

MISSISSIPPI BAPTIST HERITAGE

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Mississippi Baptists have a great heritage. One of which every true Baptist should feel gratefully proud. Just how long since the first Baptists set foot on the territory now called Mississippi, no one knows for sure. Early in 1780 a band of hardy migrants from the Great Pee Dee River section of South Carolina, most of whom were Baptists, made their way overland by foot and packhorse, then by flat boats down the Holston, Tennessee, Ohio and Mississippi Rivers to the Mississippi Territory and settled in the old Natchez District about twenty miles north of Natchez in Pickering (now Jefferson) County. These Baptists were descendents of earlier Baptist from the churches of the old Philadelphia Baptist Association in Pennsylvania and surrounding areas. The Philadelphia Association, organized in 1707, was the first Baptist Association in America. They were descendants of the Baptists in Wales.

From this band of pioneer Baptists from South Carolina, old Salem Baptist Church was constituted in the home of "Sister Margaret Stampley" under the leadership of Eld. Richard Curtis, Jr., with seven charter members in October, 1791. Charter members were Eld. Richard Curtis, Jr., Benjamin Curtis, William Curtis, John Jones, Ealiff Lanier, William Thompson and Margaret Stampley. As far as I know, all responsible historians agree that this was the first Baptist church established on what is now Mississippi soil. This was in territorial days, some 26 years before Mississippi was made the 20th State in the Union December 10, 1817. The entire territory was under Spanish rule, and no other religion but Catholic was tolerated.

Old Salem Church, commonly referred to as "Cole's Creek," erected its first house of worship along the south fork of Cole's Creek

Charleston W. Walker
Salem Baptist Church

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in what is now Jefferson County about 10 miles from Natchez. From this seeming frail beginning there are now more Baptists in Mississippi than all other religions combined. The way was not easy. Freedom and progress came at a high price. Many of those early Baptist settlers in the Catholic-ruled territory were threatened, imprisoned and flogged at the public whipping post under orders of Roman Catholic officials for preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ or holding public worship. Baptist blood has stained the fertile soil of Mississippi. Such persecution only added fuel to the fires of their evangelical zeal. They ceased not to preach Jesus Christ wherever and whenever the Lord gave them opportunity. The more trying the conflict, the more glorious the triumph!

Spanish Catholic rule ended in 1798. The territory came under rule of the United States. Our own flag waved in the sweet breeze of freedom. Soon other small congregations were constituted into New Testament Churches.

The Mississippi Baptist Association (now the Baptist Missionary Association of Mississippi) was originally organized at old Salem Church in September, 1806 with "messengers" from the following churches: Salem, organized in 1791; Bayou Pierre, 1798; New Hope, and Bethel, 1800; New Providence, 1805; and Ebenezer in 1806. From this humble beginning, by God's grace, came the some 200 churches cooperating with the Baptist Missionary Association of Mississippi (formerly the Mississippi Baptist Association) and all the vast host of other Baptist churches throughout the great State of Mississippi.

In tracing the history of our State Associational work in Mississippi, the trail may at times seem dim, but looking more closely, we find the trail clear and well defined. The historical lineage of our state work was never identified by politico-religious power, prestige nor popularity, but rather by Biblical

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principles. Our historical chronology is very clearly defined. The work has, unfortunately, been disrupted on a number of occasions in the intervening years. Yet, God, in His loving kindness, has richly blessed our labors together, and the work of the Churches of the Baptist Missionary Association of Mississippi is much alive and in evidence throughout the length and breadth of our beloved state today. The Churches of the B.M.A of Mississippi are enjoying their most fruitful years in the work of the Master. Mississippi Baptists do indeed have a great heritage! To God be the glory!

The Lord willing, the 172nd annual session of the Baptist Missionary Association of Mississippi will be convened at Southeastern Baptist College in Laurel, October 16th, 17th and 18th, 1978. You are invited to come in prayer expecting great things of the Lord and you will not be disappointed!