

BAPTIST FEATURES

PRODUCED BY BAPTIST PRESS
NEWS SERVICE OF THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION

460 JAMES ROBERTSON PARKWAY, NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE 244-2355

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March 13, 1964

Artist Finds History
Colorful Work Field

(Editor's Note: The following article, which appeared in the Baptist Standard, Texas state Baptist weekly, pictures the work of an artist whose drawings on events of Baptist history now appear in this paper from time to time.)

By J. Eugene White
Editorial Assistant, Baptist Standard

A Dallas artist has discovered that many exciting dramas of civilization lie buried in dust-covered tomes on the library shelf, forgotten by the descendants of those whose story is told in the books of history.

Erwin M. Hearne Jr., a commercial artist and a member of First Church of Dallas, has completed a series of eight oil paintings bringing to life some of the persons and events which have shaped the destiny of Baptists in America.

The series titled "Great Moments In Baptist History," won for the artist the award for the best illustration group of 1963 from the Dallas Advertising Art Association. The Sunday School Board, Nashville, Tenn. was presented an award of excellence by the art association for the exhibit.

Hearne's paintings will appear on covers of the board's 1964 periodicals.

The sandy-haired artist relates that he became interested in painting scenes from Baptist history during the last presidential election. Concern over the issue of church-state separation became strong during the campaign.

From the books of religious and secular history he learned that what his pastor and others had been saying was true--Baptists had been almost totally responsible for gaining and holding religious freedom and liberty of conscience for all men.

"The thing that struck me as I read," Hearne explains, "was the absence of pictures. There was nothing to help me visualize the heritage I was learning about."

That artist declares, "There I was, 35 years old and for the first time in my life becoming aware of the heritage of our people."

The little-used books were filled with drama and excitement; but a dull, gray page of type doesn't look very inspiring, he declares.

"I was convinced that pictures could motivate our people to read a thousand words, or many thousands, in our Baptist histories."

Finally he took his idea to J. M. Dawson, whose book on Baptists and the American Republic had so greatly impressed him. He presented his idea also to W. A. Criswell, his pastor, and to E. S. James, editor of the Baptist Standard.

Encouraged by these men, he went to Nashville, Tenn. in the summer of 1962 to meet with Davis C. Woolley, executive secretary of the Southern Baptist Historical Commission. He took along several sketches of great moments in Baptist history.

The Baptist historian was so impressed that he persuaded the Sunday School Board to commission Hearne to paint eight pictures for reproduction on the covers of Baptist literature during the third Baptist Jubilee Year of 1964.

Subjects of the paintings and the publications on which they appear or will appear are:

John Leland and James Madison at Orange, Va.--Junior Leader, first quarter, and Baptist Young Adults, second quarter.

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Isaac Backus before Continental Congress--Baptist Adults, second quarter, and Intermediate Leader, third quarter.

James Ireland preaching from Culpeper jail--Training Union Magazine, March.

Richard Furman and Luther Rice at organization of Triennial Convention--Sunday School Builder, May.

Roger Williams enroute to Narragansett Bay after banishment from Salem--Sunday School Adults, fourth quarter.

George W. Truett preaching on steps of national capitol--Training Union Magazine, September.

J. M. Frost and J. B. Gambrell preparing the report recommending the formation of the Sunday School Board--Sunday School Builder, November.

Luther Rice visiting the home of John Bagby in Virginia--Home Life, December.

Each painting is an authentic presentation of the event being depicted. Before the artist touches his brush to the canvas he has read extensively on his subject and has consulted several outstanding Baptist historians. The historians return to Hearne check sheets covering such minute details as season of the year and time of the day the event took place, description of buildings and countryside, any idiosyncrasy of dress, and anything unusual about the surroundings.

Woolley told the Baptist Standard that full-color prints of these paintings will be made available for a nominal charge if the demand is great enough to justify the cost of reproduction. Inquiries should be made through Baptist book stores or directly to the Sunday School Board, 127 Ninth Ave., North, Nashville, Tenn.

The first paintings have been so well received by those who have seen them that the Historical Commission has asked the artist to prepare a series of 25 pencil sketches of additional great moments in Baptist history.

"There's great drama in Baptist history just waiting to be captured on canvas," the artist said.

(Picture of artist sent).

Cutlines

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Baptist Press Photo

(goes with Hearne feature)

HISTORY ARTIST--Erwin M. Hearne Jr. of Dallas found Baptist history so fascinating he decided it had to be told in pictures. A number of his sketches are being published in Baptist state weekly papers. Others will appear on Sunday school and Training Union quarterlies. (BP) Photo