

My First 125 Years!

The History of Denton Baptist Association

It is hard to believe that I am already 125 years old. Actually, my birthday was May 29th, but I didn't want to make a big deal out of it. We had a big blowout for both my 50th and 100th. On each of those occasions, books about my life were written. The one back in 1936 was written by J.N. Rayzor. He was a fine Christian layman who moderated my business for eleven years when I was still in my 20's and 30's. The book written for my 100th birthday in 1986 was penned by two men – Charles “Buddy” Owens, who is a pastor and served on my staff as a church builder for a while; and an English professor from UNT, Dr. Robert “Bob” Stevens whose wife Sylvia worked for me for many years printing and operating our bookstore.

I first came into being when church leaders A.J. Halford, S.A. Beauchamp, J.T. Jenkins, A.J. Harris, and B.S. Gay sent invitations to the leaders of eighteen churches. They met at FBC, Denton, and then voted to organize Denton County Baptist Association. In a short period of time I had a constitution, officers, a committee or two, and my first annual meeting in October of 1886.

My original constitution stated that I was to help “promote harmony and fellowship among the churches and brethren, and the advancement of the Master’s Cause through the Missions, Sunday School, Temperance, and Colportage work . . .” Oh, *colportage* is the work of distributing religious materials like Bibles and tracts – just in case you wanted to know. My constitution has been revised several times, and today it states: “The Association shall be composed of autonomous Baptist churches cooperating to assist each other in

carrying out the Great Commission.” Early in my life there was a great deal of talk and focus on doctrine, evangelism, and distribution of religious material, and a strong push toward temperance regarding alcohol and tobacco. Many reports were given in those early days. We met for four days with most of the messengers camping out and cooking meals over open fires. At Aubrey, during our second annual meeting in 1887, we worshiped on Sunday morning. Later that same day, we were called into session for business. The Rev. R.T. Gardner objected to conducting any form of business on the Lord’s Day. The messengers sustained his objection. As a result, we worshiped some more on Sunday and finished our business on Monday. The reports were often very pointed as illustrated by the temperance report at the 1903 annual meeting. Their report stated that even some ministers “were chewing and smoking in front of children and also in the church, and that they were probably consuming alcohol as well.”

Many things have occurred during my lifetime. I have seen many go off to war around this world and have wept when many did not come back. I have seen prejudice and discrimination within the boundaries of my county. I have seen doctrinal issues cause churches to withdraw their fellowship from other churches. But likewise, I have seen discrimination overcome resulting in churches from many cultures and ethnicities joining with me. I have also experienced the harmony that comes from churches of great diversity working together in common ministry areas like the Baptist Student Ministry, Camp Copass, Disaster Relief, RaceWay Ministry and church planting. By the way, did you know that I had a role in

helping settle some refugees from Viet Nam to this area in the early 1980's? Today, some of my churches are helping do the same for refugees from Myanmar.

A great amount of excellent ministry was done in the first eighty-seven years of my life. In 1890 we were a rural growing area with a population numbering 21,289. In 1973 everything began to change when we called Dr. Gerald Williamson as Director of Missions for Denton Baptist Association. He was a visionary who began to move our focus from a rural society to a more urban and suburban society. He helped us begin to intentionally start new churches in rapid growth areas of the county. He also helped us develop financially so that we could be of greater assistance in helping churches.

Dr. Williamson’s influence has had an impact on all the subsequent Directors of Missions. Men like Winford Oakes, George Clerihew, Bill Tinsley and Gary Loudermilk have all continued to rely upon a need to update strategy, plant new churches and determine the best ministries for advancing the Master’s Cause at any given period of time. In 2011, with a swelling population of 673,780 and 87 member churches, I am grateful to have the privilege of serving the Greater Denton County area during my 125th year. Even more, I am looking forward with great anticipation to my next era of carrying out the Great Commission throughout the 21st Century.

Happy 125th Birthday!

