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75th National Association of Free Will Baptist Anniversary Historical Edition



Sixty Free Will Baptists from 12 states gathered at Cofer's Chapel at 7:30 on a Tuesday evening in November 1935. They came to the small, brick building in Nashville, Tennessee, to form a new fellowship they called the National Association of the Original Free Will Baptists. Free Will Baptists are one of the oldest religious bodies in the United States. They did not split off from any other group, and they don't go back to a single person, time, or place. In fact, you have to return to Elizabethan England before the colonization of America.

In the year 1600, most Christians were members of the Church of England, the official state church. In fact, it wasn't legal to be part of any other church. But the solid walls of state control had begun to crack. Religious dissenters gathered to worship on their own terms, holding to their own doctrine. In doing so, they risked their lives. One such group fled London in 1607. Led by clergyman John Smyth, they escaped to Holland where they were influenced by two important doctrines. One was the Baptist doctrine that insisted that infant baptism was not valid—that one had to be baptized after an intelligent acceptance of the Gospel. Smyth baptized himself and then baptized his followers. The act clearly renounced all ties to the Church of England.

The other significant influence was Dutch Arminian theology. Arminius, after whom the doctrine was named, rejected the prevailing Calvinistic views of his day, which taught that all events are pre-determined by God, without freedom of choice for man. In contrast, Arminius taught that men are free, that Christ died for all men, and that every man is free to accept Christ and be saved or to reject Christ and be lost. Smyth's group embraced this doctrine as

the proper interpretation of the Bible.

In 1611, when religious persecution began to decline in their homeland, Smyth's "Baptists," led by Thomas Helwys, returned to England. The date marks the establishment of the first Baptist church on English soil. The group soon became known as "general" Baptists because they taught the Arminian doctrine that Christ died for all men—a general (universal) atonement. By 1633, a second Baptist congregation had been established. This group preached Calvin's doctrine that Christ died only for the "elect." They were called "particular" Baptists. Before long, Baptist congregations had sprung up throughout England—some general, others particular.

Consequently, when Baptist congregations were established in the American colonies, they represented both groups. However, most Baptist historians generally agree that the first Baptist churches in America were general Baptist in doctrine. The particular Baptists, however, were better organized and more dogmatic in their preaching. Before long, their influence prevailed, and many general Baptist congregations were swayed to particular Baptist doctrine. Some of them, however, maintained the doctrine of general atonement. Among these were the earliest "free-will" Baptist churches in America.

One particular group of churches emerged in eastern North Carolina in 1727 under the leadership of Paul Palmer. We know little about the influences that contributed to his doctrine, but history documents his ministry along the banks of the Chowan River, preaching general Baptist doctrine and establishing Baptist churches. By 1752, 16 churches had become part of this fellowship. The Palmer churches continued to expand until 1750, when particular Baptist preachers proselytized the group, and most converted to particular Baptist doctrine. A few of Palmer's congregations remained true to the doctrine of their founder, and it was from this nucleus that modern Free Will Baptists in the southeastern United States sprang, explaining why Free Will Baptists still have a strong presence in North Carolina today.

A different situation developed in New England where the prevailing churches were Congregational, and Calvinism continued to be the prevailing doctrine. In 1780, a young



Benjⁿ Randall

preacher named Benjamin Randall began preaching "free will" doctrine and immediately found himself in hot water with the religious establishment. Consequently, Benjamin Randall and his followers—no longer in good standing with their former church—organized a Baptist congregation in New Durham, New Hampshire, on June 30,

1780. From its humble beginnings, the movement flourished. By 1820, the movement consisted of 220 churches throughout New England. The group called themselves "Freewill Baptists." Although the name was originally used in derision, it stuck.

Historians are not sure exactly when the name "freewill" was officially accepted, but Arminian doctrine was commonly referred to as "free will" doctrine in those days. It was only logical that these Arminian Baptists, whether Palmer's or Randall's be called "free will" Baptists. The Randall movement, as it came to be known, grew rapidly and far outstripped other Free Will Baptists in organization and expansion. The movement spread throughout New England and westward across Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, and Illinois. By 1900, 1,500 churches in more than 20 states enjoyed an energetic foreign missions outreach, several educational institutions, a vigorous antislavery society, and a thriving publishing ministry. The movement had been instrumental in the abolition movement, including the founding of Storer College in Harper's Ferry, West Virginia, the first college for freed slaves.

In 1910-1911, the movement, which had come to be known as the General Conference of Free Baptists, merged with the Northern Baptist Convention and lost its identity as a Free Will Baptist organization. Naturally, some churches refused to cooperate with the merger, especially in Southern Ohio, Southern Illinois, West Virginia, Missouri, and points west. These scattered Free Will Baptist congregations gradually began to look to the Free Will Baptists in the Southeast for fellowship. Free Will Baptist groups continued to spring up sporadically across the southeastern United States, often with no visible connection with other Free Will Baptists. While we cannot trace all the connections, we do know that by 1910-1911, when the northern (Randall) line of Free Will Baptists merged with the Northern Baptist Convention, Free Will Baptist churches existed in the Carolinas, Florida, Georgia, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Texas with little or no connection with the Randall movement or no connection

with each other. These churches were largely unaffected by the merger between the Randall movement and Northern Baptists. From time to time, efforts were made to organize these scattered churches, and many regional associations came into existence only to fail. One that lasted, however, was the General Conference, organized in 1921, in Nashville, Tennessee. It included representatives from Georgia, the Carolinas, Tennessee, and Mississippi. Another was the Cooperative General Association, organized in 1916 at Pattonsburg, Missouri. The Cooperative Association had representatives from Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and Arkansas. Until 1935, these organizations existed separately, one representing western Free Will Baptists and Randall churches that had not merged with Northern Baptists. The other represented churches in the southeastern United States. In November 1935, the two organizations met at Cofer's Chapel Free Will Baptist Church, Nashville, Tennessee, joined hands, and formed the National Association of Free Will Baptists.

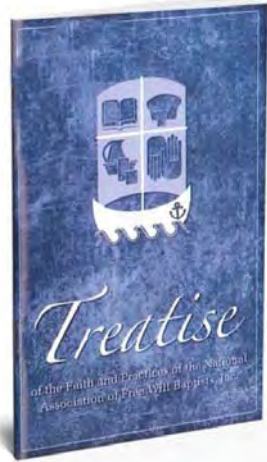


Organization - Three Days That Changed History

Delegates to the organizational meeting of the National Association of Free Will Baptists met at Cofer's Chapel, in Nashville, Tennessee, November 5-7, 1935. Although these denominational pioneers met for only three days, they conducted an impressive slate of business, putting aside previous differences to lay an organizational foundation that would stand for decades to come. The voting body included representatives from a number of existing Free Will Baptists organizations, including the Eastern General Conference, the Cooperative General Association of the West, six state conventions, and 14 local associations. Officers were carefully selected to represent both East and West. They included Moderator J.L. Welch from the General Conference; Assistant Moderator Winford Davis from the Cooperative Association; Secretary-Treasurer I.J. Blackwelder from the General Conference; and Assistant Secretary-Treasurer B.P.F. Rogers from the Cooperative Association.

Delegates quickly approved a constitution and by-laws, naming the new organization The National Association of Free Will Baptists. They established eight boards consisting of five elected members to serve five-year terms. The boards, most of which remain in existence, included the

Executive Board, Foreign Missions, Home Missions, Sunday School, Free Will Baptist League, Education, Superannuation, and Women's Auxiliary. The National Association, it was decided, would meet every three years to hear reports on the activities of each board. In addition, delegates adopted a Treatise of Faith and Practices, approving the document by unanimous vote without even hearing it read aloud, following a motion to that effect by Rev. Lizzie McAdams. Damon Dodd captured the pivotal moment in his book, *The Free Will Baptist Story*: "The motion was met with an immediate second, and the vote was overwhelmingly unanimous. This meant that the National Association of Free Will Baptists was now an official reality, that, at last, Free Will Baptists were united in a common cause. The entire congregation was caught up in the spirit of the momentous occasion. Strong men embraced each other and wept tears of joy and victory. The shouts of rejoicing Christians were lifted in praise to God." A new chapter in the Free Will Baptist story had begun.



Doctrinal Distinctions

The statement of faith adopted by the delegates at the 1935 meeting was nearly identical to the New England Treatise published in 1869. The document spelled out in no uncertain terms the basic tenets of the Christian Faith—the doctrine of the Trinity, Christology, Biblical authority, general atonement, justification, and sanctification, believer's baptism, the symbolic nature of the Lord's Supper, and the second coming of Christ. Several important distinctions, however, set Free Will Baptists apart from similar groups.

Free Will and Falling Away -- Two of these distinctions are reflected in the name of the denomination itself. "Free Will" reflects the teaching of Jacobus Arminius that humans have a free will to accept or reject salvation. This stands in stark contrast to the doctrine taught by John Calvin, that God chooses or "elects" those who will respond favorably to the gospel. Free Will Baptists further believe that freedom to accept or reject the grace of God continues after salvation, making it possible for a believer to reject the Faith and become apostate, never to be reconciled to God. Again, this doctrine clearly contradicts the popular notion of "once saved, always saved," prevalent among many modern Baptist groups.

Baptist -- At its most basic, the word Baptist indicates a belief in baptism by immersion. Free Will Baptists regard baptism as a symbolic gesture by which a new believer publically acknowledges his or her faith in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, making him eligible for church membership. However, to be Baptist goes beyond the simple act of baptism to include congregational church government and local church autonomy.

The Washing of the Saints' Feet --Perhaps the most visible denominational distinction is the washing of the saints' feet, usually practiced in conjunction with the observance of the Lord's Supper. The practice, commemorates the humility with which Christ Himself washed His disciples feet. Free Will Baptists regard the ceremony as an ordinance, a symbolic rite instituted by God as a visual reminder of the atoning work of Christ and our need to serve one another.

From the beginning, this doctrine created debate among Free Will Baptists. In the first Treatise published in 1834, New England Freewill Baptists determined that individuals and local congregations had to determine for themselves whether or not to observe the practice. The issue later became a barrier between the Eastern and Western Associations



and, in fact, delayed the formation of a National Association from 1919 to 1935. Since the 1935 meeting, however, the doctrine has remained in the Treatise unchallenged with one exception. In 1968, the Oklahoma State Association proposed a change to the wording, suggesting the removal of the phrase, "reminds the believer of the necessity of daily cleansing from sin." Although the resolution was approved, the Treatise remained unchanged. Today, the washing of the saints' feet has become the most iconic and visible distinction of the Free Will Baptist movement. While the ordinance continues to set the denomination apart from other groups, in recent years the practice has declined, and some churches no longer observe the washing of the saints' feet on a regular basis.

The Early Days -- By 1950, the association had grown to 116,291 members in 1,788 churches sprawling across 18 states. However, several years before this, it became evident that denominational leaders needed to meet more frequently, and when the convention reconvened for a second meeting in 1938 at the East Nashville Free Will Baptist Church in Tennessee, delegates passed a resolution to meet annually. State and district associations replaced the eastern and western conferences, and elected delegates—one from each district association—began to represent the states at the

annual convention. In 1940, a General Board replaced the Executive Board. Its purpose was to screen business, anticipate difficulties or disagreements, and prepare resolutions to be considered at the annual convention. The new board included an Executive Committee headed by an Executive Secretary who would guide the ongoing business of the denomination between conventions. The new committee hired North Carolina Pastor L.R. Ennis to fill the part-time role of Executive Secretary. The responsibilities of the position expanded quickly, and in 1943, the General Board recommended the hiring of a full-time Executive Secretary who would establish a permanent office in Nashville. Robert Crawford became the first full-time Executive Secretary, and for three-quarters of a century, only 10 men have followed him in this position:

- L.R. Ennis, 1940-1942
- Robert Crawford, 1943-1947
- Ralph Lightsey, 1948
- Damon Dodd, 1949-1952
- W.S. Mooneyham, 1953-1958
- Billy Melvin, 1959-1966
- Rufus Coffey, 1967-1978
- Melvin Worthington, 1979-2002
- Keith Burden, 2003-present (pictured right)



As the ministries of the denomination expanded, so did expenses. In an effort to meet the growing need for funds, delegates to the 1942 convention in Columbus, Mississippi, approved a “Unified Program Fund.” Money supplied by churches and individuals across the denomination would be distributed monthly to underwrite the expenses of each board. This plan was altered in 1954, when it was renamed the “Cooperative Plan of Support” and in 1992, when it became “The Together Way Plan.” Free Will Baptists have not always agreed on the best way to fund the work of the denomination, but they have always been generous givers.

In 1953, under the leadership of Damon Dodd and Executive Secretary W. S. Mooneyham, the first National Office Building was purchased for \$19,000. The building was located at 3801 Richland Avenue in Nashville and housed all denominational departments with the exception of Free Will Baptist Bible College.

As the young denomination grew, it began to develop certain characteristics—a “personality” if you will. During the first two decades, this personality was especially evident in two areas: missions and education.

International Missions -- From the beginning, the denomination was marked by its emphasis on missions. In the first item of business after the denomination was established, delegates voted to support the mission work of individual Free Will Baptist missionaries. This came on the heels of a

heartfelt lecture by Thomas (Pop) Willey on “Foreign Mission Work in South America.” In reality, the mission work of the denomination was already well under way when I.J. Blackwelder was elected first secretary-treasurer of foreign missions.

Laura Belle Barnard had already set sail for India with a promise of support from the Eastern General Conference. Thomas and Mabel (Mom and Pop) Willey joined her on the field within the year, working for a term in Panama before political unrest led them to transfer to Cuba in 1941.



In 1941, delegates to the National Association in Drumright, Oklahoma, approved a constitution and by-laws and formed a Foreign Missions Board.

Paul and Nelle Woolsey joined Laura Belle Barnard in India in 1947. Dan and Trula Cronk and Carlilse and Marie Hanna (pictured right) soon followed. Cuban mission work continued to thrive, and in 1943, under the leadership of the Willeys, Cuban Christians formed the Free Will Baptist Association of Cuba.



By the time Raymond Riggs became secretary-treasurer in 1950, it was clear that a full-time director was needed. Three years later, in 1953, he opened an office in the new Headquarters Building in Nashville, Tennessee. With the help of assistant, Gladys Stone, Riggs began a campaign of awareness, publishing a number of books and pamphlets, including Miss Barnard’s “His Name Among the Nations” and “A Modern Jonah” by Paul Woolsey.

During the 1950s and 60s, new fields opened in Japan, West Africa, and Brazil. The steady growth continued under the leadership of Directors Rolla Smith and J. Redford Wilson, and Free Will Baptist missionaries entered Uruguay in 1962, France in 1966, and Spain in 1973. As missionary personnel increased, stateside operations also expanded to support their growing needs. During the early 1960s, Jerry Ballard began to produce literature and filmstrips to inform the denomination of each important milestone reached by the mission. He also served as the first editor of Heartbeat magazine, which captured the stories and images of the massive global undertaking. Bill

Jones and Don Robirds built upon his early publishing efforts, and Heartbeat continued as the monthly voice of Free Will Baptist missions until it merged with ONE Magazine in 2004. By 1975, 93 missionaries were hard at work in nine different countries, with the promise of new fields to open in the near future.

As a result of the unprecedented growth of the movement, the Foreign Missions Department issued an urgent call for missionaries at the national convention in 1970. “We have more open doors than we can enter. We have an urgent need for more missionaries—Panama, France, Japan, Ivory Coast, and Brazil. We need missionaries now!” This “second wave” of missionaries is due, at least in part, to the development of short-term missions programs. In 1982, missionary Ken Eagleton initiated the T.E.A.M. program. (T.E.A.M. stands for teens equipped and active in missions.) The program gives high school students a firsthand look at life on the field during summer vacation. The success of TEAM, which was later renamed E-TEAM in honor of founder Ken Eagleton, led to the establishment of CMP, a College Missions Program designed to give students an extended stay on a field—an internship of sorts.

Under the direction of Directors Gene Waddell, who served from 1986 to 1998, and Director James Forlines, the mission continued building upon the work of the pioneers. In addition to pioneering new fields, the mission turned its attention to training national leaders in existing, forging strategic partnerships with other ministries around the world, and initiating church-planting movements.

In 2007, General Director James Forlines proposed a second change to the Missions funding system. “In order to get the new wave of missionaries on the field,” he explained, “the denomination needs to return to more undesignated missions giving.” The new plan established a Global Evangelism Fund, supporting both support services and missionary accounts. The proposal was greeted with both excitement and concern and was debated hotly for more than 80 minutes by delegates to the 2008 convention in Charleston, West Virginia. Delegates finally voted to adopt the new system, which was implemented in January 2010.

Free Will Baptist missions celebrated its 75th anniversary in 2010 with missionaries in 20 countries, more than 1,100 churches, 600 national pastors, and a missionary force numbering more than 100. The department marked the 75th anniversary of Laura Belle Barnard’s historic journey to India with the Go10 Walk for the World. For 84 days, nearly 2,000 walkers retraced Laura Belle Barnard’s steps across 14 states and 2,500 miles, carrying a Tamil Bible (translated into traditional Indian dialect) and passing a well-worn baton from group to group to raise funds for missions. In September 2008, previous missionary to Côte d’Ivoire was elected as General Director to replace James Forlines.

Education -- From its earliest days—long before the formation of the National Association in 1935—Free Will Baptists demonstrated great concern for education. A number of historic schools were started and closed or absorbed by other denominational groups. Only three regional Free Will Baptist colleges remained in operation during the early part of the 20th Century: Ayden Seminary and College, in Ayden, North Carolina; Tecumseh College, in Tecumseh, Oklahoma; and Zion Bible School in Blakely, Georgia. By the time the denomination united in 1935, only Zion Bible School remained in existence.

Efforts were made in 1907 by representatives from Georgia, North Carolina, and Tennessee to open The Free Will Baptist University in Nashville. Unfortunately, only one student enrolled, and the new school came to an abrupt end. Yet the attempt was not futile, for that single student, named John L Welch, soon became a major catalyst and spokesman in the push for a Free Will Baptist school. He worked tirelessly through the 1920s and 30s to promote a single Free Will Baptist college within the Eastern General Conference and met with representatives from the West to discuss the need for a school. In a report to delegates attending the 1933 Eastern General Conference, Welch said, “I have found a strong and growing sentiment among our people for a centralized educational institution.” In a daring move, Welch went on to recommend that the formation of the institution be contingent upon the merger of the two conferences, even going so far as to recommend that a committee of leaders from both groups meet in Nashville to consider the city as a permanent site for the new school. This group became known as the Joint Educational Committee.

Free Will Baptist Bible School, Nashville, Tennessee

When the denomination organized in 1935, the committee recommended that Nashville indeed be accepted as the location for a “Bible School” to start as early as 1936. Delegates tapped Welch, who had also been elected moderator of the denomination, to head a five-member Board of Trustees for a school that did not yet exist. They appointed Selph Jones, Henry Melvin, J.C. Griffin, M.F. Vanhoose, and E.A. O’Donnell to serve with him on the board.

Four years later, when the 1939 convention met in Bryan, Texas, Welch’s daughter Jean, a 16-year-old high school student, delivered an impassioned plea to delegates to provide an institution where she could receive training by Free Will Baptists. According to the minutes, “The challenge and prayer so gripped the hearts of all present that it resulted in a great educational rally such as many had never experienced before.” Still, it was three long years before the dream became reality. In 1941, under the leadership of Executive Secretary L.R. Ennis and Secretary of Education J.R. Davidson, the Education Board purchased a beautiful home at 3609 Richland Avenue for \$15,000. They made a down

payment of \$5,000, and a year later, in October 1942, when the college was dedicated for service, the debt had been retired on the property located in the West End area of Nashville. Free Will Baptist Bible School opened September 15, 1942, with nine students. Later in the semester, three additional students were added to the student body.

The Board of Trustees appointed South Georgia native and pastor L.C. Johnson as the school's first president. Johnson quickly proved to be a man of courage and vision as he carved out a successful educational program, but one far different than expected by most Free Will Baptists. According to Dr. Robert E. Picirilli, "While those first leaders thought only in terms of a Bible institute, Dr. Johnson led the new college to a well-rounded program that included both sound Biblical content and a generous core of Christian liberal arts." With the exception of a three-year stint as a pastor in Mississippi, Johnson served as president of the college until his retirement in 1979. Under his leadership, the school flourished. In 1943, the name was changed to Free Will Baptist Bible College, and a year later, the first four graduates celebrated commencement. The school grew quickly, expanding from 12 students to 16 in its second semester to 34 students in its second year. Before long, it had outgrown its facilities in the surrounding Cherokee Park residential area. By 1960, the campus included seven buildings, the student body registered more than 200, and the number of full-time faculty members had increased to 15. The steady growth continued through the 1960s and 70s, and the campus expanded to accommodate swelling enrollment. The school constructed a large academic building and purchased and renovated a historic Nashville mansion to accommodate Welch Library, named in honor of the man who worked so hard to make the school a reality. A cafeteria was added in 1971 and a gymnasium in 1974.

By 1975, the college had begun offering Bachelors of Art and Science degrees in several ministry fields, including biblical studies, pastoral studies, missions, and Christian education. A student body of nearly 500 pursued degrees in education, English, music, nursing, and office management. The Free Will Baptist educational dream had become a reality.

When President L.C. Johnson retired from the college in 1979, Academic Dean, Dr. Charles Thigpen (pictured right), was named his successor, a position he held for 11 years. During his tenure, the college instituted a graduate school, offering a Master's Degree in pastoral studies, a degree that later became the Master of Ministry. Then, in the mid-1980s, enrollment declined sharply after disagreements over doctrine led to the establishment of a new regional Free Will Baptist



college in North Carolina. By the time Dr. Thomas Malone became the third president of the college in 1990, enrollment had dipped its lowest point in decades, and the college faced significant financial challenges. Under Malone's leadership, and with a generous outpouring of support from the denomination, the school rebounded. New programs were introduced, including business administration, physical education, sports medicine, music education, psychology, and youth ministry. With the new programs came a need for more space, and President Malone and the Board of Trustees initiated a move to nearby Joelton, Tennessee, but the plan was derailed when buyers for the present campus failed to materialize.

In March 2003, Georgia pastor, J. Matthew Pinson, became the fourth president of the college. During his first six years in leadership, the college has expanded to 40 academic programs, developed an online learning program, and found itself listed in the U.S. News and World Report's list of America's Best Colleges and Universities for three consecutive years. Today, the nine-acre campus includes 17 buildings and is valued at nearly \$20 million. With limited room to expand and stringent building restrictions in the now-historic West End district, the school continues to seek relocation. In August 2008, the college purchased 66 acres in Gallatin, Tennessee, for \$2.79 million. The property, located 25 miles from the present campus, provides ample room for expansion.

In September 2010, the Board of Trustees voted unanimously to initiate the process by which the college would undergo a name change to Welch College, a nod to that lone student who registered in 1907 and went on to have such an influence in establishing the school.

Home Missions -- In response to a growing concern for planting Free Will Baptist churches in North America, the Free Will Baptist Home Missions Board was formed when the National Association met for the second time in 1938. Delegates elected chairman M.L. Hollis, J.K. Warkentin, Mrs. J.E. Frazier, Lizzie McAdams, and George Dunbar to fill the board. For the first decade, the work of the department was restricted by lack of funding, and the ministry was often limited to assisting the tent-making efforts of church planters. When the denomination elected Harry Staires to be promotional secretary of the department in 1947, he made it his primary mission to raise funds to implement and underwrite the funding of a successful Home Missions program. His work paid off! Receipts increased by 900% during the six years in the office. The increased funding led to the appointment of Damon C. Dodd as first full-time employee of the board. In 1953, Dodd moved the office to the new National Office Building in Nashville.

During the next decade, Home Missionaries planted—or assisted in planting—churches in Florida, Nebraska, California, Oregon, and Washington. Homer E. Willis succeeded Damon Dodd, and served as General Director of the department from 1956 to 1973. During his years in leadership, Home Missions turned its attention to New England, Alaska, Hawaii, Colorado, the Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico.

The ministry of Home Missions continued to expand during the last quarter of the century under the leadership of three directors. Robert L. (Bob) Shockey, a fiery preacher from Kentucky served from 1973-1978. Associate Director Roy Thomas followed, filling the position from 1978-1995, before Associate Director Trymon Messer assumed the post. Messer held the position until his retirement in May 2002, when current Director Larry Powell became the sixth head of the department.

In May 1982, Home Missions established the Church Extension Loan Fund (CELF). The innovative financial program made loans to new Free Will Baptist churches to help them construct facilities. Denominational participants obviously liked the idea of investing in new churches, and the program grew. During the program's 28-year history, CELF has helped build hundreds of Free Will Baptist churches across North America. The program continues to flourish and is projected to surpass \$40 million in Free Will Baptist investments in 2011. Today, Home Missions (or Mission: North America, as it was renamed in 2008) has active mission works in 26 states, Canada, Mexico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico. The department is also responsible for placing Free Will Baptist chaplains into the armed forces to minister to service men and women.

Sunday School and Church Training -- Although the denomination named Winford Davis National Sunday School Secretary at its organizational meeting in 1935, and established a Sunday School Board at its second meeting in 1938, it was nearly three decades before the denomination successfully produced its own Sunday school curriculum. For the first 25 years, most churches purchased Sunday school materials from the Free Will Baptist Press located in Ayden, North Carolina, which operated under the direction of the North Carolina State Convention. In 1959, after several failed attempts to produce a denominational curriculum, delegates to the convention in Asheville, North Carolina, approved a contract between the Ayden press and the National Association, giving the Sunday school board influence over its Sunday School literature. The contract was short-lived, ending abruptly when controversy arose between the National Association and the North Carolina Convention.

In the meantime, the Oklahoma Sunday school Board, under the direction of E.M. Kennedy, N.R. Smith, and Ernest Harrison, Sr., had begun to produce literature, developing a strong customer base across the Midwest. They

offered to relocate the program to Nashville, placing their work into the hands of the National Association. The denomination eagerly accepted the proposal, and the transition took place in 1962. That same year, the denomination hired Roger Reeds (pictured right), a young pastor from Saint Louis, to head the new publishing efforts. Reeds filled the position until his retirement in 1994.



By 1971, more than 3,000 churches had begun to use the denominational curriculum! Sales grew so rapidly that the department moved again to a larger facility at its present location in Nashville. With room to grow in the new facility, operations expanded beyond Sunday school curriculum to Christian books, church growth and record-keeping materials, doctrinal pamphlets, and more. These materials were published under the trade name Randall House Publications.

The Sunday School Department merged with the Church Training Service Department in 1978. CTS, as it was called, started as the Free Will Baptist League in the early 1920s, predating the denomination itself by more than a decade. The League, created to train young people for effective Christian service, can trace its roots to 1850 when northern Free Will Baptists established the Society of Free Baptist Young People. The name later changed to Advocates of Christian Fidelity and by 1904 had grown to 15,000 members. In 1920, at the suggestion of John L. Welch, the organization became known as the Free Will Baptist League. Following the 1935 organizational meeting, when the League became an official board of the denomination, membership continued to grow, reaching a high of 125,000 in 1956. In 1964, the denomination changed the name to Church Training Service, and in 1972, under the direction of Dr. Malcolm Fry, the CTS Department began to host annual competitions in Bible, music, and art in conjunction with the national convention. The yearly event became known as the National Youth Conference, and has grown steadily since its inception, with registration surpassing the national convention itself in 2010.

Dr. Alton Loveless succeeded Roger Reeds in 1995, and for seven years (from 1995 to 2002), the Ohio native used a lifetime of corporate experience to streamline production. He raised the level of technology to market standards, introduced an Internet marketing site, and explored the new field of electronic publishing.

Florida Pastor and former advertising executive Ron Hunter (pictured right) followed Loveless as the director in August of 2002. Under his leadership, the department developed a new slate of Sunday School material, known as CLEAR Curriculum. The award-winning line of products has received wide acceptance, far beyond denominational circles. In 2007, the convention voted to shorten the name Sunday School and Church Training Department to Randall House Publications.



The next year, Hunter announced plans to spend a half million dollars to promote D6—a program to involve parents in the spiritual growth and development of their children. Randall House hosted the first D6 conference in 2009, with 1,400 registrants. A year later, nearly 2,000 attendees from Canada, Ecuador, Norway, Scotland, Venezuela, 37 states, and 35 denominations attended the 2010 conference, making it one of the fastest-growing Christian conventions in the nation.

Free Will Baptist Women -- “I request that the women of this body be excused to go to another room and organize a national body.” The work of women among Free Will Baptists began long before Fannie Polston of Nashville, Tennessee, made this request during the 1935 business meeting of the Eastern General Conference of Free Will Baptists at Black Jack Church in Pitt, County, North Carolina. The organized ministry of Free Will Baptist women can be traced to the early 1840s, when Ann Winsor of Providence, Rhode Island, formed the first Free Will Baptist Women’s Missionary Society in her home after hearing Missionary Eli Noyes tell about the desperate needs in India. When the Women’s Missionary Society became an official organization in 1873, women in the North became heavily involved in the work of the movement. During the 1920s, two women emerged as the faces of the movement: Alice E. Lupton of New Bern, NC, and Fannie Polston of Nashville, Tennessee.

During the denomination’s formation meeting later that year, WNAC was treated like any other department, with its own board and elected officers. In 1939, however, WNAC requested that their board no longer be considered a department of the National Association, requesting instead that a single field secretary be assigned to represent women at the convention. The request was approved, and since 1939, WNAC has operated as an independent entity, separate from the National Association. It must be said, however, that no denominational department or agency could have been more loyal or dedicated to the work of the denomina-

tion. Free Will Baptist women embraced their role, and in spite of limited funding, the ministry of WNAC grew quickly in the decade following its founding. It soon became obvious that a permanent office was needed, and in 1947, when Mrs. Huey Gower was named the first Executive Secretary, she established an office in her home in Nashville, Tennessee. Six years later, in 1952, Executive Secretary Agnes Frazier moved into an office provided by Free Will Baptist Bible College. When the National Association opened its first National Office Building a year later, then Executive Secretary Gladys Sloan joined other denominational agencies in the building. In 1963, Mrs. Eunice Edwards moved from Desloge, Missouri and became the first full-time Executive Secretary of the organization.

In 1961, WNAC began to publish CoLaborer magazine. Although it has gone through many variations in size, format, and page count, the publication remains in print under the name Together With God. In 1962, WNAC established the Missionary Provision Closet, a warehouse of linens, cooking utensils, and other domestic items to be distributed to missionaries going to the field or returning home. Today, the Missionary Provision Closet continues to supply the needs of Free Will Baptist missionaries and their families. When the 1971 national convention met in Fresno, California, WNAC reorganized under the leadership of longtime Executive Secretary Cleo Purcell who served the office from 1963-1984. Delegates voted to streamline the organization but retain the missions emphasis that had been its catalyst since founding. Under Purcell’s leadership, the WNAC office relocated to the new National Building on Murfreesboro Road in Nashville, where it remained until the completion of the current National Office Building in 1991.

Dr. Mary Ruth Wisheart followed Purcell as executive secretary-treasurer in 1985. That same year, WNAC celebrated its 50th anniversary with the publication of *Sparks into Flame: A History of WNAC*. In 1993, Wisheart led the department to change its name from Women’s National Auxiliary Convention to Women Nationally Active for Christ. She was instrumental in the establishment of an endowment trust (now the Marjorie Workman Endowment Fund) to provide perpetual funding for the organization.



Marjorie Workman was selected to become the fourth executive secretary-treasurer in 1998. Under her leadership, WNAC reached several significant milestones, sponsoring the first WNAC missions trip in 2005 to a Sisters' Prayer Fellowship in Almaty, Kazakhstan. American women underwrote conference expenses for more than 500 Central Asian women who attended the conference. WNAC also partnered with Master’s Men to host National Marriage

Enrichment Conferences for couples. In 2008, the convention approved Danita High as Workman's replacement. Wife of Arkansas pastor John High, the young businesswoman brought years of banking experience to the position and worked feverishly to secure the department's financial position. Although she spent only a year in the office, she encouraged and enlisted a new wave of young women before resigning in the fall of 2009. The department celebrated its 75th anniversary by electing Elizabeth Hodges the sixth executive director at the annual conference in Oklahoma City. Hodges quickly set the tone for her work by emphasizing the importance of prayer, cooperation, and ingenuity in ministering to a new generation of Free Will Baptist women. She quickly reached an agreement with Master's Men to share office space. In spite of transition, adjustments and the recent financial struggles WNAC has faced, Mrs. Hodges is optimistic about the future. "The best times are still ahead for Free Will Baptist women. If we can pass the baton of faith to the next generation who will continue long after we are gone, we will have been successful."

Free Will Baptist Men's Ministry - Although men's fellowships have always been present in many Free Will Baptist churches, at the 1955 convention in Huntington, West Virginia, a three-member committee consisting of W.S. Mooneyham, O.T. Dixon, and Luther Gibson, was appointed to start a national agency that would promote and focus the efforts of men's ministry in the local church. The organization was built upon the acronym ATTACK: All Together to Advance Christ's Kingdom and focused on four goals: enlisting, organizing, training, and inspiring men to serve within the local church. Built upon groups—or chapters—of men in local churches, the new department grew steadily through the first decade.

By 1964, membership had grown to 3,000, and in 1969, Ray Turnage became the first director. Although he served for only a year, Turnage opened 250 new chapters and convinced the denomination to administer a portion of cooperative money to fund the ministries of Master's Men. In 1975, the Master's Men Board hired Loyd Olsan as part-time director, a position that became full-time in 1978. He was followed in 1983 by West Virginian James Vallance. Vallance dreamed of making Master's Men the "hands" of the denomination, and under his leadership, the department built more than 70 churches and missions facilities across the United States and in nine international locations.

In 1990, Master's Men left the office space provided by Randall House Publications and moved into the National Office Building in 1990.

Sports Fellowship activities began in 1992, when Master's men began to sponsor the annual Free Will Baptist Softball Tournament previously hosted by Randall House Publications. The same year, the department introduced the first

national golf tournament. In 1994, the board introduced the Build-a-House Campaign. Donors provide funding for building materials, Master's Men volunteers provide labor, and the newly constructed house sells for a profit, helping to underwrite the growing ministries of the department. Jim Valance resigned in December 1997, and Ohio native and pastor Tom Dooley became director in 1998. In 1999, the department paid its long-standing debt to the Free Will Baptist Executive Office. When Tom Dooley submitted his resignation in 2001 to return to pastoring, the board hired Director of Ministry Development Ken Akers in January 2002. Akers found himself the leader of a department that continued to struggle. In the wake of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, Free Will Baptists responded by giving hundreds of thousands of dollars to those devastated by the storm. The storm made it clear that Free Will Baptists needed an organized plan to channel relief efforts and supplies to victims of natural disaster. Delegates to the 2006 National Convention approved a Disaster Relief Plan that named Master's Men Department the relief agency for the National Convention.

Board of Retirement and Free Will Baptist Foundation

Originally called the Board of Superannuation, The Board of Retirement was established at the 1935 organization meeting of the National Association. General guidelines for the Board were approved four years later, at the 1939 convention in Bryan, Texas. The organization's constitution and by-laws were approved in 1943, and participation grew slowly but steadily throughout the following decade, reaching 57 participants in the "Endowment-at-Age-70" plan by 1954. A year later, the Board hired K.V. Shutes as the first full-time director. Although Shutes served in the position for only two years, his wife Lora served as chief administrator of the Board for an additional 14 years. In 1969, a new pension plan formulated and implemented by North Carolina pastor Herman Hersey came to the attention of the national Board of Superannuation. In July of that same year, the National adopted the 16-month-old plan. Hersey remained as the manager of the retirement plan and was elected general director of the new national department, the Board of Retirement and Insurance. Hersey eventually became the full-time director. At the time of his move, the plan had 17 retirement accounts, with assets totaling \$3,600. A year later, the number of participants had grown to 120, and only a decade later, in 1983, assets topped \$2 million. In 1980, Hersey led the Board of Retirement to establish the Free Will Baptist Foundation. The Foundation works with churches, organizations, and individuals to create perpetual funding for Free Will Baptist ministries. Hersey retired in 1993, and William (Bill) Evans was appointed general director. Under his direction, assets grew to nearly \$30 million and settle-

ment options were greatly expanded. Evans retired July 31, 2005, and was succeeded by Ray Lewis. During the first five years of Lewis' tenure, the retirement plan was subjected to a major revision to reach full compliance with IRS regulations. Assets have grown to over \$43 million in 2010, earnings allocations were revised, and for the first time participants were able to check the status of their accounts online.

The Executive Office -- This office was created by the newly established General Board in 1941 to handle the business of the denomination between annual meetings. The Board hired North Carolina pastor L.R. Ennis as the first executive secretary, paying him a salary of \$50 a week. Although Ennis carried out the work of executive secretary, he also found time to pastor three churches that same year! Seventy years later, the office maintains five full-time staff members who serve as the public relations arm of the denomination. The office continues to oversee the planning and promotion of the annual convention, including the production of the minutes, the Digest of Reports which contains the annual status report of each denominational agency. The office also produces an annual 300-page Free Will Baptist Yearbook containing statistics and contact information for churches and personnel across the denomination. It administers Together Way funds and oversees the publication of ONE Magazine, the 64-page official publication of the denomination.

Perhaps the greatest accomplishment—not only for the Executive Office but the entire denomination—came in 1953, when the first National Office Building located at 3801 Richland Avenue in Nashville, Tennessee, was purchased for \$19,000 under the direction of then Executive Secretary Damon C. Dodd. For the first time, all national departments (with the exception of Free Will Baptist Bible College) shared a single home—literally. The small, two-story residential structure on Richland Avenue served the departments until 1965 when expansion pushed Executive Secretary Billy Melvin to relocate the offices to a newly constructed facility at 1134 Murfreesboro Road in Nashville at a cost of \$163,000. Two years later, the Sunday School Department added a second building to the campus in an attempt to house their growing publishing ministry. Soon, however, the growing publishing house donated their portion of the building to the denomination and moved to their current facilities at 114 Bush Road. In 1991, under the leadership of Melvin Worthington, the Executive Office purchased a 30,000 square-foot office building at 5233 Mt. View Road in Antioch, Tennessee where it remains today. The office houses every national ministry with the exceptions of Free Will Baptist Bible College and Randall House Publications. -Reprinted with the permission of *One Magazine*

2011 National Youth Conference South Carolina Winners



Group Bible Memorization (Peace, Florence) - 2nd Place
Lacy Gordon, Jesse Timmons, Olivia Mason



Bible Tic Tac Toe (Liberty, Manning) 3rd Place - Stephen Carlson / Kaylin Ridgeway



Camille Driggers (Horse Branch, Turbeville) - YET TEAM 2012
Also, Individual Drama - 3rd Place



Puppetry - H.I.S. 5 - Bay Branch, Timmonsville - 1st Place
Hannah Driggers, Jessica Hyman, Crystal Hyman, Cody McKay, and Zach Micale

Other 2011 NYC Winners Not Pictured

- *Vocal Duets - Noah and Nicholas Shute - Brothers For Christ (Sand Hill, Coward) - 3rd Place
- *Vocal Trios - PFC Trio (Horse Branch) - 2nd Place
- *Vocal Quartets - Horse Branch, Turbeville - 2nd Place
- *Carson Coker (Horse Branch) - Illustrated Storytelling - 3rd Place
- *Dusty Hancock (Horse Branch, Turbeville) - Individual Drama - 3rd
- *Group Drama -(Bay Branch) The Last Flight of 2006-3rd Place
- *Fabric Art - Alexis Inman (Temple, Darlington) - 3rd Place
- *Exhibition Category - Thomas Smith (New Prospect) - Preaching
- *Exhibition Category - Bay Branch - Human Video

2011 National Youth Conference South Carolina Winners Continued



Connor Morgan (Horse Branch, Turbeville) Bible Memorization - 2nd Place



Lane Ward (Peace, Florence) - Bible Memorization - 1st Place



Kayla Kimbrel (Temple, Darlington) - Bible Memorization - 3rd Place



Kaylynn Wells (Temple, Darlington) - Bible Memorization - 1st Place



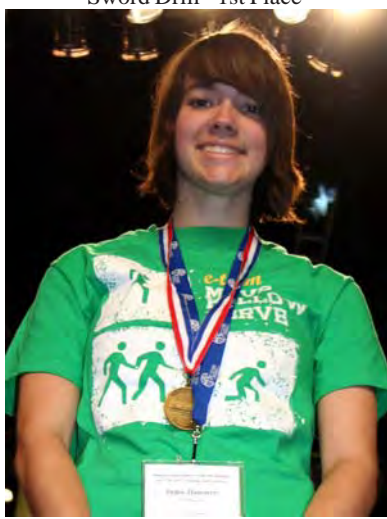
Denise Wiggins (Peace, Florence) - Bible Sword Drill - 1st Place



Jacob Austin (Beulah, Pamplico) - Truth Quest - 2nd Place / Woodwind Solo - 1st



Madison Coker (Horse Branch, Turbeville) - Individual Drama - 1st Place
Also, Female Solo - 2nd Place



Jamie Hammers (Peace, Florence) - Painting - 1st Place



Hunter Langston (Temple, Darlington) Photo Essay - 1st Place

2012 South Carolina Free Will Baptist State Association meeting - February 23-24, 2011 at Southside FWB Church, Aiken, SC Visit www.scfwb.com for details.

2012 South Carolina Free Will Baptist State Women Active for Christ Meeting - March 17, 2012.

2012 South Carolina Free Will Baptist State NYC/CTS Competition April 27-28, 2012 at Peace FWB Church, Florence

2012 NAFWB Convention and National Youth Conference - July 15-18, 2012 Memphis, Tennessee



Heb. 6:19

FWB Member Celebrates 100 Years of Life

New Prospect Free Will Baptist Church of Pamplico celebrated the 100 year birthday of church member Annie Creel on Sunday, September 11, 2011. She has been a dedicated member of the church for 78 years. The entire service was dedicated to her honor including special singing, personal testimonies, and a message entitled "Christian Hero." A surprise dinner followed the service with most of Mrs. Annie's family in attendance. "I feel pretty good," said Creel who reached the milestone Friday, September 9th.

Pastor Wayne Smith has come to know how much Mrs. Annie is loved by the church, her family, and community. He said she hardly ever misses a Sunday. "She's family. She's been here so long and helped so many different families. It was important for the church to honor her, and at 100 years of age, we're blessed to have her. It is a once in a lifetime opportunity to have the chance to personally know someone like Mrs. Annie. Her dedication to the Lord should be an example to the younger generations." Creel was born in 1911, in Georgetown, moved to Johnsonville, and spent virtually all of her life on the farm. She talks fondly of her days with her husband of almost 50 years, Hubert Creel, who was also a devoted member at New Prospect. When she was 60, Creel said, she asked the Lord if he would let her live to be 100. At that age today, she does all her housework and maintains her flowers. Creel said she maintains a positive but realistic outlook on what else life holds for her. "When you get as old as I am, you know your days are about spent," she said. "Most of my life, I've lived for the Lord, and I plan on going on as long as I can."



Pictured Above: Mrs. Annie Creel, Wallace Stone, Pastor Wayne Smith, Kevin Calcutt, and Duffie Gaskins

Executive Secretary Todd Smith's Schedule

October

- 1 State Leaders Meeting – Columbia
- 2 Columbia FWB Church, Columbia
- 4 Clarend School District Minister Meeting
- 4 Carolina Hospital System Visitation
- 7 SC Conference Missions Luncheon
Horne's Restaurant, Florence, SC
- 7 Funeral – Mrs. Betty Lewis - Rains FWB Church
-Mother-in-law of Rev. Richard Huggins
- 7 SC Conference Quarterly Meeting
- 9-14 Homecoming/Revival – Five Points FWB Church
Washington, North Carolina
- 14 Carolina Hospital System – Reverend Wayland Owens
- 15 50th Wedding Anniversary Celebration, Johnny and
and Mrs. Lossie Evans - Tabernacle, Coward
- 16 40th Homecoming – Jefferson Road FWB Church
- 16 Cypress Fork FWB Church, Manning
- 18 Lake City Area Wide FWB Minister Breakfast
- 21 Friends of India Board Meeting – Charleston
- 22 Eastern Conference Meeting
- 25 South Conway FWB Church, Conway
- 27 Beaver Creek Association Meeting
- 30 First FWB Church, Chester
- 31 Close out State Office books for the October

November

- 3 Visit Peace FWB Church, Florence
- 5 FWB Home for Children Homecoming Day
- 6 First FWB Church, Chesnee
- 6 Parkway FWB Church -Souls for Harvest Service
- 8 Florence/Darlington Area FWB Minister Breakfast
- 13 Tabernacle FWB Church, Kinston, NC
- 15 Lake City Area Wide FWB Minister Breakfast
- 20 First FWB Church, Florence
- 20 Fill in at Horse Branch FWB Church, Turbeville
- 23-26 Thanksgiving with Family (Bookstore Closed 23-25)
- 27 Fill in at Horse Branch FWB Church, Turbeville
- 29 Close out State Office books for November

December

- 4 Happy Home FWB Church, Andrews
- 5-7 Free Will Baptist Leadership Conference, TN
- 11 Mullins Marion FWB Church, Marion
- 18 Candle Light FWB Church, Kinston, NC
- 19-23 Bookstore Closed for week of Christmas

Next Issue - The Winter 2011 Edition of *The Informer* will include Pastor Appreciation articles, church news events, Fall conference meetings, missions news, denomination news, and much more!