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'Original' Garrett Retires,
Leaves Trail of Influence

By R. G. Puckett

When God made W. Barry Garrett he used more originality than when he made most other men. There is only one "Barry" and his life has held tremendous influence on Baptists in America for more than a quarter of a century.

In his words, Nov. 1, 1978 was the day he was "free at last, free at last." But his retirement from the staff of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs after nearly 21 years of distinguished service does not mean he will no longer be involved nor influential in Baptist life. After six months of "no schedule," the Garretts will be eager and ready to renew their contribution to the cause of Christ through the Baptist tradition.

Barry's life began in the conservative Midwest. The Oklahoma native became aware of politics and national events early in life through the influence of his father and other family members. He graduated from Baylor University, and The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Oklahoma Baptist University later gave Garrett an honorary doctorate and Southern Seminary recognized him as *Alumnus of the Year* in 1976.

After a stint in the pastorate, Garrett became editor of the "Baptist Beacon," Arizona Southern Baptists' state paper. Here his writing and research ministry began which resulted in an invitation to join the staff of the Baptist Joint Committee in Washington in 1958.

History was made when Garrett moved to Washington. The first regional bureau for Baptist Press, the national news service for Southern Baptists, was born. With central offices in Nashville, Albert McClellan, then director of Baptist Press, felt the direct contact and news source out of the nation's capital was essential. McClellan's successor, Wilmer C. Fields, continued and expanded the concept of regional bureaus--there are now six--but Washington was the first.

In addition to his function as bureau chief for Baptist Press and as information officer for the Baptist Joint Committee, Barry also edited "Report from the Capital," the monthly publication for the Joint Committee which represents nine different Baptist bodies in America.

As a skilled reporter, Garrett holds the coveted and much-sought press credentials for the galleries in Congress and the press room at the White House. Stories filed by Garrett with Baptist Press were always accurate, detailed and comprehensive. If Baptists did not know of legislation and actions in Washington which vitally affected them, it was simply because they had not read Garrett's stories.

Garrett is an incisive analyst. Few men can match his grasp of political processes, the implications of subtle lines in bills before Congress and the impact of some government decisions upon the cherished Baptist principle of separation of church and state.

Living in suburban Washington, on the Maryland side, and maintaining a retreat home in northern Virginia, Barry has enjoyed wide exposure and involvement with persons from all walks of life. He carries a national and world view, flexible in methods and approaches, yet deep in his convictions of what constitutes genuine Christianity.

Here is a man comfortable at the White House in a presidential press conference and also comfortable sitting beside the quiet lake in Indian Acres, talking with a fellow camper who may have no faith at all.

Garrett's achievements have been acknowledged and recognized by his peers, his acquaintances and non-Baptists who sense he is a "regular guy." Evidence of those approvals

include honorary degrees, awards and resolutions such as the one passed by the State Mission Board of the Baptist Convention of Maryland Oct. 2. He's been a faithful churchman in Maryland, serving the needs of the state convention in starting new churches, chairing the Christian Life Commission and resolutions committee.

From Barry's point of view, one of the most satisfying roles he has enjoyed is "Chaplain of Indian Acres," the retreat center where he parks his 31-foot Airstream. Each Sunday services are held on the grounds, led by Barry, if he and Mrs. Garrett are spending the weekend there.

The Southern Baptist Press Association, composed of state Baptist papers and SBC publications, has benefited from Garrett's wisdom and warmth. While editor in Arizona, Barry served in several offices, including the presidency of the group, and since moving to Washington he has maintained active participation in the group's decisions, research and fellowship.

In the opinion of John E. Roberts, editor in South Carolina and current president of SBPA, "no man has contributed more to our cause and fellowship than W. Barry Garrett."

Two things are essential in Baptist journalism--intelligence and integrity. The writer must have sense enough to see things as they are and courage enough to tell it like it is.

Garrett has both qualities. His credibility is impeccable with his peers. His craftsmanship as a writer is admired. His insights and opinions are respected and weighed heavily. His fellowship is enriching to any group where he is present.

Impoverished but sincere words captured the gratitude of Baptist journalists at the luncheon in Washington honoring Garrett upon his retirement:

"Thank you Barry, not just for what you have done, but more importantly, for what you are!"