I had a picture of Gordon, but I don't. He's another handsome young man. C. M. Gordon, who comes here in the year 1878, 36 years old, a fiery young man, I assume, because he had had a fist fight in his last pastorate on main street over some argument. The church had justified him however. He was six feet tall which was extra-ordinarily tall for a man in that day and time, an elegant dresser, he came here to be president of the college. He, too, was married three times, wives didn't last very long in that day and age. I think after two or three children some of them just decided they'd rather die than have to go through it again. I'm telling you, I read about some of that in history, very descriptive, and it's terrible. He died shortly after he left Meridian, two years after he left Meridian; everybody thought he was going to really be a great pulpiter, a great preacher, a great pastor. After revival he went into his room and he went to blow out the little gas lamp (continued next page)

that he had there by his bedstead and the thing exploded and he was burn so badly in the fire that ensued that he died. It was during his pastorate that the dissension took place in the church. Again I say he was not a very compromising man, great pulpit ability but apparently he didn't seem to get along with people too well and so a lot of the people just left and went over to. . . Calvary. Now, this brings us to about - during this period of time - first I'll just mention it, we had been members of the Bethlehem Association and during this period of time then the railroad had come through, so the Association of Bethlehem was formed before the railroad and in 1876 up at Shubuta the Chickasahay Association was formed and these were churches that were along the Mobile and Ohio Railroad starting up here around Shuqualak, Shubuta, and going all the way down to Quitman. Anyway, they set their goal of raising \$100.00 for foreign missions. This was still during reconstruction and a very, very difficult time. Now I brought us up to the year 1879 and during this period of time, post-Civil War, 1879, the character of our church has evolved somewhat, as you can tell. I think largely for two factors. One is that most of the people now live in town who are members of the church and also the pastors have been ministerially educated, most of them at Mississippi College and northern seminaries, and they had begun to set up a diversified church program, first they'd ever had before, to hold regular services and to feel affluent enough or that they could do something like this which was to build a fine building. Now, I'm going to (continued next page)

leave off there because the year 1879 begins another era and that is when a man by the name of J. W. Bozeman comes to Meridian to be pastor, the last one that we have wearing a full beard, and his era marks Meridian from being just this small town church, becoming one of the great leading churches in the Mississippi baptist life.

Thank you.

INDEX

Ball, John	17-18
Boyle, John	24, 31
Bozeman, J. W.	38
Carter, W. P.	15, 17
Clark, N. L.	18
Compton	30-31
Crumpton, W. B.	34
David, Nannie	28
David, William J.	28-29
Duncan, Alex	1
Forbus, Lloyd	32
Foster, J. C.	34
Gordon, C. M.	36-37
Hamilton, J. B.	27-29
Hardin, Captain W. A.	32
Hardin, Captain William H.	35
Harvey	22
Herlbert	25
Keith, W. W.	21-22, 26
Lloyd, J. L.	29
Luke	10
McCaleb, John T.	8-9
McLemore, Richard	5, 17, 26
McRaven, Miss Robel	1
Nicholson, Elder James M.	11
Perlman	25
Ragsdale, Louis (Lewis)	17, 25
Smith, Columbus	31-32, 34-35
Spinks, Elder Isaac	17
Thomas, Brother	11
Whitfield, Theodore	29-30, 32
Williams, Solomon	20
Willis, Brother	11
Wilson, William C.	9