

THE B. M. A. OF MISSISSIPPI IS 170 YEARS OLD

The Baptist Missionary Association of Mississippi lacks only 30 years being as old as the nation. When the State Association convenes, the Lord willing, at Laurel October 19-20, 1976, we will be holding our 170th annual session. The B.M.A. of Mississippi is the oldest Association among our people.

The B.M.A. of Mississippi is rooted deeply and firmly in the rich history of Mississippi. It had its beginning in the organization of the old Mississippi Baptist Association at Salem church about 18 miles from Natchez in 1806. Only five or six small churches scattered in the old Natchez district in what is now southwest Mississippi constituted the body. We would think of it today only in terms of a local association. By 1920 two other Associations - the Union and Pearl River had organized to the north and east. The old Mississippi had spread into southeast Louisiana and churches were organized in that area including New Orleans and Baton Rouge.

By this time the Association was being disturbed by those in sympathy with what ^{we} familiarly know now as the convention system. An abortive effort was made to organize along these lines in 1824. The leaders of the old Association resisted, and this effort to capture them was a failure. However, in 1836 the present State Convention was organized.

By about 1834 the Bethel, Buttahatchie, old Choctaw, Yazoo and Leaf River ^{ASSOCIATIONS} had come into being. The gospel had been preached in most every area of Mississippi. The Judson Association was organized in northeast Mississippi in 1853. The Hobolochitto Association was organized in south Mississippi in 1856.

The old Mississippi continued mostly as a local Association in the years to follow. Such men as Zachariah Reeves, J. R. Graves

and others who were always identified by their contemporaries as "Landmark" Baptists, were their leaders. These men stood vehemently in opposition to the modern Convention system of work.

In tracing the history of our State Associational work in Mississippi, the trail may, at first glance, 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 ^{power}, prestige nor popularity, but by Biblical principle. However, our historical chronology is also very clearly defined.

When the old General Association of Baptist Churches of Mississippi was established in 1855 under the able leadership of men like Nathan L. Clarke and others, this was simply the old Mississippi Baptist Association continued as a state-wide body. The old Mississippi continued her work as a local body also.

Clarke College at Newton was organized by the churches of the old General Association under the leadership of Dr. Clarke, who never was in sympathy with the State Convention nor the Southern Baptist Convention in principle. Clarke College was actually taken from our people - legally but rather craftily in a time when the old Association had grown rather weak and compromising. (Bro. Clarke was Moderator of the General Association

Elder James P. Johnston was missionary for the old General Association throughout south Mississippi for most of his ministerial life. He constantly warned the churches of the error of "Conventionism." He, like Dr. Clarke, and other^N of his time and before, was every wit an old-line Association Baptist. Bro. Johnston was licensed to preach by Mt. Nebo (First) Baptist Church of Bay Springs in 1850. He was ordained by the same church in 1853. He pastored the old church for a long number of years according to Bro. E. B. Cox in his book, "Life and Work of James P. Johnson."

When the old General Association of Mississippi began to compromise and cooperate with the "Convention" work, our state work suffering as a result, as had been done at other times through the years past, it was old Mt. Nebo (First) Baptist Church that invited the churches to meet at Bay Springs in 1908 for a "re-organization" of the state work. From that time it was known as Mississippi State

in 1855 and for several years after.

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Association of Baptist Churches. In the years which followed, the yearbooks showed various other modifications of the name, adding or dropping such words as "Regular, Missionary, State," etc. which may or may not have been official. In later years the original name - Mississippi Baptist Association - was officially adopted again until 1969 when the name of Baptist Missionary Association of Mississippi was adopted by the State Association.

It was the churches of the old General Association which first took notice of the Choctaws in Newton, Neshoba, Jasper and other scattered counties, and did mission work among them. (Life and Work of James P. Johnston).

We believe the spirit which moved men like Richard Curtis, William Hamberlin, Stephen DeAlvo, Moses Hadly, Zachariah Reeves, Nathan L. Clarke, J. R. Graves, M. P. Lowrey, James P. Johnston, J. P. Martin, John Moffatt, C. A. Gilbert, J. E. Glenn, ^{M. WALTERS} D. N. Jackson, and others, their associates and contemporaries, and those people they pastored, still moves in a great host of old-line Association Baptists in Mississippi today! May God richly bless them, and may their tribe increase to the glory and in the service of God.

-- L. S. Walker

*James
never
counted
5/21
Moses
Hadley
P. J. Johnston*