

LOUISIANA BAPTISTS

WILLIAM CATHCART

(1826 - 1908)

Louisiana, one of the Gulf States, was long a part of the territory of France, but was purchased by the United States in 1803. It has about 20,000 white Baptists and about 30,000 colored.

The sentiments of the Baptists were first propagated in this State by preachers from the contiguous parts of Mississippi. Eld. Bailey E. Chaney removed with his family into Eastern Louisiana, then called West Florida, in 1798, and settled with a number of other South Carolinians not far from Baton Rouge. He began to preach to his American neighbors, but he was not long without molestation. He was arrested and imprisoned at Baton Rouge by the Spanish authorities. But he purchased his liberty by promising to abstain from preaching in the future, and subsequently returned to Mississippi.

Soon after the cession of the French portion of the Territory, Joseph Willis, a mulatto, who was a licensed Baptist preacher, and who had been a co-laborer with Richard Curtis in Mississippi, boldly crossed the Mississippi River, and in 1804 preached at Vermillion and Plaquemine Brule. The following year he returned and settled on Bayou Chicot in St. Landry Parish, where he began to preach, and in 1812, with assistance from Mississippi, organized a church, of which he became pastor.

About the beginning of the present century a number of young ministers crossed into West Florida, at the peril of their liberty. By the labors of these, two churches were gathered on Pearl River, called Mount Nebo and Peniel, which were constituted in 1813.

Previous to 1806, Ezra Courtney,

who had settled in Mississippi in 1802, made frequent visits into the Felicianas and East Baton Rouge, and about that time removed and settled near the present town of Clinton, and in 1814 Hepzibah church was constituted. In 1819 West Florida was ceded to the United States. Other ministers



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came into this part of the State. Elisha Anders settled in West Feliciana, Howell Wall and W. B. Wall in St. Helena. As early as 1818 a small church was gathered in New Orleans, and enjoyed the labors of Benjamin Davis.

West of the Mississippi Joseph Willis continued for several years to labor alone, and organized churches at Cheneyville, Vermillion, Plaquemine Brule, and Hickory Flat. In 1816 he was joined in this field by Ezekiel O'Quinn and Isham Nettles. On the 31st day of October, 1818, six churches met by delegates at Cheneyville, and organized the Louisiana Baptist Association, of which Joseph Willis

was elected moderator. Other ministers were ordained, and churches increased, mainly through the zealous labors of Mr. Willis.

In 1822, Eld. Henry Humble settled on the Ouachita River, in the parish of Catahoula, and in 1826 the First church in Catahoula was established. Here, at a somewhat later day, labored Asa S. Mercer, John Hill, the Meridiths, Thomas and James, and many churches were gathered in the Ouachita region.

In 1820, Eld. James Brinson, with a number of other Baptists, settled at Pine Hills, not far from the present town of Vienna, and organized a church in 1821. Here they were joined by John Impson. They extended their labors westward, and gathered a church about four miles east of Mount Lebanon, called Providence. It was afterwards removed to Athens. Not far from the present town of Minden they found a few Baptists, whom they gathered into a church called Black Lake.

In 1837, a colony, most of whom were Baptists, removed from South Carolina and settled at Mount Lebanon, in Bienville Parish. In the company was Henry Adams, a colored man, who was an ordained Baptist preacher. A church was organized, and Mr. Adams became pastor. He was a man of some education, and was very much respected by the community. This church became one of the most active and influential in the State.

About the same time Elias George, Samuel J. Larkin, and William B. Larkin began to preach in Union Parish, and many churches were gathered in a few years.

In 1843, Eld. John Bryce, an eminent Baptist minister, was sent to Shreveport as collector of customs on imports from the republic of Texas. While discharging the duties of his office he preached in Shreveport and the surrounding country. In 1845 a church was gathered in Shreveport, and Mr. Bryce became pastor. His office of collector of customs having expired by the annexation of Texas, he continued to labor in this region until 1850. He was joined in 1847 by A. W. Jackson and Jesse Lee, two able ministers from Alabama, and on December 21, 1849, the Grand Cane Association was organized.

In the Sabine region the churches were principally planted and consolidated by the labors of Nathan H. Bray after 1847. There were a few churches before this planted by Willis and his co-laborers, but they were feeble and scattered. In 1848, Mr. Bray formed them into an Association called Sabine.

The Bayou Macon region, between the Ouachita and Mississippi Rivers, had but few Baptists previous to 1850. Shortly after this J. P. Blake and D. D. Swindall began their labors there, and in 1855 organized the Bayou Macon