From Rogers to Netherton:
A Heritage of Baptist Presidents
The Second & Sixth: Robert Reedy Bryan

“Professor Bryan filled his professorship in the college to the entire satisfaction of the board and of all the patrons of the school. He had a sharp, incisive mind, strong will power, was courteous and affable in his manners, and soon won the hearts of all the young men in the institution. No professor ever connected with Carson College was more universally admired and loved by his students.” Dr. Jesse Baker, Carson-Newman College President, 1869-70.

Perhaps no other individual poured more of himself into the young institution that has become Carson-Newman College than Robert Reedy Bryan. During his lifetime he served the school not only as a professor and administrator, but as president from 1851-53 and again from 1866-68. At one point Bryan taught all the curriculum offered. A gifted teacher, he committed himself to the cause of Baptist education in East Tennessee and left behind a legacy lasting almost one hundred and fifty years to date.

One of fourteen children, R.R. Bryan was born April 11, 1822 in Jefferson County. His grandfather was one of five delegates sent from Sevier County along with representatives from nine other counties to meet in Knoxville January 11, 1796. Their purpose was to draft a constitution that would provide the organizational backbone for the state of Tennessee.

At the age of fifteen, Bryan accepted Christ and was baptized at the Dumplin Valley Church under the pastorship of Elder James Lankford. He attended Holston Seminary in New Market for two years and then high school in Strawberry Plains for an additional year.

By the time he was twenty-three, the desire to educate had firmly taken hold. In 1845 he began teaching locally in both public and private schools, spending some time in the old Baptist brick meeting house at the Mossy Creek Zinc Works. Four years later he would meet with other East Tennessee Baptists to discuss the need for increased educational facilities in the area. Little did he know that meeting would dictate the course he would follow for the rest of his life.

In his book *History of Carson-Newman College*, Isaac Newton Carr names I.M. Newman, Samuel I. Newman, William C. Newman, and Rev. Nelson Bowen as being the other individuals at this initial meeting. J.J. Burnett adds C.C. Tipton to the list in his work *Sketches of Tennessee’s Pioneer Baptist Preachers*. They were later joined by Elder William Ballew, Hon. James H. Carson, Joseph Hale, Dr. William F. Helm, Elder T.J. Lane, Elder James Lacy, Elder Joseph Manning, Elder Ephraim Moore, Elder Jonathan Quarrels, Elder William Rogers, Elder Grant Taylor, Coleman Witt, and Joseph Witt. The result of these meetings was the formation of the Baptist Educational Society of East Tennessee.

During this busy time Bryan married Rebecca A. Lankford, daughter of Elder James Lankford, on September 5, 1850. The marriage would be fruitful as they were blessed to have eleven children.
In August of 1851, Rev. William Rogers was unanimously elected by the Trustees as the first president of Mossy Creek Baptist Seminary. R.R. Bryan was responsible for the design and layout of the 1851-52 calendar and curriculum. In September, the seminary opened its doors for its first semester.

Bryan was never officially ordained and yet teaching was his passion. His favorite subjects were found in the natural sciences. Burnett writes of him: “The secret of his success as a teacher, I suppose, was his personality; he was a born teacher. He was friendly, enthusiastic, magnetic. He was not prepossessing or commanding in his appearance by any means – but he was a live wire and shot electric currents through thick skins and drowsy brains, waking up the dormant powers of the mind. One of his most marked characteristics was his patience...” In his History of Tennessee, East Tennessee Edition, Goodspeed adds that “He had the reputation of being one of the finest English scholars in East Tennessee.”

However, Mossy Creek Baptist Seminary’s first year was not without tragedy as William Rogers died in November from complications of typhoid fever. Bryan took over the presidential duties and continued in that role until 1853 when he was succeeded by Samuel Anderson. He was eager to return to strictly teaching and continued until the seminary closed in June of 1862 due to the Civil War. During this time the school underwent a name change and became Mossy Creek Baptist College in 1855.

The Civil War was devastating to the college as Union soldiers began a three year occupation. The institution was badly damaged and was sold to pay off its debts. East Tennessee Baptists joined in an effort to raise funds to buy back the college. R.R. Bryan helped lead this work. After much fund-raising and labor that would lead to weakened health, Bryan and the college supporters were able to repurchase the school and open its doors once again in September of 1868.

R.R. Bryan once again served as president during this rebuilding time from 1866-68. The college became his life work but that work would eventually take its toll. He became ill and died June 26, 1878. Before that time however, he lived to see the college move its location to the Mountcastle estate property. Two years after his death Mossy Creek Baptist College was renamed Carson College.

Perhaps one of the most telling quotes about Robert Reedy Bryan came from a fellow president of Mossy Creek Baptist College. N.B. Goforth wrote: “Professor R.R. Bryan has many lasting monuments, not of marble or brass, but more enduring – monuments of immortal minds, molded by personal contact of teacher and pupils in the schoolroom.”

**Baptist History Resources**

Continuing our series on Baptist historical and reference materials, this issue will highlight Resource Kit for Your Church’s History published by The Southern Baptist Historical Society. This kit is a valuable resource for historical committees or media centers interested in preserving their church’s history. The kit includes the following:

- Church History Committee Handbook
- How-to Pamphlet Series - Locating & Preserving Your Church’s Records
- Microfilming Your Church’s Records
- Tape Recording Your Church’s History
With renovations finally completed, the Baptist Archives were dedicated during the Founders’ Day chapel October 19, 1999. The Carson-Newman Baptist newsletter was started and the first two issues were sent out with each being mailed to over 2,000 individuals and churches in Tennessee. A display was set up at the Tennessee Baptist Convention in Franklin, Tennessee to promote the Archives’ work. We continued working with churches to photocopy their records on acid free paper and bind them for inclusion in their libraries as well as a copy for our collection. We are currently working with First Baptist Church, Newport and hope to begin on minutes from First Baptist, Jefferson City sometime this fall.

**Statistical Report**

**Accessions:** 11  
**Patrons:** 50 (14 in 1997-98 / 40 in 1998-99)  
- Carson-Newman Staff: 6  
- Carson-Newman Students: 17  
- Others: 27

**States Represented:**  
- Alabama: 1  
- California: 1  
- Florida: 1  
- Illinois: 2  
- Indiana: 1  
- Oklahoma: 1  
- Pennsylvania: 2  
- Tennessee: 12  
- Texas: 3  
- Virginia: 1  

**Walk-Ins:** 31  
**Phone Requests:** 0  
**Letter Requests:** 1  
**Email Requests:** 18  
**Inter-Library Loan Requests:** 3

**Types of Reference Questions Handled:**  
- Statistics/Information from SBC & TBC Annuals  
- Genealogy Inquiries  
- Church History Related Questions  
- Biographical Questions  
- Associational Histories  
- General Baptist History  
- Issues in Baptist Life

Visit our web site at:  
http://library.cn.edu/CNAPs/Baptframe.html  
Off campus  
http://library.cn.edu:8686/CNAPs/Baptframe.html
SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Formed in 1938 under the leadership of W.O. Carver at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, the Society functioned from 1951 to 1995 as an auxiliary of the Historical Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention. When the SBC decided in 1995 to eliminate the Commission, the Society became an independent organization. Today, the Society operates on its own, does not receive Cooperative funds, and is self-supporting. The Society is a voluntary, non-profit organization whose primary purpose is to provide leadership and direction for the study, preservation, and communication of Baptist history and heritage. Membership entitles members to receive the journal Baptist History and Heritage, the Baptist Heritage Update newsletter, a 10% discount on other Society publications and products, and reduced fees for participating in the annual meeting. For more information, contact Charles W. Deweese, Executive Director & Treasurer. Mailing address: SBHS, P.O. Box 728, Brentwood, TN 37024-0728 Phone: (800) 966-2278 Email: cdeweese@tnbaptist.org Website: www.baptisthistory.org

TENNESSEE BAPTIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY
The Tennessee Baptist Historical Society is composed of individuals, churches, associations, institutions, and other organizations that are willing to share their resources and interests for the cause of Baptist history in Tennessee. Membership entitles members to receive publications of the Society and attend the annual meeting that is usually scheduled in conjunction with the Tennessee Baptist Convention. For more information, contact Albert Wardin, Jr., Treasurer Mailing address: 208 Old Williamsburg Court, Nashville, TN 37215

Albert L. Lang, Archivist
C-N 71997
Jefferson City, TN 37760
(865) 471-3542
alang@cn.edu