DUCK RIVER ASSOCIATION OF MISSIONARY BAPTISTS

Just as many churches owe their existence to a division in a parent church, so Duck River Association can trace its founding to the fact that groups of people called Baptists could not agree on matters of doctrine and programs of service.

In 1826, the membership of the Elk River Association of Primitive Baptists divided over the Arminian theory and the doctrines expounded by Alexander Campbell. More than a third of the member churches left to form the Duck River Association of Christ.

FORMATIVE YEARS

There are no known records of the 1827 meeting of the new Association, but the 1828 Minutes listed letters from 13 churches and stated that, during the annual session, held at Boiling Fork, Franklin County, 10 more churches were received into the membership.

The 23 churches were located in Bedford, Cannon, Coffee, Franklin, Rutherford and Warren Counties. The combined membership was 880 and the total contributed for all purposes was $21.80.

Among the 13 churches which came out of the Elk River Association was the Bethpage Church, which was the forerunner of the present Estill Springs Church. One of the "newly constituted" churches which entered Duck River Association in 1830 was the "Baptist Church of Christ, at Salem," which later became Maxwell.

In 1829, the phrase "of Christ," was dropped from the name of the Association, but some churches retained this part of their titles for several decades.

Alexander Campbell and his family, who had come out the Presbyterian Church, were baptized into the Baptist Church about 1812. Campbell was ordained as a Baptist minister and served in several churches. However, he and his followers became known as "reformers." Many ministers and entire congregations accepted his teachings. By 1826, churches and associations in several states were torn and disorganized because of the issues at stake. An impasse was reached, and in 1830, Campbell and his followers withdrew and became known as the "Disciples of Christ."

Although Campbell ceased to be a Baptist, he continued to travel and preach and debate, and Baptist groups in many areas continued to argue about certain issues that had been raised. As a result, the Duck River Association encountered many difficulties during the first twenty years of its history. By 1840, six more churches had come into the Association, making a total of 29.

New subjects now arose for debate:

--A Baptist State Convention started in 1833, near Nashville, educating ministers and sending out missionaries. Some felt the Association should join this Convention;

This new State Convention had established, "a Seminary of learning to instruct youths, preachers, etc. at Murfreesboro," in 1841, and there were some who felt that young people and even ministers might profit by attending such an institution.

--Also, some members of the Association were using literature published by a Baptist publishing and Sunday School Society, in Philadelphia, and they had suggested that the whole Association should adopt the use of this literature.

DIVISION

These issues had already wedged a crack in the foundation of the Association so, when the group met at Salem, in 1843, only a light blow was needed to split the two factions asunder. The blow came in the form of a letter from Concord Association, asking fraternal correspondence and union with Duck River. The messengers were almost equally divided, in their opinions. When the vote was taken on the reception of the letter, "it stood 30 for and 27 against."

"The 30 claimed to be the Association and the 27 withdrew and agreed to meet in council…," at a later date. The majority said, "we will unite with Concord Association." A portion refused to receive the letter on the grounds they could not fellowship missionary operations. They said, "we cannot quit our position, we cannot unite with you while you retain your Calvinistic doctrine, your resolves and pledges to do everything in your power to sustain the Baptist Publishing and Sunday School Society, and pledges to support the Seminary of learning…at Murfreesboro."

And so the two groups, later known as "Missionary" and "Separate," went their divided ways, each group claiming to be "THE DUCK RIVER ASSOCIATION." Each group met in 1844 and each group magnanimously offered to take the other back into the fold, if it would admit it had been wrong and would change its views. But each group stubbornly refused to admit being wrong or to concede that the other was the original Duck River Association.

In 1844, the "Separate" group reported letters from 10 churches, plus one newly received; the "Missionary" group reported letters from 14 churches, plus 12 newly received. These 26 churches of the "Missionary" Association were in Bedford, Franklin, Marshall, and Rutherford Counties.

According to the "Separate" Minutes, the "Missionary" group sought union with the "Separate" group again in 1845 and 1846, but the "Separate" Association reported it was "not ready for correspondence" and finally rejected both the proffered letter and the delegates who carried it.

Again, ministers, members and churches were torn between loyalties, and some churches wavered a few years, uncertain which Association they should support.

All through the years, though one group was called "Missionary" and others "Separates," each officially was known simply as the Duck River Association of Baptists. Finally, in 1953, the "Missionary" group adopted a new constitution which stated, "the members of this body and their successors shall be known as the "Duck River Association of Missionary Baptists."

A NEW BEGINNING

After 1844, we have no records of the Missionary Association for nine years, but Minutes of the 1853 sessions indicate that during its first ten years, the Missionary group had tried to live up to its title. By this time, it had Standing Committees on Domestic Missions, Foreign Missions, Education, Sunday School and Prayer Meetings, Indian Missions and instruction for the Colored Population. Duck River Male Academy was under construction and classes were scheduled to start early the next year. Also, the Association had a Missionary who had worked 5 ½ months. His report stated (in part) "…rode 1,092 miles; witnessed 41 professions; baptized 22 persons; constituted one church and aided in the constitution of another…."

The 1854 minutes carry reports from two Missionaries. One had worked, "11 months and 9 days; had 26 professions; 12 baptisms; aided in the constitution of 3 churches; traveled 1,990 miles." The other reported 98 days work; 91 sermons; 42 conversions; 11 baptisms; aided in the constitution of 2 churches; traveled 1,092 miles."

In 1853 the chairman of the Committee on Sunday School and Prayer Meeting moved to "recommend the propriety and duty of organizing a Sabbath school in each church, and also, sustaining a weekly Prayer Meeting." He further noted there is "much good resulting from training the young mind…"

During the early years churches used the literature of the Publishing Society of Philadelphia. However, after the Southern Baptist Convention established their own publishing house, they gradually began to support it.

No Sunday School enrollment figures are found in the Minutes until 1887, and these were given by only a few churches. No totals were tabulated until 1916, when 28 churches (out of 40) reported 2,390 enrolled in Sunday School.

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

In spite of early denominational division, the Civil War, and the long years of restoration, the young people of Duck River Association area had many opportunities for higher learning and a Christian Education.

Union University was established at Murfreesboro, in 1841, by the "Tennessee Baptist Education Society for Ministerial Improvement." This school was, in part, responsible for the split in the Association in 1842, and it experienced many difficulties. For a brief time it flourished, but closed in 1861.

On January 1, 1851, the Tennessee and Alabama Female Collegiate Institute opened in Winchester, with 8 instructors and 110 students. It was founded and operated by the denomination, but the 1851-53 catalog of the school advised, "in consequence of the munificence of Mrs. Mary Sharp…to this institution…as soon as it can be legally done the name Mary Sharp will be substituted for that of Tennessee and Alabama Female Collegiate Institute…"

Mary Sharp claimed to be, "the oldest college for women in American where Latin and Greek were required for graduation." For many years, it ranked with Vassar College for Women, founded in 1861.

Near the present Mary Sharp Elementary School in Winchester is a historical marker which states, "…the school suspended from 1861 to 1865, the building being used by Federal Troops. Reopening in 1865, it finally closed its doors in 1896."

The Association opened the Duck River Male Academy, February 6, 1854, at Fairfield, Tennessee, with 25 students. By the next September, there were 49. For many years the school flourished, and glowing reports are in each issue of the Association Minutes for a period of about 50 years. In 1889 and again in 1893, the school reported 150 students enrolled. But in 1908, the Association appointed a committee "…to consider the control and disposition of the school property…no longer useful to us for school purposes."

In addition to the denominational schools, the Winchester Normal School, opening in 1871, was for many years, directed by a Baptist minister and other Baptist teachers. When the Association met in Winchester in 1893, the messengers attended Chapel services at the School.

In 1889, Professor Terrill, who had been President of Winchester Normal, resigned and built "Terrill College," at Decherd. This school, which reported 200 students in 1891, thrived for a time, but closed near the end of the century.

In 1905, the Tennessee Convention started the "Tennessee College for Women," at Murfreesboro. The new college, which used the site of the old Union University (which closed in 1861) had both a Junior and Senior college and a preparatory section. The school, located within the Association area, was well attended until the depression years of the 1930's destroyed its enrollment and financial support. It closed in 1946, and the convention sold the buildings, some of which are now used by the Middle State Teachers College.

Many of the Minutes of the last Century list funds donated by churches to support a ministerial student, sponsored by the Association, or state that "the By-Laws were suspended" and a collection was taken, during a meeting, to defray the expenses of a girl at Tennessee College and a boy at Union University (Jackson).

JOINED STATE CONVENTION

During the 1877 meeting of the Association the following resolution was passed: "That we become auxiliary to the Tennessee Baptist Convention and in the future prosecute the work of missions through the State Mission Board; that we continue an Executive Committee, and that the first Mission money received be expended to pay the amounts due missionaries for past labors, and all money collected be sent at once to the Treasurer of the State Mission Board."

In 1891, a committee was appointed "to consider the propriety of following a new association comprising several churches of this Association and including some 12 churches of the State

now represented in Alabama." During the next annual session 9 churches "retired" to join the new William Carey Association.

Also, in 1892, a resolution was passed inviting the W.M.U. to meet with the Association the next year "to devise means by which they can do more effectual work in Missions and cooperating with us in the great work of carrying the gospel to all creatures; that we recommend all pastors assist and encourage the organization of W.M.U. and Children's Bands in all churches."

In 1889, there were "only 4 Societies in 34 churches." By 1904, there were 7. In 1909, fifteen churches and 22 Societies, some W.M.U.; some Y.W.A.; some Sunbeam Bands.

Although there was a Standing Committee on W.M.U. from 1898 on, a man was always Chairman of the Committee and, as such, gave the annual report. In 1914, a woman presented the verbal report to the assembly and, in 1918, a woman was listed as chairman of the committee on Women's Work.

The first report of G.A.'s and R.A.'s was given in 1928. When the W.M.U. of the Southern Baptist Convention had its 50th Anniversary, in 1938, the Duck River organizations had 18 W.M.U.'s and 35 Young People organizations in 34 churches.

PROBLEMS OF THE TIME

Transportation problems are by no means new in the Association. The early missionaries rode horseback. Later, as they were required to carry more and more literature, both missionaries and colporteurs used buggies.

In 1895, the Association, "appointed and authorized a man to raise funds and buy a buggy for the colporteur." The next year, the messengers took "additional collections and pledges for the buggy for the colporteur." Finally in 1902, the treasurer was directed to solicit contributions to pay off the balance of $5.00 on the buggy bought for the former colporteur."

Apparently, even in those days, many had learned that it was easier "to leave the driving to…" someone else. Repeatedly, the assemblies passed resolutions to "tender thanks to the Railroads and the Turnpikes Companies and Hacks for reduced rates."

And it's possible that the matter of "indecent literature" did not develop during the Space Age. In 1897, the colporteur reported that certain denominations (which he names) were "putting their baneful literature in the homes of our people. Also, large numbers of novels, the story papers, **Saturday Blade, Chicago Ledger** and other vile trash are corrupting the mind and blighting the prospects and damning the souls of our young people."

The following was introduced for action in 1899, "I wish to call attention to the evils of the habit of using tobacco in its many forms and ask that a committee be appointed to investigate as to the extent of these evils, especially as they effect the ministry, and report their finding at our next annual meeting." After some discussion, the resolution was amended to include the use of coffee

and opium, also. "The resolution passed," but unfortunately, we have no copy of the Minutes for the year 1900!

TWENTIETH CENTURY

In 1901, there were 35 churches in the Association, with a total membership of 3,091. These reported 110 baptisms. There were 956 enrolled in Sunday School, and there were four mission Societies. The total paid for pastor's support, for the entire Association was $3,573.86.

Beginning in 1907, and continuing through 1914, Tennessee Baptists held Annual Summer Encampments in the Hotel buildings at Estill Springs, which was a resort town.

After the success of this program, the State later conducted conferences, encampments, and conventions at Ovoca, three miles from Tullahoma. The Ovoca Assembly grounds and buildings were owned by the Knights of Pythias and were leased from them for a short period, each summer from 1924 through 1936.

The 1911 Assembly heard a report that the Tennessee Baptist Convention had bought a 75 acre farm between Nashville and Franklin and was constructing a three-story building, preparatory to moving the Tennessee Baptist Orphanage to this farm. The messengers pledged their cooperation and financial support, and immediately took a collection. The next year the messengers were told the farm needed cows, and they took an offering "to buy a Duck River Cow." Since that time, the Association has contributed funds, food, clothing, toys and equipment, to the Home.

In 1918, the Minutes mentioned a committee on B.Y.P.U. work. In 1922, the report stated "Duck River has no less than 20 unions. In some cases more than in one church." The following year, the Association elected a President and Vice-President of Sunday School and B.Y.P.U.

In 1934, the Minutes stated "a new organization is pending and information for a report is lacking." A year later the new Director of Baptist Training Union gave a report and listed the officers for the year 1935-36.

CENTENNIAL

The Centennial session of the Association was held at Lewisburg, September 25 and 26, 1926. That year there were 39 member churches in an area covering all of Bedford, Coffee, Franklin, Marshall and Moore Counties, and parts of Grundy, Lincoln, Rutherford and Warren Counties. These churches had a total of 4,039 members; reported 205 baptisms; gave $5,781 to Missions and the total gifts were $28,282. There were 2,940 enrolled in Sunday School.

On this Anniversary Year, fifteen churches failed to send messengers and a few failed to send letters. The assembly voted to "amend the constitution so as to automatically remove from the roll of membership of churches any church failing for two successive years to represent itself in the session of the Association." Many churches were dropped from the roll during the next few

years, but all were "unanimously received and restored," after they asked to be returned to the fold.

While the "Laymens Missionary Movement" started in the Southern Baptist Convention in 1907, the work is not mentioned in Duck River Minutes until 1927, when a committee was appointed, and a report was made. In 1940, the Assembly voted to "change the topic of Laymen's Work to Brotherhood," but still there was no organization in the Association until 1948, when one was reported.

In 1954-55, the Brotherhood adopted the R.A. groups, formerly sponsored by the W.M.U. This obviously provided a needed stimulus, for the entire organization has been growing since that time.

SESQUICENTENNIAL

In 1976, 150 years after the Duck River Association of Christ separated from the Elk River Association of Primitive Baptists, both Duck River Association (the "Missionary" and the "Separate" groups) held annual meetings in the same geographic area. Each numbered its session the 150th. Each listed about the same number of churches, but the programs and reports of the two assemblies bore little resemblance to each other for the two groups were perhaps farther apart on doctrine and service than they were in the 1840's.

The Sesquicentennial session of the Duck River Association of Missionary Baptists was held at Winchester, First Baptist Church, on October 18, 1976 and Highland Baptist Church on October 19, 1976. That year 34 churches and two Missions formed the Association. These were from Coffee, Franklin and Grundy Counties.

It was at the October 19th Session that Little Mountain (Little Mount) Baptist Church came into the Association, bringing the total of 34 churches. The two missions were Beech Grove and Cumberland Chapel.

1976 – 1986

During this span of ten years two churches were added to the Association. These were Victory (1978) and Beech Grove (1985). This brought the total to 36 churches in 1985. Through 1986 there were also two missions (Cumberland Chapel and Emmanuel) that were considered a part of the Association.

The budget more than doubled during this period of time. The budget for 1976-77 was $37,845.00, and in 1986-87 it was $85,910.00.

Missions was in the forefront during these years. In 1980 Northland Baptist Association in Michigan became the Association's sister in ministry. In 1981, and for several years thereafter, persons from Duck River Association participated in missions work in Borkino Fasso or, as it was then known, Upper Volta, in Africa.

Also, in 1981 the Association participated in a New Work Probe and identified several sites in the Association that needed a mission or church. Again, in 1984 the Association took missions seriously at home and began a ministry among migrant workers in the Hillsboro area.

Two World Missions Conferences were held in the Association in this 10-year period (April 1978 and October 1985). These conferences were very helpful in keeping the matter of missions in the minds of the people of the Association. Twenty-three (23) churches participated in the 1985 conference.

Evangelism has always been a priority with Southern Baptists. In 1986 the Association participated in the "Good News America, God Loves You" Simultaneous Revival effort. In November, 1986 the Evangelism Committee of the Association set in motion plans for an area-wide crusade to be led by the E.J. Daniels team from Orlando, Florida.

Evangelization is not only a local priority. It is a world-wide priority for Southern Baptists. The Association joined the Tennessee Baptist Convention in partnership with Venezuela.

Education has played a big role in preparing persons for ministry. In January, 1983 the Association saw the beginning of a Seminary Extension Program. Numbers of classes have been held since the inception of the program. It continued to function in 1986.

The Duck River Association of Missionary Baptists have, for a number of years, been very supportive of the Baptist Student Union work at Motlow State Community College. The Director of Missions and other persons have served on the Advisory Committee for the BSU over the years. In 1986 the Association set aside $7,000.00 toward their goal of the some $31,000.00 for the purpose of helping the BSU to build a building on campus. The Association worked with New Duck River Association and William Carey Association in this matter.

These ten years were progressive years. As God provides opportunity, the Association will move ahead in missions, evangelism, stewardship, and education.

MEMBERSHIP

Approximately 132 churches have been members of the Association, since its beginning. But the majority of them have, for one reason or another, left to join other groups. By 1945 there were 39 churches, an area which included 5 counties. After much consideration and planning, fifteen churches, located in Bedford and Marshall Counties requested letters for dismissal from Duck River Association to become members of the New Duck River Association, which was organized October 8, 1945.

This reduced Duck River Association to 23 churches in a five county area, and left a 3,533 membership, a little more than half of the figure reported in 1945. The geographic scope was now less and the matter of traveling to meetings became easier for many. This, in turn, increased the opportunities for results in both the old and the new Associations.

In a few years the remaining Bedford and Rutherford County churches left to join Associations closer to them. In 1958, two churches and one mission, located in Warren County, left Duck River to join the new Central Association, organized in October, 1958.

This trimmed Duck River to its present geographical reach, covering Coffee, Franklin and part of Grundy Counties, with 19 churches and 4 missions. The Association had 34 churches and 2 missions in 1976. There were 5,886 enrolled in Sunday School; 1,836 in Training Union; 815 in W.M.U. The total membership at that time was 10,238. During 1986 the Association was comprised of 36 churches and 2 missions. There were 6,663 enrolled in Sunday School; 1,551 in Church Training (the new name for what was Training Union); 1,041 in WMU; and 359 in Brotherhood. The total membership was 12,352.

So far as is known, the Association did not have an office until 1956 when, by special arrangement, the Trustees established an office in the basement of the First Baptist Church, Manchester. That year, too, the Association built a residence for its Missionary, who, with his family, moved into the new house, January 25, 1957.

The basement office space was used until September, 1961, when office space was rented on the Manchester-Tullahoma Highway 55, opposite Rose Hill Cemetery.

In February, 1962, Trustees of the Association bought a lot on Highway 41-A on the South edge of Tullahoma on which to construct a brick office building to furnish an office for the Missionary, one of the secretary and large conference room and two small ones, plus a utility room, work room and two restrooms. It was occupied in July, 1963.

The Missionary's home in Manchester was sold and a housing allowance was started for the Missionary. This helped to liquidate indebtedness. They sold the Missionary two lots owned by the Association near the present office site. The next few years saw many improvements in equipment, parking space, and services offered to the churches.

LOOKING AHEAD

What does the future hold for Duck River Association of Missionary Baptists? Who can say? The first 160 years have been good, and the prospects for the future are limited only by those limitations placed on the work of our Lord for those individuals who are and will be in places of responsible leadership in the Association.

The Association, though not geographically as large, has a tremendous opportunity to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ. The world is coming to Duck River Association of Missionary Baptists. We must discover ways of telling the old, old story in an ever-changing society. The message must be taken to people where they are because the days of their coming seeking the Lord are just about over. May our vision be enlarged and our Lord's work accomplished in greater ways in the years ahead.

DIRECTORS OF MISSIONS

Henry Miller 1853-1854

John Wagster 1854-1859

W.W. Arnold 1859-1877

T.J. McCandless 1877

W.H. Burr 1882

William Huff 1883-1886

Edgar McNutt 1898

A.R. Hester 1900-1902

L.D. Agee, C.A. Todd, Berry McNatt, S.H. Price...1901-1902

F.M. Jackson 1913-1916

W.C. Rains 1917

T.G. Davis 1919

J.F. Goree 1944-1946

Cannie Leonard 1946-1949

H.C. Adkins 1950-1954

E.C. Sisk 1954

H.D. Standifer 1956-1974

Hoyt Jennings 1974-1979

J.C. Carpenter 1979-1986

Baylon Hilliard 1986-2010

Mark Puckett 2010-PRESENT