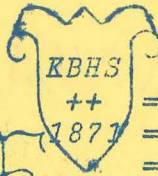


THE KENTUCKY BAPTIST HERITAGE



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Newsletter Of
THE KENTUCKY BAPTIST HISTORICAL
SOCIETY

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VOLUME I, PAGES 17-24

NUMBER 3

MARCH, 1971

WE ARE NEARING THE 100 MARK IN
MEMBERSHIP IN THE SOCIETY.....

MEMBERSHIP GOAL --- 100

As of Friday, March 5th the membership in the Kentucky Baptist Historical Society stood at 70 with prospects of much greater growth.

Since our February report the following have been added to the list:

LIFE MEMBERSHIP (\$25.00)

Huff, Henry B.

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP (\$2.50)

Case, J.V., Jr.
Curry, Kenneth E.
Glover, R.I.
Hooten, Colburn
Jones, D.E.
Kruschwitz, Verlin C.
McNeely, Crawford
Neat, Don
Risk, Owen
Robbins, Carl B.

*Severns Valley Bap. Church
Smith, Mrs. Wilda F.
Southeastern Seminary Library
White, Judge Otis
Whitworth, Albin C.

*Kentucky's oldest Baptist Church. Organized on June 18, 1781.

We hope that many more of our Baptist Churches will take out membership in the society so that the Newsletter may be found as a regular item in their files and church library.

A total of 100 members in the Kentucky Baptist Historical Society is our goal by March 31, 1971. We now have 70.

We urge all individuals, churches, and organizations to send in their Membership Applications and membership Fees at their earliest convenience.

We have been mailing out about 850 copies of the Newsletter each month since its inception in a trial run in December, 1970. We have also given out over 1,000 copies of the Newsletter at the Kentucky Baptist Convention in November, 1970, and the Kentucky Baptist Evangelistic Conference in January, 1971.

We are sending 18 complimentary copies to Kentucky Baptist schools and colleges, and to other institutions, as well as other Historical Societies and Commissions.

WILL THIS BE THE LAST ISSUE
YOU WILL RECEIVE?

As previously announced, this Newsletter is being sent gratis to about 800 persons, mainly in Kentucky, during the months of January-March, 1971.

In consequence, this will be the last issue you will receive unless you become a dues paying member of the Kentucky Baptist Historical Society. We hope you like the paper enough to guarantee its continuous coming to your address.

SEND IN YOUR MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION AND FEE TODAY!

K B H S CENTENNIAL 1871-1971

On March 21 the KENTUCKY BAPTIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY will be one hundred years old, as it was chartered on this date in 1871 by the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

With the exception of the writings of individual ministers, such as John Taylor (1823) and William Hickman (1828), and brief sketches of churches, ministers, and associations here and there, very little was done to preserve the written history of the Baptists of Kentucky prior to the War Between the States (1861-1865). John Asplund had preserved some materials in his Annual Register of the Baptist Denomination (1790-1795); and David Benedict had enlarged upon the work of the Baptists in Kentucky in his History of the Baptists (1813 and 1848). Likewise, as early as 1842 Dr. John L. Waller had begun to gather materials from the associations and churches and in the early 1850s it was thought that he had actually begun a History of the Baptists in Kentucky. But, upon his death in 1854, it was discovered that no manuscript existed of such a work. In the years 1856-1858 Dr. S.H. Ford began to publish sketches of ministers and churches, as well as some materials on associations and the general history of Baptists in Kentucky, in serial form in the Christian Repository. However the work never culminated in a finished volume.

During the period of reconstruction after the Civil War, the movement arose in the Kentucky Baptist Ministers' Meeting, meeting with the First Baptist Church, Covington, Kentucky, on May 25, 1865, to preserve our Kentucky Baptist history, resulting in a COMMITTEE ON BAPTIST HISTORY, Composed of J.H. Spencer (Salina), R.L. Thurman (Frankfort), and Henry McDonald (Whitehall) being selected by J.M. Frost, Sr. the Moderator.

This committee later presented the following resolution, which was adopted by the Ministers' Meeting:

"RESOLVED, That we feel deeply the need of a correct history of our denomination in Kentucky, and a correct biography of our departed ministers; that we urge our brethren, who are competent, to undertake this work, and that we pledge our hearty assistance to the undertaker of this important enterprise."

Interest in Kentucky Baptist history was so stimulated that the Constitution of the General Association was amended in 1866 to include the following in the article on purpose of the body:

"...AND TO COLLECT AND PRESERVE OUR DENOMINATIONAL HISTORY OF KENTUCKY."

A board of ~~six~~ members to compose a BOARD OF KENTUCKY BAPTIST HISTORY, to be located in Covington, Kentucky, was approved, with Dr. W. Pope Yeaman as the first Corresponding Secretary.

While it was suggested that a Historical Society be organized soon, in the report of 1867, it was not until 1870 that definite steps were taken to officially organize a state historical society and secure a charter for the same, and that the society be headquartered at Frankfort, Kentucky.

Accordingly, on March 21, 1871, the KENTUCKY BAPTIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY was officially chartered by the State Legislature, with the following serving as the first members of the board: L.W. Seeley., J.M. Frost, Sr., E.G. Berry, J.M. Dawson, S.L. Helm, and D.S. Colgan.
(CONCLUDED ON PAGE EIGHT)

DR. J. H. SPENCER

KENTUCKY BAPTIST HISTORIAN

By LEO T. CRISMON
President Kentucky Baptist Historical Society

A paper read before the Kentucky Baptist Convention on November 13, 1947, commemorating the 50th Anniversary of his death.

The ancestors of John Henderson Spencer were English, coming by way of England, to Virginia, to South Carolina and Georgia, then to southern Kentucky as early as 1796. The name of one descendent of the family, Captain Spear Spencer, who fell in the battle of Tippecanoe in 1811, was given to a county in Kentucky and to another in Indiana.

John Henderson Spencer, son of William Spencer and Sally Caldwell Richey, was born September 9, 1826, in Allen County, Kentucky, a few miles southwest of Glasgow. He grew to young manhood in that and immediately neighboring communities. He states in his autobiography that his recollection of those early scenes went back to the time when he was only one year of age.

In a day and country where there were few schools and teachers, the story of his education reads like a romance, for a period of almost 25 years,--private schools, individual instructors, self education, college, himself teaching. An interesting item comes from his seventh or eight year. He had an uncle and an aunt who were feeble minded. He said that it occurred to him, as he heard grown up people discuss many things which he could not understand, that he did not know any more than "Uncle Mose" or "Aunt Kitty." For a long time he pondered the question as to whether he was an idiot, as his uncle and aunt were incorrectly styled. He argued that if he had "good sense" he should know as much as his parents and other people with whom he talked. He kept silent on the subject for very shame. Finally the idea occurred to him that people got wiser as they grew older, and that he might get to know as much as other men by the time he grew to manhood. He says that this thought greatly relieved and comforted him.

Through his persistence and effort at learning, by the time he was twenty-one he knew more than any teachers in the community. So he then became a teacher himself, teaching a part of the year, and going to school in other months of the year, or studying at home.

He also became interested in music, and began to study it, attending a night singing school, and learning to play a few instruments, including the flute, the accordion, and the vilin.

His father and mother were morally and religiously inclined, but not members of any church. However, his grandfather, John Spencer, was a Baptist and the clerk of Bethel Baptist Church (organized, 1808) in Allen County. Allen County was settled principally by Baptists from Virginia and the Carolinas. John H. Spencer had the benefit of their heritage and influence, though he did not have the opportunity to attend worship services frequently in his youth. On January 19, 1849, at a "protracted meeting" at Hopewell Baptist Church, he was converted, and joined the church the following day.

After conversion and church membership he continued his pursuit of learning, attending schools at Scottsville, Allen County. He then heard of Georgetown College, and determined to attend that school, but after arriving there by a rather round about way, from Bowling Green down Green River to Evansville, Indiana, then up the Ohio River to Louisville, by rail to Frankfort, then by stage coach to Georgetown, and having been examined by the faculty, he was told he was not qualified to enter college or to take even a course in English. That was in December, 1850, and he was twenty-four years of age. He stayed at Georgetown about four weeks, did come work in the preparatory department of the college, realized what further work was necessary to qualify himself, a whole year of study, the cost of a college education, etc., and with a heavy heart, turned his face towards home.

Since he had known no life except that of a farmer, he now decided to make this his life-work. But after one season, because of physical weakness, he turned to the school room again, then decided to prepare himself for teaching as a profession. In the fall of 1842 he went to Louisville and bought a small library, including history, science, and the classics, to help him in his preparation.

While he was absent on that occasion, Hopewell Baptist Church, to which he belonged, brought up the matter of licensing him to preach. There was some opposition, in that he played the flute, accordion, and worst of all the violin, and that he played "carnal tunes" on it. The matter was referred to a future meeting, and in April, 1853, with Dr. Spencer himself present, the church voted un-animously to license him to preach. He began immediately to preach at every opportunity, and on May 6, 1854, he was ordained by the same church. He then moved his membership from Hopewell Church to Bethel Church, the church of his ancestors. After his visit to Georgetown he had decided not to go to school any further, but having been ordained he felt the need of further preparation and began making plans to enter school again.

So, a few days after his ordination, in his twenty-eight year, he started to Russellville to enter Bethel High School, later called Bethell College (1856). He stayed there a little more than two years, then, because of his physical condition, he left the school to become missionary in Bays Fork (now called Allen County) Association, November, 1856, thus entering on a ministry, going from church to church and holding meetings, which he continued for almost forty years. In May, 1857, he attended the meeting of the General Association and of the Southern Baptist Convention in Louisville, and he met many Baptist leaders whose friendship he cherished the rest of his life.

For two years, October 1857 through October 1859, he was pastor of the church at Cloverport, but he soon decided that he was not fitted for the pastoral office. He said that during these two years he was practically a missionary in a broad field with Cloverport as the center, rather than the pastor of the church in that village. For nearly all the rest of his active ministry he served as an evangelist, either independently, or as a missionary, for Nelson Association (1861), Long Run Association (1864), or the General Association (1870), organizing new churches, reviving dead churches, strengthening weak ones, helping pasotors in revivals (and on at least two occasions engaging in debate), in Kentucky, Indiana, Tennessee, Illinios, Missouri and at one time going to Kansas and Colorado for his health (1873). He and A.B. Miller preached at old Long Run Baptist Church on Sunday, September 8, 1861, the day following a meeting of Long Run Association with that church, to an audience estimatied at 5,000 people.

In his autobiography Dr. Spencer gives an interesting account of his marriage to Miss Alice Lavelia Everhart, daughter of Captain G.W. Everhart, a steamboat man on the Ohio River. He became engaged to her in March, 1861. Later they set the date for the wedding for Sunday, September 15, 1861. On Thursday before, he met the captain in Louisville and obtained the license. On Saturday night he preached at Knob Creek in Bullitt County. On Sunday Morning he rode to the house of Captain Everhart, and was married to his daughter before breakfast, by Dr. W.E. Powers. When they arose from breakfast, he says that he walked with his bride into the parlor, and without sitting down, he said to her, "Now, my darling, you are all of this world to me: but my duty to the cause of Christ is all of the next world." He says that he then printed the first kiss on her lips, bade her adieu and hurried away to his appointment at Knob Creek at 11:00 o'clock, and he did not see her again for six days. He went to Little Flock Church in Bullitt County on Sunday night where he had made an appointment to commence a protracted meeting for that time before the day for the marriage had been fixed. He closed the meeting on Friday night, then went back to Beechland on Saturday night, met his bride, and after preaching, went home with her.

In October, 1862, he accepted a call to the church at Henderson, Kentucky, and stayed with the church for fourteen months. Since this was during the Civil War, he confined his ministry more closely to his pastorate than he had at Cloverport, and devoted more time to study than he had since leaving Bethel College. In September, 1863, he and his wife went back to Beechland for a meeting in which her father, Captain Everhart, a profane swearer and a skeptic, was converted. According to Dr. Spencer's record he held about fourteen special meetings at Beechland from 1858 to 1876. They seem to have made their home at Beechland until her death August 19, 1872.

As early as 1866 Dr. Spencer says that he began to learn the history of the churches in which he preached and the biographies of the brethren. In that year he wrote and published a biography of the gifted pulpit orator, Thomas J. Fisher (born April 9, 1812) who had fallen in the strength of his manhood by the hand of an unknown assassin, on the night of January 8, 1866, on the streets of Louisville. Now in 1867, a new feature was added to his labors which became a paramount element of his work for the next twenty years.

Through his interest in Kentucky Baptists he had decided that a true account of their transactions should be collected and published in permanent form. At this time he added to his ministerial labors

the task of searching records, gathering old documents, and interviewing aged men and women wherever he went. When he was not engaged in preaching, he would canvass such portions of the state as he had not been able to reach while engaged in his ministry.

On May 11, 1875, three years after the death of his first wife he married Burilla Buron Waller, a member of the noted Waller family which gave to Kentucky Baptists John Lightfoot Waller (1809-1854). After the marriage for some years they lived at Lacona (until 1877), then (1877-1885) at Pleasure Ridge Park, Jefferson County (about five miles south of the limits of Louisville and about two or three miles from the river), then later (1885-1897) they lived at Eminence.

In 1876 the centennial of our national independence was observed. In Kentucky this was also the centennial of Baptist preaching (Thomas Tinsley and William Hickman at Harrodsburg, 1776) and this phase was added to the observance. J.H. Spencer was called on to visit several churches and to deliver addresses in the campaign for Christian education in connection with this observance.

In the Preface to THE BAPTIST ENCYCLOPEDIA, published by William Cathcart in 1881, the name of "J.H. Spencer, D.D., Kentucky, is included among the able brethren who have rendered assistance to the Editor."

As early as 1865 Dr. Spencer was appointed on a committee of the General Association (See minutes, 1886, p. 34, 35) to make plans for writing a history of Baptists in Kentucky. "In 1866, the General Association so amended its constitution as to make it a part of the business of the body: 'To collect and preserved our Denominational History of Kentucky.'" But in 1876, through failure on the part of the committee to procure facts or to obtain a historian, it transferred the whole matter into the hands of Dr. Spencer who personally had already been at the task for ten years.

For nine years longer Dr. Spencer worked, through continued illness in the last years, and in April, 1885, he completed the work and submitted it to the publishers, at the same time announcing that the book would be sent to prepaying subscribers at the estimated cost of publishing (\$5.00 a set). He states that by the time he needed the money to pay the publishers, he had received every dollar for which he had asked (1,500 subscribers had been requested). It was necessary to order a second edition of the book to supply all the orders which came in.

In 1887 (October 20-22), at Walnut Street Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky Baptists observed the fiftieth anniversary of the organization of the General Association of Baptists in Kentucky. At this meeting Dr. Spencer read a paper entitled "Fifty Years of Baptist Progress in Kentucky," and it was printed in the JUBILEE VOLUME, published in 1888.

In 1889, perhaps, Dr. Spencer began writing his autobiography which has been preserved in his own handwriting and from which I have drawn largely for this address. He seems to have progressed very slowly with it because of the infirmity of his age. At the time of his death he had brought the record up only to August, 1876. The manuscript is now in the archives of the Kentucky Baptist Historical Society, and recently a typed copy has been made and bound. (This bound and typed copy was microfilmed in 1969 by the Society W.H.R.)

At the 1870 meeting of the General Association the History Committee had approved the appointment of Dr. W. Pope Yeaman to write a History of Kentucky Baptists. His later removal to Missouri preventing him from accomplishing anything worthwhile.

In 1873, at the suggestion of the venerable J.M. Frost, Sr., the General Association voted to observe and have a Centennial Memorial Meeting in Harrodsburg, in 1876, to commemorate the first one hundred years of Baptist life and work in Kentucky, beginning with the first recorded Baptist Preaching on Kentucky soil, at Harrodsburg, in April, 1776, by Thomas Tinsley and William Hickman. This would also coincide with the observance of the National Centennial. Brethren Green Clay Smith, Henry McDonald, and J.M. Frost, Sr., were selected as the Committee to report on the matter at later meetings of the General Association. They reported and suggested the formation of a full Centennial Committee. In consequence Brethren Green Clay Smith, Henry McDonald, L.B. Woolfolk, J.M. Weaver, and James B. Evans became the said Committee. Their report in 1875 was thorough and well calculated to arouse great interest in all the work of the denomination in Kentucky. Brethren J.M. Frost, Sr., and A.F. Baker had taken the places of L.B. Woolfolk and James B. Evans on the committee.

On Thursday, May 25, 1876, at the Walnut Street Baptist Church, Louisville, Kentucky, at 10:00 A.M., Brother L.B. Woolfolk delivered the Centennial Address. By this time Brethren Arthur Peter, John L. Burrows, S.L. Helm, William F. Norton, and G.W. Burton. Peter was elected Chairman, Burrows became Corresponding Secretary, John S. Long was chosen Recording Secretary, and R.D. Baker was elected Assistant Corresponding Secretary. Dr. Basil Manly also addressed the General Association on the History of Kentucky Baptists During the Past Century. A composite picture of ministers attending the Centennial Session, together with the picture of William Hickman in the center, was produced. A copy of the same is in the society's files in the Seminary at Louisville.

At this session of the General Association, Rev. Green Clay Smith, Chairman of the Committee on Baptist History in Kentucky, presented the following which set in motion the writing and publication of the first History of Kentucky Baptists:

"...Your Committee ... would most respectfully transfer this whole matter into the hands of Rev. J.H. Spencer, D.D., with the request that he at once proceed to prepare such a history of Kentucky Baptists as he is enabled from facts, documents, etc., now in his possession, and may be able to procure, and that he report his progress at the next meeting of the General Association."

Fired with a greater faith and made exceedingly proud over their heritage the Baptists of Kentucky in the period 1875-1880 made unprecedented progress in all phases of missionary and benevolent work. It also resulted in the required amount being raised to assure the removal of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary from Greenville, South Carolina, to Louisville, Kentucky, in 1877-1878.

Furthermore, Dr. Spencer began a very laborious, tedious, and sometimes disappointing, effort to complete his history. He finally succeeded in producing two volumes containing over 1,400 pages, and the entire first edition was subscribed and published in 1885. Another printing was made necessary and completed. (Wendell H. Rone, Sr.)

WE SALUTE DR. J. H. SPENCER --- FOR THIS MONUMENTAL WORK

Dr. Spencer was known widely as a historical and devotional writer, as well as an effective evangelist. His first publication was a small pamphlet on THE ACTION OF BAPTISM (1863). After he became too afflicted to get away from home, he continued to write for periodicals.

During his active ministry as an evangelist he preached as many as 572 times in one year, and travelled as many as 5,679 miles in a year. There were as many as 147 added to the churches under his ministry in a single year, and it is estimated that 5,000 persons professed faith under his preaching. None of his sermons had been preserved, but he has said that he usually preached about an hour at each service. His descriptive powers are evident from passages of his autobiography, one of which describing the scenes of his boyhood is as follows:

"We lived and labored among the deep solitudes; our recreations were taken amid verdant glens and wild, romantic gorges; in flowery, wooded vales and forests of giant oaks and spreading beech and elms; along the base of rockcrested hills and among foaming cascades and leaping cataracts of crystal waters, and in light canoes on the bosom of a clear bright river. Our companions were the deep-throated wood-lark, the light-grey fawn, the chattering squirrel and the sportive bass. Our worship was in God's great temple of nature; our matins were the songs of the thrush and mocking-bird; our noon refrains, the chorus of the zephyrs; our vespers, the hum of insects among the wood-bines; and our anthems, the roar of waterfalls and the thunder of the heavens."

After several years of suffering from rheumatism Dr. Spencer died at his home at Eminence, on Tuesday, December 21, 1897. Funeral services were held at Eminence by Dr. W.P. Harvey and Dr. T.T. Eaton, then at Beechland by Dr. W.E. Powers.

He was buried beside his first wife in the Bell Cemetery, across the highway from Greenwood School, about a mile and a half west of Beechland Church. His second wife who died on November 27, 1915 now rests by his side.

-- Dr. Leo T. Crismon

OUR ANNUAL MEETING

The annual meeting of the Kentucky Baptist Historical Society and Commission will be held with the Cedar Creek Baptist Church, Fern Creek, Jefferson County, Kentucky, on Friday, July 23, 1971.

William D. Martin, a member of our society, is the pastor of the Cedar Creek church. He has done a most commendable work in gathering and preserving the history of this church, which was organized on June 16, 1792, only a few days after Kentucky became the fifteenth state in the union, on June 1, 1792. The church was first known as Chenoweth's Run. It assumed its present name about 1840.

Put this date on your calendar and plan to attend.

S.B.C. HISTORICAL COMMISSION AND SOCIETY

The Southern Baptist Historical Commission and Society will hold its annual meeting in Nashville, Tennessee, on April 19-21, 1971, at the S.B.C. Building and the Dargan-Carver Library.

Several members of the Kentucky Commission and Society plan to attend this annual meeting. Their expenses will be borne by the Kentucky Commission.

We hope to have a report of the meeting in the May issue of the Kentucky Baptist HERITAGE.

DONT FORGET TO SEND IN YOUR MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION TO THE SOCIETY, IF YOU HAVE NOT ALREADY DONE SO. CHURCH MEMBERSHIP IS OPEN