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Great Moments
In SBC History

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When the Southern Baptist Convention organized in 1845, its constitution provided for expansion into all the United States. Two boards were established, but with provisions for as many other boards as the convention needed for its benevolent work.

Since that day, May 10, 1845 in Augusta, Ga., the convention has through the past 125 years grown to the point it is now the largest Protestant denomination in the nation.

From 4,126 churches in 1845, the SBC has grown to 34,335 churches reported in 1970. Membership has increased from 350,000 church members in 1845 to 11,489,613 reported in 1970. The number of boards has increased from two to four boards and seventeen other agencies.

The two boards--Foreign Mission Board located in Richmond, and Domestic Missions then located in Marion, Ala.--went into business as soon after the convention as possible with missionaries at work.

In the beginning, the convention refused to start a publication board, though there was strong sentiment for one. By 1849, a group of interested persons organized the Southern Baptist Publication Society located in Charleston, S.C., but it was not an agency of the convention. Then, in 1851, the convention authorized a Bible Board to be located in Nashville.

In this same year, J. R. Graves set forth his "Landmark Statement" at the Big Hatchie Association at Cotton Grove, Tenn. For more than 50 years Landmarkism caused controversy among Southern Baptists until the followers of these teachings withdrew from the convention in 1905 and organized the General Association of Landmark Baptists.

Another great moment in Southern Baptist history took place in 1859 when alongside the convention was formed the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary located at Greenville, S.C. Later it was recognized as an agency of the convention.

When the War Between the States came with all its fury, the Bible Board was swept away, as was the Publication Society. The Convention organized in the midst of the war in 1863 the Baptist Sunday School Board to produce literature for the churches of the South. The seminary which had closed in 1862 was re-opened in 1865, and after struggling to remain open, it moved to Louisville in 1877.

In 1866 at the meeting in Russellville, Ky., the convention voted to meet annually thereafter.

The years following the war were so severe that the Sunday School Board was about to collapse when the convention voted to combine the Sunday School Board with the Domestic Board of Missions in 1873. The next year the name of the combined Board was changed to The Home Mission Board.

Another great moment in the life of the convention came in 1888, though there is no reference to it in the convention proceedings and reports for that year. It was the organization of Woman's Missionary Union as an auxiliary to the convention.

The women in a number of states had been organized to promote giving and praying for missions. It was another 30 years before the convention gave the women the status of messengers, and then two years longer--1920--before a woman addressed the convention. It was 45 years more in 1963, before a woman was elected vice-president of the convention.

The convention brought the Sunday School Board into being in 1891. This action set the convention on a new course of ministry and education unparalleled hithertofore.

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As the second 50 years was beginning, the Baptist Young People's Union of the South was organized as an auxiliary to the convention in 1896. This church member training organization became fully graded in 1932 and is known as Training Union. The Sunday School Board began to promote the BYPU and to offer field service in Sunday School work about 1900.

At the same time these educational activities were being promoted in the churches, theological education was having difficult times. In 1896, W. H. Whitsitt was charged with error in teaching of Baptist history. The crisis became so severe that Whitsitt offered his resignation as president of Southern Seminary in 1899 to avoid splitting the convention.

While this was going on, the Home Mission Board appointed a field secretary for the territory west of the Mississippi, and with the organization of the Laymen's Missionary Movement in 1907 the men were being enlisted in stewardship and missionary education. This movement later became the Brotherhood Commission in 1952.

The laymen joined in the celebration of the Judson Centennial in 1912-14 in an effort to raise one million dollars for foreign missions.

In 1908 Southwestern Seminary was founded in Texas and later accepted as an institution of the convention.

As World War I was coming to a close, the laymen led in calling for an efficiency committee to recommend ways for increasing the business efficiency of the convention. The recommendations called for a church financial plan and the election of an Executive Committee (1917).

The convention accepted the challenge in 1919 to raise \$75,000,000 in five years. The 75 Million Campaign was a great success in enlisting the people and securing \$92 million in pledges. But the pledges were not paid because of the recession in the early 1920's.

The over-expansion of the agencies and state conventions and the failure to receive 75 million dollars plunged the convention in discouraging debts. On top of this, the misappropriation of funds by trusted employees made matters worse.

Even in the face of all this, the convention established in 1919 the Relief and Annuity Board (later the Annuity Board) which ministers to the retirees and the needy among the pastors and denominational workers. Also during this period the convention organized the Education Board and committed to it the Ridgecrest Assembly.

One of the good things coming out of the 75 Million Campaign was the Conservation Committee which recommended the Cooperative Program to succeed the five-year effort of fund raising.

At the same time the Cooperative Program Commission came into being and it recommended a central Executive Committee to be the convention ad interim.

In 1927, the Executive Committee, which had operated on a limited scale, was enlarged. One of the first things the enlarged Executive Committee did was to deal with the debts referred to above.

The Hundred Thousand Club was set in motion in 1933 to help pay the debts. By 1943 all the debts were paid and the convention was making ready to celebrate its Centennial with a great evangelistic crusade. But World War II caused the Atlanta convention to be postponed.

In 1939 two events were great moments. One was the establishment of the Radio Committee. It became the Radio Commission in 1946 and the Radio and Television Commission in 1956.

The other important event was the adoption of the Business and Financial Plan of the convention. This brought into operation a single plan for all the financial programs of the convention and its agencies.

In 1942, the SBC began its expansion into the West and North, and indeed the whole United States when California was accepted as one of the cooperating states of the convention. The convention adopted a minority report admitting California, rather than a committee recommendation that the action be delayed.

Another significant minority report was adopted in 1949 when the convention approved a substitute motion to locate a western assembly in Glorieta, N.M. The first assembly was held there in 1952 under the work of the Sunday School Board, which earlier had been requested to operate an assembly at Ridgecrest, N.C.

After World War II the convention accepted the challenge of Secretary M.T. Rankin of the Foreign Mission Board for advance in giving until the convention gave 10 million dollars to foreign missions and 1,750 missionaries were under appointment. This quickened the pace of Southern Baptists.

The Sunday Schools undertook to enlist "A Million More in '54" and the convention gave approval in 1954 to the Supreme Court's plan to integrate the public schools.

The convention launched the plan of Baptist Jubilee Advance in 1957. The Advance included the Thirty Thousand Movement begun in 1954 to organize twenty thousand missions and preaching points, and ten thousand churches. Southern Baptists and other Baptist conventions from 1959 to 1964 observed the sesquicentennial of the beginning of the organized work in support of missions in America.

During this period, in 1962, the convention requested the Sunday School Board and the Brotherhood Commission to invite the Woman's Missionary Union to join in planning emphases and themes for the post Jubilee years. This was a far-reaching step. Long-range plans were made for 1965-69.

To follow that period, the convention recommended that plans be projected by a special 70 Onward Committee for the decade beginning in 1970. The Inter-Agency Committee, which came into being in 1959, was called on to coordinate the plans.

Recommendations of special study committee adopted in 1959 brought several significant advances. Included was the Stewardship Commission and the Inter-Agency Council with its assignment to coordinate and correlate the work of the agencies; as assigned programs touch the churches.

In 1962 the convention was disturbed by a controversy over the book The Message of Genesis written by Ralph Elliott of the Midwestern Seminary and published by Broadman Press. This prompted the appointment of a special committee to re-study the convention's "Statement of Faith and Message." The revised statement was presented and approved in 1963.

In 1968 the convention approved a "Statement Concerning the Crisis in Our Nation," regarding the conditions of violence, racial injustice, and poverty.

In New Orleans in 1969, the convention voted for its agencies to abide by the Statement of Faith and Message. Convention President Criswell challenged the convention to recognize the word of God as the two-edged sword of faith and works. The ideas of evangelism and social action were brought together as the challenge for the future.