

# (BP)

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention 460 James Robertson Parkway  
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## --- FEATURES

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April 24, 1970

Southern Baptist Convention  
Observes 125th Anniversary

by Davis C. Woolley  
Executive Secretary, Historical Commission  
Southern Baptist Convention

Southern Baptists are observing the 125th anniversary of the founding of the Southern Baptist Convention during 1970, with special attention given to the anniversary during the convention in Denver, June 1-4.

The observance will celebrate the organization of what now has become the nation's largest Protestant denomination on the historic date of May 10, 1845, when Baptists from eight states and the District of Columbia met in Augusta, Ga., for the purpose of "eliciting, combining and directing the energies of the Baptist denomination in America."

The anniversary observance will seek to mark this significant mile-post in such a manner as to increase understanding, appreciation and support for the life and work of Southern Baptists.

At the convention in Denver, the first evening session will be devoted to a multi-media dramatic production which will portray the historical highlights of Southern Baptists and point the way for a greater future.

The anniversary committee has outlined three objectives for this observance: (1) to improve Southern Baptists' understanding of their own heritage. (2) to relate the Christian commitment of Southern Baptists more meaningfully to the present and the future; and (3) to interpret more adequately to the denomination's various publics the progress of Southern Baptists as a part of the body of Christ.

The anniversary is shared by two of the convention's agencies. The Home Mission Board and the Foreign Mission Board were both brought into being by the convention in 1845 and are also observing their 125th anniversaries.

Histories of both boards will be published for the occasion, and other anniversary special features are being planned. The history of the Home Mission Board has been written by the executive secretary, Arthur Rutledge, while the Foreign Mission Board book is a compilation of sections written by each of the area secretaries and the executive secretary, and edited by John D. Hughey, the board's secretary for Europe and the Middle East.

One of the anniversary features is a documentary film "Dimensions of Courage" showing who Southern Baptists are, where they came from, and what the plans are for the future.

This film was released for premier showing in 100 "M" Night Church Training rallies across the nation in the fall of 1969. The film is now available from Baptist Film Centers for viewing in churches all across the nation.

The film, "Dimensions of Courage," was prepared by a film production committee appointed to assist the convention's order of business committee in presenting a worthy observance of the anniversary. W. C. Fields, public relations secretary of the Executive Committee of the SBC, has served as chairman of the committee, and the public relations committee of the Executive Committee has assisted in making plans for the anniversary.

Every agency of the convention has responded to the call to mark this anniversary in a manner to increase understanding, appreciation and support for the life and work of Southern Baptists.

Mrs. R. L. Mathis of Waco, Tex., president of the SBC Woman's Missionary Union, has charge of the multi-media feature on the opening night session of the convention in Denver, June 1.

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Great Moments  
In SBC History

by Davis C. Woolley  
Executive Secretary, SBC Historical Commission

When the Southern Baptist Convention organized in 1845, its constitution provided for expansion into all the United States. Two boards were established, but with provisions for as many other boards as the convention needed for its benevolent work.

Since that day, May 10, 1845 in Augusta, Ga., the convention has through the past 125 years grown to the point it is now the largest Protestant denomination in the nation.

From 4,126 churches in 1845, the SBC has grown to 34,335 churches reported in 1970. Membership has increased from 350,000 church members in 1845 to 11,489,613 reported in 1970. The number of boards has increased from two to four boards and seventeen other agencies.

The two boards--Foreign Mission Board located in Richmond, and Domestic Missions then located in Marion, Ala.--went into business as soon after the convention as possible with missionaries at work.

In the beginning, the convention refused to start a publication board, though there was strong sentiment for one. By 1849, a group of interested persons organized the Southern Baptist Publication Society located in Charleston, S.C., but it was not an agency of the convention. Then, in 1851, the convention authorized a Bible Board to be located in Nashville.

In this same year, J. R. Graves set forth his "Landmark Statement" at the Big Hatchie Association at Cotton Grove, Tenn. For more than 50 years Landmarkism caused controversy among Southern Baptists until the followers of these teachings withdrew from the convention in 1905 and organized the General Association of Landmark Baptists.

Another great moment in Southern Baptist history took place in 1859 when alongside the convention was formed the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary located at Greenville, S.C. Later it was recognized as an agency of the convention.

When the War Between the States came with all its fury, the Bible Board was swept away, as was the Publication Society. The Convention organized in the midst of the war in 1863 the Baptist Sunday School Board to produce literature for the churches of the South. The seminary which had closed in 1862 was re-opened in 1865, and after struggling to remain open, it moved to Louisville in 1877.

In 1866 at the meeting in Russellville, Ky., the convention voted to meet annually thereafter.

The years following the war were so severe that the Sunday School Board was about to collapse when the convention voted to combine the Sunday School Board with the Domestic Board of Missions in 1873. The next year the name of the combined Board was changed to The Home Mission Board.

Another great moment in the life of the convention came in 1888, though there is no reference to it in the convention proceedings and reports for that year. It was the organization of Woman's Missionary Union as an auxiliary to the convention.

The women in a number of states had been organized to promote giving and praying for missions. It was another 30 years before the convention gave the women the status of messengers, and then two years longer--1920--before a woman addressed the convention. It was 45 years more in 1963, before a woman was elected vice-president of the convention.

The convention brought the Sunday School Board into being in 1891. This action set the convention on a new course of ministry and education unparalleled hithertofore.

As the second 50 years was beginning, the Baptist Young People's Union of the South was organized as an auxiliary to the convention in 1896. This church member training organization became fully graded in 1932 and is known as Training Union. The Sunday School Board began to promote the BYPU and to offer field service in Sunday School work about 1900.

At the same time these educational activities were being promoted in the churches, theological education was having difficult times. In 1896, W. H. Whitsitt was charged with error in teaching of Baptist history. The crisis became so severe that Whitsitt offered his resignation as president of Southern Seminary in 1899 to avoid splitting the convention.

While this was going on, the Home Mission Board appointed a field secretary for the territory west of the Mississippi, and with the organization of the Laymen's Missionary Movement in 1907 the men were being enlisted in stewardship and missionary education. This movement later became the Brotherhood Commission in 1952.

The laymen joined in the celebration of the Judson Centennial in 1912-14 in an effort to raise one million dollars for foreign missions.

In 1908 Southwestern Seminary was founded in Texas and later accepted as an institution of the convention.

As World War I was coming to a close, the laymen led in calling for an efficiency committee to recommend ways for increasing the business efficiency of the convention. The recommendations called for a church financial plan and the election of an Executive Committee (1917).

The convention accepted the challenge in 1919 to raise \$75,000,000 in five years. The 75 Million Campaign was a great success in enlisting the people and securing \$92 million in pledges. But the pledges were not paid because of the recession in the early 1920's.

The over-expansion of the agencies and state conventions and the failure to receive 75 million dollars plunged the convention in discouraging debts. On top of this, the misappropriation of funds by trusted employees made matters worse.

Even in the face of all this, the convention established in 1919 the Relief and Annuity Board (later the Annuity Board) which ministers to the retirees and the needy among the pastors and denominational workers. Also during this period the convention organized the Education Board and committed to it the Ridgecrest Assembly.

One of the good things coming out of the 75 Million Campaign was the Conservation Committee which recommended the Cooperative Program to succeed the five-year effort of fund raising.

At the same time the Cooperative Program Commission came into being and it recommended a central Executive Committee to be the convention ad interim.

In 1927, the Executive Committee, which had operated on a limited scale, was enlarged. One of the first things the enlarged Executive Committee did was to deal with the debts referred to above.

The Hundred Thousand Club was set in motion in 1933 to help pay the debts. By 1943 all the debts were paid and the convention was making ready to celebrate its Centennial with a great evangelistic crusade. But World War II caused the Atlanta convention to be postponed.

In 1939 two events were great moments. One was the establishment of the Radio Committee. It became the Radio Commission in 1946 and the Radio and Television Commission in 1956.

The other important event was the adoption of the Business and Financial Plan of the convention. This brought into operation a single plan for all the financial programs of the convention and its agencies.

In 1942, the SBC began its expansion into the West and North, and indeed the whole United States when California was accepted as one of the cooperating states of the convention. The convention adopted a minority report admitting California, rather than a committee recommendation that the action be delayed.

Another significant minority report was adopted in 1949 when the convention approved a substitute motion to locate a western assembly in Glorieta, N.M. The first assembly was held there in 1952 under the work of the Sunday School Board, which earlier had been requested to operate an assembly at Ridgecrest, N.C.

After World War II the convention accepted the challenge of Secretary M.T. Rankin of the Foreign Mission Board for advance in giving until the convention gave 10 million dollars to foreign missions and 1,750 missionaries were under appointment. This quickened the pace of Southern Baptists.

The Sunday Schools undertook to enlist "A Million More in '54" and the convention gave approval in 1954 to the Supreme Court's plan to integrate the public schools.

The convention launched the plan of Baptist Jubilee Advance in 1957. The Advance included the Thirty Thousand Movement begun in 1954 to organize twenty thousand missions and preaching points, and ten thousand churches. Southern Baptists and other Baptist conventions from 1959 to 1964 observed the sesquicentennial of the beginning of the organized work in support of missions in America.

During this period, in 1962, the convention requested the Sunday School Board and the Brotherhood Commission to invite the Woman's Missionary Union to join in planning emphases and themes for the post Jubilee years. This was a far-reaching step. Long-range plans were made for 1965-69.

To follow that period, the convention recommended that plans be projected by a special 70 Onward Committee for the decade beginning in 1970. The Inter-Agency Committee, which came into being in 1959, was called on to coordinate the plans.

Recommendations of special study committee adopted in 1959 brought several significant advances. Included was the Stewardship Commission and the Inter-Agency Council with its assignment to coordinate and correlate the work of the agencies; as assigned programs touch the churches.

In 1962 the convention was disturbed by a controversy over the book *The Message of Genesis* written by Ralph Elliott of the Midwestern Seminary and published by Broadman Press. This prompted the appointment of a special committee to re-study the convention's "Statement of Faith and Message." The revised statement was presented and approved in 1963.

In 1968 the convention approved a "Statement Concerning the Crisis in Our Nation," regarding the conditions of violence, racial injustice, and poverty.

In New Orleans in 1969, the convention voted for its agencies to abide by the Statement of Faith and Message. Convention President Criswell challenged the convention to recognize the word of God as the two-edged sword of faith and works. The ideas of evangelism and social action were brought together as the challenge for the future.

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Those Days In May, 1845:  
What Happened in Augusta

by Lynn E. May Jr.  
Research Director, SBC Historical Commission

Excitement ran high in Augusta as Baptists arrived in town for the convention scheduled to begin the next day. The Augusta Baptist Church had arranged accommodations for 130 delegates, but more than twice that number came! Southern hospitality prevailed, however, and before the evening grew late, a place had been found for everyone.

Delegates from eight states and the District of Columbia, traveled to Augusta by boat, train, stage, and private conveyance. Those who came by horseback committed their horses to the care of the local livery stable for 37½ cents per day.

Two delegates from Maryland and a thirty-member delegation from Virginia traveled by rail and by boat. One of their number, J. B. Jeter, later wrote about traveling from Wilmington, North Carolina, to Charleston, South Carolina, by steamer. They encountered a severe storm that made them extremely seasick and caused the inexperienced landlubbers to fear a disastrous shipwreck.

The role of Southern ministers as defenders of slavery and the extent of their clash with those Northern ministers who supported abolitionism was vividly portrayed by Jeter. He wrote:

"When the peril had passed this thought forced itself on our minds: If we had perished our fate would have been deemed decisive proof that slavery was wrong, and that God visited its defenders with a just and signal judgment. A thousand pulpits would have proclaimed the instructive lessons of the fearful providence."

Some Southern leaders saw the meeting in Augusta as an opportunity to realize their vision of a national convention which would be broad in its scope and purpose and centralized in its operation.

Richard Furman and William Bullein Johnson of South Carolina, along with Luther Rice had sought without success to lead Baptists to organize the Baptist General Convention, first national Baptist body, by this pattern when it was formed in 1814.

The society method, that is, the formation of separate, independent bodies for each facet of denominational work, continued to prevail among Baptists in America. But one idea was never lost among Baptists in the South--the vision of a national body broad enough in its purposes to engage in a wide range of activities.

Furman Johnson, and others gave this denominational concept its first real test in 1821 when they led in forming the South Carolina Baptist Convention by this pattern as the first state convention in America. By 1845 state conventions had been organized in most states.

Dissatisfaction of Southern leaders with cooperative efforts through the America Baptist Home Mission Society, formed in 1832, became a divisive element. Baptist leaders in the South and West complained that this Society was neglecting mission fields in their areas. Such complaints were largely without foundation, but the effect on Southern minds was the same as if the charges of neglect had been true. This divisive issue prompted several calls for a Southern Baptist Convention prior to 1845.

Baptists initially managed to keep the slavery controversy out of the meetings of their national societies. But the inevitable happened. Radical opponents of slavery among Baptists of the North continued to agitate the slavery issue.

The final breaking point came when Alabama Baptists addressed resolutions to the Board of Managers of the General Convention demanding a specific avowal that slaveholders would be appointed as missionaries.

Baptists throughout the South were cut to the quick when they heard the board's reply, particularly the following statement:

"If... anyone should offer himself as a missionary, having slaves, and should insist on retaining them as his property, we could not appoint him. One thing is certain; we can never be a party to any arrangement which would imply approbation of slavery."

Many Baptist leaders, North and South, concluded that continued cooperation was no longer possible or proper.

The Virginia Baptist Foreign Mission Society took the lead in calling for a consultative convention. On April 10, 1845, by agreement with Georgia Baptists, this Society proposed that all Baptist brethren, North, South, East, and West, who were "aggrieved by the recent decision of the Board," convene in Augusta, Georgia, on May 8, 1845, to consider the formation of a new denominational body.

The 293 delegates who met in Augusta in 1845, made momentous decisions which have vitally affected their denomination for almost 125 years. They represented only 166 of the 4,126 Baptist churches in the South which in 1845 reported a total membership of 351,951.

Over 97 per cent of the delegates were from four of the eight states represented. Five states affiliating with the convention sent no delegates. But the actions taken at Augusta had lasting significance for all.

1. Baptists in the South withdrew from their northern brethren and formed a new denominational body. This separation continues today.

2. They determined to unite the efforts of Baptists in the South in particular but in other areas as well in cooperative endeavor. History attests their success.

3. They created a new kind of national Baptist body, new in being and in character.

With all delegates properly seated on Thursday morning May 8, 1845, the meeting proceeded to the election of officers, choosing W. B. Johnson as president, Wilson Lumpkin and J. B. Taylor, vice presidents, and Jesse Hartwell and James C. Crane as secretaries of the body.

The first major step toward separation from their northern brethren came when Richard Fuller moved that a committee of two from each state represented in the meeting be appointed to prepare a preamble and resolutions for the action of the convention. Following the selection of the committee, with Fuller as chairman, the convention adjourned until 4:00 p.m.

That afternoon the body adopted rules of order. Fuller's committee made a report. But after considerable debate, the convention adjourned to 8:00 a.m. Friday. All agreed that too much haste was inadvisable.

Resuming consideration of the report on Friday morning, the delegates engaged in a "full free, and harmonious discussion."

After referring to his own conservative position on this issue in the past, J. B. Jeter concluded: "I am now in favor of a separate organization, and the more I reflect upon the subject, the difficulties which at first presented themselves to my mind vanish, and I believe the cause of God will be promoted thereby."

Editor T. W. Haynes of South Carolina declared: "I go hand, heart and soul for the resolution." Layman Duncan of South Carolina also expressed support for a separate organization, but questioned the committee's recommendation that it be called a society.

"I prefer the term society, Chairman Richard Fuller. explained, because the Baptist church could not in this way be divided."

Some of the leaders at Augusta, however, expressed reservations about withdrawal from Baptists in the North.

Following further discussion, Jonathan Davis, Georgia pastor, arose to express favor for the resolution, but questioned the wisdom of acting without assurance that the brethren of Tennessee, Kentucky, and other western states would unite with them in this matter.

Editor J. S. Baker of Erogia then related that he had in his possession letters from Kentucky, Tennessee and Mississippi declaring their support for separation. Representatives from Alabama and North Carolina rose to assure the convention of the support of their states.

At last the delegates were ready to vote. They unanimously approved the resolution, thereby demonstrating their determination to sever old ties and form their own denominational body. The nature of this new organization would be determined by its constitution.

The Fuller Committee, with the addition of W. B. Johnson and seven other delegates was instructed to prepare a constitution for the proposed organization.

The constitution they presented to the convention on Saturday morning was largely the work of a single member of the committee, William Bullein Johnson.

At an earlier meeting of the South Carolina Baptist Convention of which he was president, Johnson had unveiled a plan of organization that had been maturing in his mind for many years. In contrast to the old society plan, this new plan called for one convention embracing the whole denomination with separate and distinct boards, "for each object of benevolent enterprise, located at different places, and all amenable to the convention."

In Augusta, Johnson presented his proposed constitution to the constitutional committee. The 13-article constitution recommended to the convention by this committee on May 10 consists of Johnson's proposed 11-article constitution with slight revision and the addition of two new articles.

Presentation of the constitution to the convention on Saturday morning provoked debate on several matters. One was the proposed name: "Southern and Southwestern Baptist Convention."

Eventually a motion prevailed to strike the words "and Southwestern."

After discussing and adopting each article, the assembly adopted the preamble and constitution by unanimous vote.

At the Saturday afternoon session J. B. Jeter moved that the convention convene in Richmond, Virginia, on June 10, 1846, for its first triennial session. He further resolved that the delegates assembled in Augusta proceed to elect provisional officers and boards to continue in office until the 1846 session.

On Saturday night, the only evening session during the Augusta, meeting, the convention elected 33 members and officers for each of the boards, including a vice president from thirteen states and the District of Columbia, in addition to a fifteen-member board of managers.

Sunday was devoted to worship in the First Baptist Church building. That afternoon W. B. Johnson, assisted by J. B. Taylor, conducted a special Lord's Supper Service which was attended by a large crowd. The custom of denominational communion was not uncommon in the 1840's.

When the convention reconvened for its final session on Monday morning, Secretaries Crane and Hartwell noted that only about one hundred were present for this last session, "many of the brethren having left the city...."

During the final Monday session, the convention adopted resolutions on numerous matters including those to affiliate with auxiliary societies, to urge financial support of the mission boards, and to urge the Domestic Mission Board to "take all prudent measures for the instruction of our colored population." The convention also voted to seek a charter of incorporation and to instruct the Domestic Mission Board to aid in establishing the Baptist cause in New Orleans.

The organizational meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention then adjourned. President W. B. Johnson led the closing prayer, after which they sang a hymn and departed.



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April 24, 1970

SBC Historical Commission  
Traces 125 Years of History

**NASHVILLE (BP)**--The Southern Baptist Historical Commission, meeting here just three weeks prior to the 125th anniversary of the organization of the Southern Baptist Convention, heard a detailed account of the first convention in Augusta in 1845 and traced the history of the denomination since its founding to the present.

A description of "What Happened in Augusta" was given by Lynn E. May Jr., research director on the commission's staff; and an address tracing the major events in the denomination's history was given by Davis C. Woolley, executive director of the commission.

The three-day meeting of the SBC Historical Commission opened with a personality profile of the first convention president, W. B. Johnson, SBC president from 1845-1850.

Throughout the sessions, monographs of the lives of three other major convention presidents were presented to the commission members. The biographical sketches were presented on P. H. Mell, fourth president of the SBC from 1863-1872; Johshua Levering, president from 1908 to 1911; and George W. Truett, president from 1927-30.

In addition, personality profiles and monographs of two Baptist historians, B. F. Riley who wrote the first history of the SBC that was never published by the denomination; and W. W. Barnes, the author of the major chronicle of the denomination's history and professor at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth.

In his description of the first convention in Augusta, May 8-12, 1845, May told of the events leading up to the convention and the adoption of the constitution setting up a centralized organization rather than separate mission societies as had previously been done.

Dissatisfaction of southern leaders with the efforts through the American Baptist Home Mission Society, formed in 1832, became the divisive element that led to separation, especially after the society refused to appoint a slave-owner from Georgia as a home missionary.

Woolley, in tracing the history of the convention since it was organized 125 years ago, pointed to a growth from 4,126 churches and 350,000 members in 1845 to a total of 34,335 churches and 11,489,613 members reported in 1970.

In other major speeches, Gains S. Dobbins, retired seminary professor and Sunday School Board official, told of his 60 years of work in the denomination; and Maj. Harwell G. Davis, an attorney and former president of Howard College (now Samford University), in Birmingham, Ala. Dobbins also is living in Birmingham in retirement.

Dobbins, who retired twice after professorships at Southern and Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminaries, referred not only to the past but the present, saying there are uncertainties in the present in the midst of certainties of the past in the denomination.

Among the uncertainties, he asked if Southern Baptists would "meet change with change, maintaining witness to unchanging truth in a changing environment," and if "Southern Baptists, a predominately rural people," would be able "to adjust their thinking and acting so as to win for Christ in the city."

Adding that some issues are causing much controversy in the denomination, Dobbins observed that it is better to have "controversy leading to solution than 'peace at any price' with the issues unsolved.

"Polarization of the convention into two opposing camps will bring disorganization and weakness," he added. "Dialog in Christian spirit concerning differences of opinion and interpretation will bring creative togetherness that strengthens unity and advances the cause of Christ."

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In a major speech at the Southern Baptist Historical meeting just following the commission's sessions, Albert McClellan, program planning secretary for the convention's Executive Committee, said that the 125th anniversary convention in Denver "is probably the most issue-laden convention we have had in some time."

McClellan said that the messengers attending the convention have the choice of either facing the issues honestly with intelligent awareness of the complexity of the issues, or facing the issues "with the blind simplistic believe that my point of view is the only possible point of view."

McClellan observed that Baptists "must for the sake of God's kingdom find ways of clinging to our individual convictions while holding to our faith in the democratic process. We must be willing for the sake of the fellowship to find a consensus."

"If concensus is not possible," he said, "then brotherhood has failed. I refuse to believe that this is where we are. The spirit of Christ still lives within us sufficient to draw us together provided we don't cling to our own sense of perfection and absoluteness." He called for more dependence on the Holy Spirit.

In major business actions, the Historical Commission re-elected W. Morgan Patterson, professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, as chairman, and heard reports on plans for the 125th anniversary convention in Denver and the production of Volume III of the Southern Baptist Encyclopedia.

The convention in Denver will include a multi-media presentation of the history of the convention entitled "Milepost 125," the commission was told. Another report indicated the second one-fourth of the copy for articles to be included in the encyclopedia would be turned over to the publisher for typesetting on May 1. Completion is scheduled in June, 1971.

In the report of the chairman to the commission, Patterson called for a thorough study of Baptist heritage, saying that "greater familiarity with one's denominational heritage will provide a basis to distinguish between that which is good and bad, that which is essential and nonessential, and that which is enduring and transitory.

"A knowledge of beginnings and historical developments tends to encourage an attitude of understanding and tolerance of divergent viewpoints among us," Patterson said.

"Here Baptists often find themselves in a dilemma; how to reconcile their belief in maximum freedom with adherence to minimum doctrine and practice," he said. "The issue is where to draw the line.

"To live together in harmony and cooperation," he added, "requires mutual respect for each others views and the mutual trust that should characterize a community of Christians."

In other sessions the members of the commission saw a film produced to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the convention in 1945 entitled "Romance of a Century," and visited First Baptist Church, Nashville, which is observing its 150th anniversary this year.



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