“Dr. Goforth was characterized by mental energy and rugged strength rather than polish; he was a diamond in the rough. He believed in education, in the truest sense of the word – training, discipline – rather than polish or cramming; and, teaching by example, his life bore fruit in that direction.”

J.J. Burnett’s quote from *Sketches of Tennessee’s Pioneer Baptist Preachers* wonderfully describes the life and work of Napoleon Bonaparte Goforth. One of only two presidents to serve two terms, he provided leadership during some of the college’s most exciting, expansive and trying days.

Goforth was born May 20, 1828 to Hugh and Mary Goforth in Sevier County, Tennessee. At the age of nineteen while attending services conducted by William Billue and Joseph Manning at Central Campground he became a Christian. He was baptized by Manning in the Pigeon River.

Three years later Goforth attended Sevierville Academy and then went on to Maryville College where he received his B.A. in 1854. Afterward he received his M.A. and later an honorary doctorate from Mossy Creek Baptist College.

1855 proved to be an eventful year for both the college and Goforth. He became the chair of Mossy Creek Baptist Missionary Seminary’s languages department and the school changed its name to Mossy Creek Baptist College. This was done to more accurately reflect the school’s original purpose of providing a Baptist liberal arts education.

Physical growth also took place. Up until this point students had been housed in local residences. In 1855 William C. Newman was asked to direct the construction of two buildings - Newman Dormitory number one and two.

On December 24, 1856 Goforth married Rebecca Adaline Pattison of Jefferson City. She was the niece of Isaac, J.N., and William C. Newman and second cousin of Samuel Newman. These four were among the Oak Tree Five whose vision and efforts led to the founding of Mossy Creek Baptist Missionary Seminary in 1851.

In 1859 Goforth succeeded Matthew Hillsman as president and according to Dr. I. N. Carr in his *History of Carson-Newman College* “gave himself diligently to the task of maintaining and developing the college.” That same year he was also ordained in Boyd’s Creek Church. In 1861 he began pastoring the Mossy Creek Church. Among the other East Tennessee churches he pastored were Riceville, Mouse Creek, Eastanallee, Hiwassee, Mount Harmony, Double Springs, and New Hopewell.

1861 brought the start of the War Between the States and the secession of Tennessee. After commencement in the spring of 1862 Mossy Creek
Baptist College was forced to close its doors. Goforth had already left to enlist in Co. “A” of the 31st Tennessee Infantry Regiment (later the 39th Tennessee Mounted Infantry Regiment) on May 1 for a three-year period. Records describe him as having “dark complexion, brown hair, gray eyes. 6’ tall.” In addition to this information, William and Darby Taylor’s book *Onward Christian Soldiers!* throws light on his activities at this time.

On May 14 he was appointed Chaplain of his regiment. Field and Staff muster records reveal that he was in Mississippi a considerable time during 1862-1863. On June 7, 1864 Goforth was admitted to the C.S. Army Hospital in Charlottesville, VA with “debilitis” but returned to duty on June 10. On April 28, 1865 he is surrendered at Asheville, NC and on May 21 takes the Oath of Allegiance there.

After the war, Goforth went to Riceville with W.A.G. Brown to help revitalize the Riceville Academy. Founded by John Biggs and Mollie Porter in 1857, it was re-chartered in 1870 as Riceville Scientific and Classical Institute. That year Goforth resigned and returned to the presidential duties at Mossy Creek Baptist College.

The college was at a very pivotal point in its history. At the start of the war it was greatly in debt. The college had borrowed money from John Roper Branner to purchase land. However, he became its owner in 1865 when he was the only bidder at its auction. Money was also owed to William C. Newman. The next year Branner sold the campus and buildings back to the Board of Trustees.

Union troops occupied the three college buildings during the war and left them practically in ruins. R.R. Bryan became president in 1866 and under his guidance and unwavering dedication the college began its recovery. Bryan sacrificed personal health to see Baptist higher education re-established in East Tennessee.

The college re-opened in 1868. By 1869 however, the school had debts of $6,000. Jesse Baker, president from 1869-1870, made his famous 3,500 mile campaign to raise enough money to allow the college to be debt free for the first time. Baker returned to full time preaching after this and the trustees looked for a strong visionary leader to move them toward physical expansion and economic growth, hoping for an endowment of $100,000.

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N.B. Goforth’s gravesite, Riceville Community Cemetery
(Photo courtesy Charles Key)

Goforth returned and would serve for the next twelve years, the longest tenure of any president until Dr. James T. Warren (1927-1948). A major step came in 1876 when the A.J. Mountcastle property was purchased. The mansion was converted into classrooms, laboratory and library. Classes were offered there beginning in the fall of 1876. Students lived in the two Newman dormitories and local housing while the old administration building was used for the primary and preparatory departments.

During this time the college experienced the cooperation and contributions of East Tennessee Baptist churches, associations, and individuals who were committed to the cause of education. During the East Tennessee Association of Baptists’ meeting in September 1879 the following was noted in the denominational report on education:

“Happily for our churches, we have all the facilities for securing an education; Mossy Creek College is near. A female school, at the same place, has also been organized for the education of our daughters. The same officers have charge of both institutions...God lays on their [the schools’] heads a heavy obligation. If they meet this high obligation, they may hope to take the world for Christ; if they ignore it, they may expect to fall into obscurity and to become an unimportant factor in the activities of the world.”
Despite a lack of available records, it is possible to provide a probable sketch of female education offered at this time. Up to this point a girls’ school had been run in the local Masonic Hall. Apparently the school underwent some developments as it became known as the Branner Institute with classes being offered in what is now Glenmore Mansion.

The first advertisement in a Mossy Creek Baptist College catalog appears in 1878. It is for the 1878-79 school year and describes the Branner Institute as a “Boarding and Day School for Young Ladies” with “Charges Greatly Reduced.” It is possible that the college had taken over control of this institution.

This theory is strengthened by an advertisement found in the October 1879 minutes of the General Association of Tennessee Baptists. It mentions Carson College (in 1880 the college was renamed to honor long time trustee and benefactor J.H. Carson of Dandridge) and the Masonic Female College “conducted under the supervision of Professors Goforth and Russell, and is designed to meet the local demand for female education as well as to accommodate those who wish to educate their sons and daughters at schools in close proximity.” A visitor to Mossy Creek in October 1879 mentions in a Baptist and Reflector article that “the female school is doing well with about seventy-five or eighty students.”

Despite the confusion caused by various names, these are the earliest roots of what would eventually become Newman College. Goforth resigned in June 1882 but plans were being laid under his guidance to bring the girls’ college into the original campus. The men primarily utilized the Mountcastle estate for classrooms and made use of local housing.

Goforth returned to Riceville and continued teaching at the Scientific and Classical Institute and preaching on weekends for the next twenty years. He experienced a debilitating fall that severely limited him. He died at his home in 1907.

Baptist History Resources: Onward Christian Soldiers! Mossy Creek Baptist College Students in the War Between the States 1861-1865
by William D. Taylor and Darby O’Neil Taylor

The Taylors have painstakingly poured over numerous records, books, and historical documents to produce a resource useful to anyone interested in the Civil War or East Tennessee.

In this 191 page, illustrated and indexed work are the following sections / chapters (Also included are six informative appendices):

Mossy Creek Baptist College Students & the War Between the States: A Chronology
  Ch. 1 Service Records of Pre-War Graduates, Mossy Creek Baptist College
  Ch. 2 Service Records of Enrolled Students, 1856-1857 Academic Year
  Ch. 3 Service Records of Enrolled Students, 1858-1859 Academic Year
  Ch. 4 Service Records of Identified Presidents, Board Members, and Faculty

Onward Christian Soldiers! may be ordered from Dr. William D. Taylor for $39.95 plus postage at C-N Box 72018 Jefferson City, TN 37760.

Baptist History and Heritage Society’s Annual Meeting at Carson-Newman College

Carson-Newman will proudly host the Baptist History and Heritage Society’s annual meeting June 20-22, 2002. If you missed last year’s meeting at First Baptist Church, Pensacola, FL, make plans to attend here in Tennessee. For more information contact Charles W. Deweese, Executive Director-Treasurer at (800) 966 - 2278. (Email: cdeweese@tnbaptist.org ) or Dr. Mel Hawkins, Editor, Baptist History & Heritage at (865) 471 – 3246 (Email: mhawkins@cn.edu ). Hope to see you there!

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BAPTIST HISTORY AND HERITAGE 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: BHHS, P.O. Box 728, Brentwood, TN 37024-0728
Phone: (800) 966-2278
Membership: $25/1 yr. $45/2 yrs. $60/3 yrs. $15/1 yr. (student) $20/1 yr. (senior 60+)
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 ($15 per year) 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.
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