

The American Baptist Experience 1907-2020

By Dr. William H. Brackney Ph.D.

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Dr. Jeff Woods
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Thank you for your excellent leadership through these challenging times! You and your ABCUSA Leadership Team effectively address the pressing issues of the past 14 months during the storm called "Covid 19 Pandemic" and keeping the ABC Family together and moving forward with a Biennial.

We seek your counsel, and this is to follow up on my phone call regarding "a new history" of the American Baptists. Please review the concept of a new American Baptist History by an American Baptist, a first since Robert Torbet wrote "A History of Baptists" and "Ventures in Faith" during his service at the General Secretary's Office. Your endorsement is of great importance. You may remember discussing a meaningful distribution of this new history at future Orientations to American Baptist Life.

On behalf of Dr. William H. Brackney, I am requesting your consideration and a competitive proposal to publish his forthcoming book, "*The American Baptist Experience 1907-2020*." An executive summary is enclosed. You may be aware that Bill is a prolific writer with over 50 books, numerous lectureships, scholarly articles, and video productions to his credit.

Steeped in American Baptist life from childhood, authoring this new history is a labor of love for his American Baptist family! He has already begun scholarly research at Acadia University and Seminary from his home in Nova Scotia. As soon as the COVID 19 pandemic has passed and he can travel to and from Atlanta, Bill will continue his research at the American Baptist Historical Society. **There is an urgency about this research and completing significant interviews of eyewitnesses to the denominations journey before they pass from the scene.**

It would be our preference for Judson Press to publish this history. Judson Press has been the voice of American Baptist publications since 1824.

For ***“The American Baptist Experience 1907-2020,”*** we are proposing a finished product with the following specifications:

- 9 X 12 in horizontal format
- 300 pages, high gloss paper
- Color images and photos throughout the text
- 2500 copies with 1000 hardcover binding

The Author and Managing Editor will provide:

- Camera-ready design and layout
- Camera-ready text and digital images
- Camera-ready design and digital images for the dust cover

I have enclosed a copy of Bill’s most recent book, ***“For the Ranchers: a History of Rainbow Acres.”*** It has enjoyed great acceptance among the constituents of Rainbow Acres; engendering great pride and deepened commitment by those who have contributed to Rainbow Acres ministry. The narrative and photography are interwoven to create an enjoyable reading experience that draws the reader into the story.

The Rainbow book was patterned after a 400-page monograph, authored by Wilma Rugh Taylor and Norman Thomas Taylor entitled: ***“This Train is Bound for Glory: The Story of America’s Chapel Cars”*** published by Judson Press. It has been one of the more successful books published by Judson Press through the years.

The final manuscript will be in an engaging narrative, appealing to contemporary audience combined with the dimensions of the book ***“The American Baptist Experience 1907-2020”*** will prompt it to “stand out” from all the other histories about Baptists on bookshelves everywhere. To inspire the reader, instill pride, and deepen commitment to the American Baptist experience into the next century will be an ultimate hope fulfilled!

We are also seeking a collaborative and distribution proposal. One of the Author's goals is to distribute ***"The American Baptist Experience 1907-2020"*** to Baptist Colleges and Seminaries worldwide and major research libraries in the United States, Canada, and throughout the world.

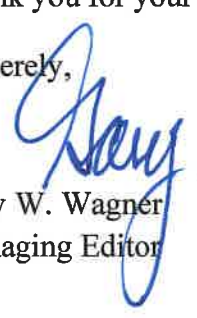
Fulfilling this new history's promise will require significant fundraising to engage Mercer University Press with their professional digital designer to prepare the manuscript for the publisher. Consideration will be given to a Kindle edition that is appealing to a contemporary audience and professionals engaged in scholarly research. Our goal is to have ***"The American Baptist Experience 1907-2020"*** published in advance of the 2023 American Baptist Churches Biennial.

Thank you for your consideration and response with your proposals.

Sincerely,

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Sincerely,



Gary W. Wagner
Managing Editor

Enclosures: Executive Summary of ***"The American Baptist Experience."***

Copy ***"For the Ranchers: A History of Rainbow Acres."***

CC: Judy Fackenthal

"Those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it." George Santayana,
Harvard University

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The American Baptist Experience

by William H Brackney PhD

The fledgling American Baptist experience of the 20th Century began out of the ferment of the significant cultural changes in North America. Rooted in the legacy of four centuries of Proclaiming the Gospel, well-educated clergy and influential visionary leaders at the turn of the New Century 1900, created a new vision for Northern Baptist with the mission of transforming America to become a “more perfect union” for all Americans.

The unique vision and mission distinguish American Baptist from all other Baptists in North American. Influential leaders of the Church in this New Century began to bring the power of the Gospel to address the always evolving moral, ethical, and social concerns of society. Themes of 20th Century of Baptist leadership included: evangelism, mission, ecumenism, ecclesiology, emerging ethical issues (investments/apartheid), peace and justice, religious liberty, human rights, civil rights advocacy, interfaith relations, gender equality, and fidelity to the Scriptures.

Woven into the narrative are the experiences of the American Baptist Education and Publication Society, American Baptist Home Mission Society, American Baptist Foreign Mission Society, and the Ministers and Missionaries Benefit Board. The American Baptist Story has never been told with this holistic perspective!

The leadership, participants, and witnesses for the last 50 years of the American Baptist Experience, like the Greatest Generation, are rapidly passing from the scene. The next generation of leaders who inherited the mantels of leadership and who remember their powerful witness to the Gospel are becoming fewer in number, too.

The story of the American Baptist Experience is more than a history of a great denomination. It is told by theologian, ethicist, educator, and historian who is able to synthesize the events and themes the last 120 years journey. It is the gathering of significant interviews, shared memories, unique perspectives, documentation that is hidden but not lost in the archives of the denomination, and celebration of American Baptist identity. Ultimately the story will instill hope for the American Baptist vision and mission into the next Century.

The Objectives of the American Baptist Experience

This project will conduct historical research, including interviews, toward producing a new and unique book about American Baptists. The span of the study will encompass 1907-2020, and the focus will be upon the evolving national leadership of this denomination, including especially the evolution of a unique national/international denominational witness, the role of the national societies, and the rising influence of the region/state/city organizations. **The overall objective will be to present a living narrative that reveals the American Baptist experience, unique among all North American Baptist groups.**

We will identify themes from this Century of American Baptist leadership, including, evangelism, mission, ecumenism, ecclesiology, emerging ethical issues (investments/apartheid), peace and justice, religious liberty, human rights, civil rights advocacy, interfaith relations, gender equality, and fidelity to the Scriptures.

The end product will be a 300-350 page book, replete with illustrations and photographs, charts, lists, original text selections in sidebars, and comprehensive indexes.

Suggested possible chapter breakdown:

Introduction

A brief sketch of American Baptist history, reaching back to Providence and Newport, Rhode Island, and culminating in the 19th Century.

I. Laying the Foundation: 1907-1925

Influenced by a new century devoted to cooperative Christian endeavor, Baptists in the northern United States moved boldly to create a model of efficient witness, the Northern Baptist Convention. Within twenty years, Northern Baptists successfully merged with the Free Baptist General Conference, joined the National Council of Churches as a charter member, and helped to organize the Baptist World Alliance. Program committees were organized by the Convention (Social Service, Promotion, M&M), and recognition of the importance of African American and women leaders was affirmed in the NBC family. The historic societies agreed to cooperate with the new Convention in annual planning and fundraising. Key relationships were forged with state conventions, and city mission societies, and a formal roster of educational institutions was maintained. Theologically, the Convention defended biblical fidelity by affirming the New Testament as the sole rule of faith, the principles of the social gospel, and a contextualized approach to missions. Key figures in this era included

Samuel Z. Batten, Walter Rauschenbusch, Helen B. Montgomery, Shailer Mathews, and M. A. Levy (NBC Corres. Sec.).

II. Struggle for Identity and Integrity: 1925-1950

At mid-century, the Northern Baptist family matured in its search for self-identity. Serious theological differences among the churches and across the Convention resulted in the application of the voluntary principle as major fundamentalist and conservative groups left the Convention to form new Baptist denominations. Likewise, some historic ethnic groups, notably the Germans and Swedes, also moved out of the family to form separate organizations. Yet, several other ethnic groups re-affirmed their relations with the NBC, like the Danish, Norwegians, Czechoslovaks, Italians, and Chinese. At the same time, Northern Baptists clarified their mission strategies at home and abroad, and drew closer to historically African American Baptists. Work in urban missions increased greatly. During the 1940s, a resurgence of interest in the Board of Education led to increased support for American Baptist colleges and seminaries. Through the Home Mission Society, support was increased for historic black Baptist colleges in the southern states. At Green Lake, Wisconsin, a national conference center became a focal point for American Baptist identity, renewal, and lay education. Leaders like J. C. Hazen (NBC Corresp. Sec.), Luther Wesley Smith, Richard Hoiland, Charles L. White, and Lucy Peabody forged new directions for Northern Baptists. Following the War, American Baptists led in Refugee Resettlement efforts, led by Walter O. Lewis and Matthew Giufrieda.

III. Holding in Trust: 1950-1970

This period exhibited an interest among Northern Baptists to take leadership as the premier Baptist group in American history. Consequently, in 1949 the Convention assumed a new name, the American Baptist Convention, holding the name in trust for other Baptist groups to join. Overtures were made to the African American conventions, the Southern Baptist Convention, and ethnic groups. Ecumenical conversations were held with the Disciples of Christ (Christian Church), and overseas Baptist bodies. During the important era of civil rights advocacy, the M&M Board helped to finance civil rights events, and the Home Mission Societies joined civil rights leaders in promulgating racial justice, led by Dean Wright, Forrest Ashbrook, William T. McKee, and Harold Stassen. The overseas work of American Baptists entered a period of cooperation with other mission-sending agencies in Europe, Africa, and India. Continued generous support for the National Council of Churches, the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, Religion in American Life, and the World Council of Churches, marked American Baptists as a genuinely ecumenical denomination. General secretaries Reuben E. Nelson and Edwin H. Tuller,

brought a new level of statesmanship to American Baptist witness, as did the historian Robert G. Torbet in ecumenical discussions, and Jitsuo Morikawa in transformational missions. After significant debate, a new international headquarters for the denomination was created in Valley Forge, Pennsylvania. The "Statement in Stone," a circular building designed to incarnate separate but integrated American Baptist organizations, became synonymous with American Baptist identity.

IV. What is the Church? 1970-1985

During the 1960s, as Protestant membership statistics in general declined, American Baptists engaged in deep self-reflection about their identity. Spurred on by the work of Paul Harrison, Anthony Campolo, Norman H. Maring, Winthrop S. Hudson, Lawrence Jansen, Norman Green, and Ambrose Cram, American Baptists sought to correct their course toward a corporate model of national organizations, by re-emphasizing the role of the local churches. Through major studies like SCODS, SCOR, and SAAR, the result was the renaming –and reconceiving--- of the denomination as the American Baptist Churches in the USA. It was a bold exercise in revisionist ecclesiology that integrated the national societies as program boards of the national organization, with the cooperation of the regions/state/cities through the Covenant of Relationships (COR). A general board was created to integrate all of the interests of American Baptists while continuing to celebrate their heritage in biennial meetings. One of the outstanding achievements in this period was the issuance of the SWIM Report that transformed American Baptist attitudes toward women in ministry. The longest-serving general secretary, Robert C. Campbell, symbolized a new commitment to an informed evangelical and ecumenical witness, as reflected in his attendance at the World Council of Churches assemblies. Nationally, Campbell and the ABC board presidents worked hard at pooling the interests of the national boards into a unified structure, the National Executive Council. At the end of his tenure, Dr. Campbell presided over an American Baptist witness in every U.S. state and territory.

V. Consolidation in Mission: 1985-2000

Much of what had been achieved theoretically and theologically in the 1970s, played out in real-time in the 1980s. There was a noticeable trend toward an informed evangelicalism through efforts in church planting. Shifting patterns of relationships for schools and colleges led to several institutions dropping from the ABC roster, while others strongly affirmed their denominational identity. Several regional organizations embraced the work of contiguous city societies, and others combined to more efficiently minister to regions. Of particular importance in this era was the

growth of dually-aligned local congregations with African American groups and new partnership organizations. The M&M Board was a key player in promoting dual alignment, making available its health care and retirement programs. At the national level, two of the historic national societies, National Ministries and Educational Ministries, combined efforts as a renewed American Baptist Home Mission Society. Significant changes in missiology occurred in this era, witnessed through ABC missionaries like Jorge [George] Pixley and Dr. Gustavo Parajon, who led American Baptists in a new appreciation of liberation theology. Under the direction of General Secretary Daniel E. Weiss, the Valley Forge corporate offices became the "American Baptist Mission Center." Weiss became an active participant in the National Association of Evangelicals, reflecting a grassroots interest among the churches. What seemed like centralization of American Baptist character, was, in reality, a broadening of American Baptist influence in places like the American Baptist Assembly, the American Baptist Women, American Baptist Men, the Ministers Council, the Commission on the Ministry, and health care institutions like American Baptist Homes and Hospitals, and uniquely, Rainbow Acres. The American Baptist Historical Society also took on new priorities of service for the denomination and the global Baptist community. This was an era that witnessed the growth of national opportunities for women: Elizabeth Miller, Kathryn Baker, Linda Isham, Shirley Jones, Linda Spoolstra, L. Faye Ignatius, Martha Barr, and Ernestine Galloway.

VI. Pushing the Boundaries: Baptists and Other People of Faith: 2000-2013

American Baptists in this era became cognizant of their ecumenical heritage. A new general secretary, A. Roy Medley, American Baptists, redoubled the denomination's involvement on cooperative ventures, notably the Baptist World Alliance, the Baptist Joint Committee on Religious Liberty, the New Covenant Baptists, and the National Council of Churches (of which Medley was a president). Even further, American Baptists became major leaders in the Christian community in engagement with other faith groups, notably the Muslims. Two national meetings were brought about largely under American Baptist auspices with the Islamic Society of North America. This produced a ripple effect in other areas of Baptist life, notably the Baptist World Alliance. Concurrent with the broadening ecumenical and interfaith stances of American Baptists, the overseas mission of American Baptists went through a total paradigm shift from sending missionaries to a field to recognizing and funding indigenous leaders. Within the United States, domestic missions shifted to new people groups and cooperation with other Protestant organizations. One of the most significant extensions of American Baptist influence was the ABC of the South that stretched from Texas to Maryland. Burmese, Karen, and Kachin refugees enriched American Baptist life in this period. An apex was reached during this period, for American Baptist women in ministry, modeled at the denominational level by Kate Penfield, Cheryl Wade, and Marcia Patton.

VII.Strengthening Local Congregations: 2013-2020

In recent ABC history, the denomination has been careful about its program priorities and declining budgetary resources. During this period, American Baptists debated the contentious issues surrounding gender equality and absorbed the painful departure of a region. Lee B. Spitzer's short tenure as general secretary emphasized the strength of the regions (he was a product of regional ministry) and greater program integration. The combination of regional organizations has continued, and new emphasis has been given to relations with other Baptist groups.

VIII.The Continuing Legacy

(To be deduced from interviews and analyses)

The Author: Dr. William H Brackney

The Rev. Dr. William H. Brackney is a native of Washington, DC. He was educated at the University of Maryland (hons. B.A.), Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary (M.A.R.), Temple University (M.A., Ph.D., with distinction). A historical theologian, he is a specialist in Post Reformation Protestantism, contemporary Free Church studies, human rights and the ethics of poverty, and Christianity with other world religions. He has taught at Houghton College, Colgate Rochester Divinity School, Dean of Theology at McMaster University, International Baptist Seminary, Vice President and Dean at Eastern Baptist Seminary, Acadia University, and Divinity College, Golden Gate Baptist Seminary, and Baylor University. At Eastern Seminary, he was Vice President and Dean, and at Baylor University, the head of the Religion Department and founder of the Program in Baptist Studies. At Acadia, he directed the internationally recognized Acadia Centre for Baptist and Anabaptist Studies, and is a Fellow at the Centre for Baptist Studies at Oxford University and the Institute for Baptist Studies in Elstal, Germany. Currently, Dr. Brackney is the Millard R. Cherry Distinguished Professor of Christian Thought and Ethics Emeritus at Acadia University. A former executive director of the American Baptist Historical Society, Dr. Brackney was also the archivist of the ABC-USA and curator of the Samuel Colgate Baptist Historical Library. In the Baptist World Alliance, he was the founding chair of the Commission on Baptist Identity and chair of the Division of Study and Research. He is a mentor to scores of doctoral students internationally. An ordained American Baptist minister, Rev. Brackney has served churches in Texas, Pennsylvania, New York, and Nova Scotia, Canada. He is an engaged ecumenist and has served in interfaith work and theological conversations, currently the founding president of the Board on the Halifax Interfaith Council and chair of the

international Believers' Church Conference Continuation Committee. Among Dr. Brackney's over 40 published books are *A Genetic History of Baptist Thought* (second edition), *Historical Dictionary of the Baptists* (third edition), *Baptists in North America, Congregation and Campus: A History of North American Baptists in Higher Education*, *The Early English General Baptists and their Theological Tradition*, *Walter Rauschenbusch: Published Works and Select Correspondence* (3 vols.), general editor of the *Baptists in Early North America (BENA) Series* (12 vols.), *Maritime Old First Churches*, *For the Ranchers: A History of Rainbow Acres*, *In the Shadow of the Prophet* (with David Gushee), *The Spirit among the Dissenters*, and major articles in the *Baptist Quarterly* (UK), *American Baptist Quarterly*, *Baptist History*, and *Heritage, Perspectives, Review and Expositor*, *Bibliotheca Dissidentium*, *Schriften Des Vereins Fur Reformationsgeschichte* (SVR), *ethicsdaily.com*, and *Westminster Studies in Education*. He was the principal lecturer in an *American Baptist Identity Video Series* and, recently, a video series on Baptist identity. A festschrift honoring Dr. Brackney, *Crossing Baptist Boundaries* (Mercer, 2019), was edited by the noted German ecumenical historian, Erich Geldbach.

The Editorial Team

Names to be Nominated

Reverend Gary W Wagner

Gary Wagner has served as President of Rainbow Acres since March of 1996. Under his leadership, Rainbow Acres has grown into a "state of the art" residential facility and educational community serving Adults with Developmental Disabilities, in Camp Verde, Arizona. In celebration of its 45th Anniversary he was the editor of "For the Ranchers! A History of Rainbow Acres" authored by Dr. William H. Brackney.

Wagner has over 50 years of experience in public relations, marketing and fundraising for higher education at Bacone College in Oklahoma, the American Baptist Assembly in Wisconsin, Alderson Broaddus College in West Virginia, Rainbow Acres, the Sioux Falls College in South Dakota, and Colgate Rochester Crozier Divinity School in New York. In 1975 he was commissioned a Missionary for the American Baptist Home Mission Society. Wagner is one of the longest-serving individuals in active in marketing and fundraising for American Baptist ministries. Over his career, he has raised over \$50 Million for a variety of educational ministries. His educational credits include a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Religious Education and Sociology from Sioux Falls College in SD. and a Master of Divinity in Pastoral Care from Colgate Rochester Divinity School in Rochester, NY. He has done advanced studies in Christian Organizational Development at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, CA.

A lifelong American Baptist growing up in the First Baptist Church of Washington, Iowa, Wagner can trace his family lineage back to Elder John Crandall of Westerly, Rhode Island who was among the first Baptists in the New World. Along with Roger Williams, John Clark and Obadiah Holmes, Crandall was one of the signers of the Charter of Rhode Island. Wagner's inherited his interest in family history and the history of Baptists from his mother and her Crandall cousins.

The programs and services of Rainbow Acres are built around a "whole life concept," believing that every individual has the potential to continue growing in all facets of human development.

Rainbow Acres, a Christian Community with heart, empowers persons with developmental disabilities to live to his/her fullest potential with dignity and purpose. Rainbow Acres located on a 50-acre ranch in rural Northern Arizona and the residents are called "Ranchers," denoting personal dignity, worth and value. Over the past 24 years, Rainbow Acres has constructed 12 new modern homes for the Ranchers, built two Four-Plex Apartments (total of eight apartments for independent living) rehabilitated two permanent program facilities. Construction of the Palmer Community Center was completed in 2010 with state-of-the-art light and sound systems for artistic performances, and modern stainless-steel kitchen. Total capital investment in the Ranch facilities is over \$25 Million, without debt financing. The economic impact of Rainbow Acres upon the Verde Valley is over \$100 million since 1996.

In 1985-1988 Wagner served on the Capital Funds Commission for the Baptist World Alliance, and again on the Commission of Freedom and Justice 2000-2005. He was the founding President of the West Virginia Chapter of the National Society of Fundraising Executives and served on the National Board (1984-1988). His name appears in Who's Who in Education, Who's Who in the South, and Who's Who in America. Wagner is past President of Camp Verde Kiwanis Club and served on the Boards of Camp Verde Chamber of Commerce and Verde Valley Regional Economic Organization. He also served on the Board of the EAGLE Commission of the United Methodist Association and several Accreditation Peer Review Teams. Gary and his wife, Jussara, have a son Isaac and a daughter, Abigail. They are members of Verde Community Church in Cottonwood and associate members of Church of the Red Rocks in Sedona. He enjoys travel with family. Historical and biographical literature has been a life-long passion.

Questions & Answers about The American Baptist Experience

Q: Why this book now?

A: The author is among the most respected American Baptist Historians, with a passion for sharing the American Baptist Experience, and is available for the significant undertaking. We must engage former American Baptist leaders who are still living, we must recover their voices.

Q: Why another book about Baptist history?

A: American Baptist Historian and distinguished educator Dr. Robert Torbet wrote the last definitive book strictly about American Baptist heritage in 1963.

Q: What is so special about the American Baptist experience?

A: It is the oldest continuing Baptist tradition in America, the most diverse and prophetic of all the Baptist groups.

Q: Who would most benefit from such a book?

A: You! Every reader! Baptist Historians, theologians, ethicists, and, educators. Those involved in issues of social justice, seminary students, others training for ministry outside ABCUSA. All American Baptist pastors, new members classes, pastors from other faith traditions joining the American Baptist Churches USA, and many others.

Q: Is this just a cover for telling the story of the American Baptist executive leadership?

A: The whole nature of the American Baptist Experiences is greater than one or a succession of gifted leaders. The contributions of regional and national program boards will be interwoven in the narrative. It is the story of gifted individuals who participate in the life of American Baptists Churches.

Q: Will controversial issues be presented?

A: We will openly and fairly treat the debates and differences of opinion that helped to forge American Baptist witness!

Q: How will diversity be exhibited in the narrative?

A: By using a dialectical narrative method, the choice of characters, and the contributions of consultants. Our approach will be inclusive!

Q: Are there other objectives to be achieved?

A: Strengthening of American Baptist identity! Across the Nation, American Baptist are less and less visible. Responses to the Baptist name ranges from uninformed to embarrassment to hostility. It is imperative a new image of American Baptist Churches USA is needed.

Q: Will there be assurance of reliability and fact-checking?

A: Author is a professional well-published American Baptist historian. The He will interact with distinguished professional peers, a Board of Reference, and the editorial committee.

Q: What are some unique features of this proposed book?

A: The text will be illustrated with many photos, charts, and selections of original texts, high quality glossy materials.

Q: How will the book be distributed?

A: Our distribution goals are ambitious! Advanced funding of the book will enable it to be distributed to the libraries of Baptist Colleges and Seminaries across the United States, Canada and around the world. The book will also be marketed through its own website and Judson Press and Christian Book Sellers

Q: How will the research and publication expenses be funded?

A: The Managing Editor and a network of individuals believing in the importance of this history will raise the funds needed. The total expense is estimated in the range of \$50,000.

Q. Should Funding and sales of the book exceed normal profit margins how will those funds be utilized?

A: To advance the ministries of ABCUSA.