



STATE MISSIONS IN MISSOURI DURING ONE HUNDRED YEARS

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THE Louisiana Purchase was made in 1803. Missouri was organized as a separate territory in 1812, after having been joined to the territory of Indiana. She was admitted to the Union of states in 1821. She then had a population of 50,000.

The celebration on this historic spot of the one hundredth anniversary of the organization of a Baptist church here in 1806, proclaims the fact of the early arrival and progressive spirit of Baptists in this then new and strange land.

From this early, heroic start, the Baptist cause grew as much as could well be expected under the pioneer and political circumstances of those days.

By the time the territory was admitted as a state, other congregations had sprung up in other parts of the land. The growth was especially across the central part of the territory whither many Virginians and Kentuckians had come.

The ministers of those early days were men of force of character, zeal and consecration. They felt the burden of the need of the expanding country and sought to supply this need by voluntary preaching journeys, from time to time.

But there grew up a feeling of the need of more systematic and united effort in this direction.

In 1833 Thomas Fristoe, Fielding Wilhoite and Ebenezer Rogers met at the home of John Jackson in Howard county to confer upon the subject. This meeting resulted in a call for a meeting to be held on the 29th of August, 1834, at Providence church in Callaway county. This call was circulated by personal tours and correspondence.

The meeting at Providence was well attended by a representative body of ministers and laymen, as well as by sisters and young people. In that body were many ministers whose ability, wisdom and zeal would grace any like occasion of the present day.

The meeting organized and agreed on a plan of a constitution, but did not adopt it, thinking it wiser to present the proposed constitution to the churches and brethren for their consideration and to defer final action until the next year, at a meeting to be held at Little Bonne Femme church in June, 1835.

At this latter meeting the name "Central Society" for the organization, and the proposed constitution, were adopted.

Article 2 reads: "The object of this society shall be to adopt means and execute plans to promote the preaching of the Gospel in the destitute churches and settlements within the bounds of the state."

This, therefore, was the birth of state missions in Missouri. It marked the first organized effort in that direction and that article is the fruitful mother of all that has followed in the way of state missions since. Violent and abusive opposition to the organization immediately broke forth; led, especially by two ministers who were present. From that day on, the work of state missions has always been opposed in one form or another under one guise or another; but always with disastrous effects to the men and measures which have opposed it, until the opposition has no voice that can be heard above the paeans of praise for God's great blessings on our efforts.

Notwithstanding the opposition, the society lived. The work before it was difficult because of the wide separation of the churches, slow means of communication, sparse settlements, political agitations and lack of men and means.

But those faithful men held on, braved dangers, overcame obstacles and followed faithfully the vision of the divine leading.

At the third meeting, which was held at Bethlehem church in Boone county in 1836, the first public collection for state missions was taken, amounting to \$51.75. Here, also the first state missionary was elected and the first executive board was appointed. At the meeting in 1839, the name was changed to the "General Association."

The summary of the work for the first ten years is as follows:

Number of missionaries....	14
Number of baptisms.	376
Money collected (and reported)	\$1,857.38
Money collected (not reported but estimated) .	1,000.00

At the close of the second ten year period in 1855, the annual receipts were \$1186.54.

For the following five years, 1855-60, the total baptisms were 1815. The total expenses were \$11,327.39.

The next five years were years of civil strife and therefore of confusion and dearth in all religious work.

The report of the treasurer in 1865 dates back to 1861 and shows "receipts of money up to 1865 to the amount of \$1,100.63 and disbursements to the amount of \$1,145." At this meeting in 1865, the president of the executive board concluded his report in these words: "And now, dear brethren, as the grim visage of war has disappeared, let us pray that the great Head of the church will greatly increase the missionary spirit of his people so that the faithful heralds of the Cross may again be sent forth to point sinners to the Lamb of God."

Dr. Yeaman adds in his history of the General Association, "The past was without inspiration for the present and the present was without hope for the future. Nothing could uphold the Christian worker but faith in God."

From 1865 to 1875 there was some prosperity in the work, but, hindered in the early part by the divisions caused by the Civil War. The political feeling following the war led to the organization of the Missouri Baptist General Convention, whose leading spirits and adherents were northern men. The constitution made it auxiliary to the Home Mission Society.

So overwhelmingly southern was the sentiment in the state at that time, and so bitter the feeling on both sides that it was impossible that this organization could have any large success. It only held three meetings. Then, under the wise leadership of Dr. Burlingame the members were received into the General Association.

In 1873 the executive board was removed to St. Louis. There was a decline in the prosperity of the work until 1875 when it was nearly destroyed by the large expense account which was almost four times what was paid to the missionaries and \$1,200 more than the collections of the state superintendent of missions.

In 1874, there was collected for state missions \$3,614.79 and the year closed with a deficit of \$215.20. In 1875, the Superintendent's collections exceeded his salary and expenses by only \$241.58, while the same salary and expenses were, as above stated, nearly four times the total paid the missionaries.

This precipitated a crisis. In June, 1876, the superintendent resigned and Dr. J. D. Murphy was elected to do office work only. The year resulted in a goodly number of baptisms, but limited collections. The dissatisfaction with the work of the years from 1874 to 1878 resulted in moving the board from St. Louis to Mexico.

The conditions for those years gave some just grounds for complaint and furnished a timely excuse for others who were enemies of the work. This later resulted in the organization of the General Convention under the auspices especially of the American Baptist Flag. But this body died on its second birthday, "to be remembered only to be pitied as a short-lived product of ambition and folly."

Shortly after the removal of the board to Mexico, Dr. Yeaman was elected corresponding secretary. While the revival of the work was slow at first, this action really marked the beginning of a large and permanent prosperity in state missions. Dr. Yeaman continued as corresponding secretary from November, 1878, to 1886.

Rev. S. M Brown succeeded him for three years. The results of these years were really phenomenal for that date, the number of baptisms being 2,910 and the collections \$42,604.98.

After an interval of one year's successful work in which Rev. J. C. Armstrong was secretary to do office work only, Rev. S. M Brown was re-elected under the same conditions, and the next year, 1890-91, took the field again. All these years were years of growth in influence for the General Association.

Bro. Brown was succeeded in 1892 by Rev. W. T. Campbell, whose five years of service, to 1897, were marked by the largest number of baptisms ever reported up to that time in a like period. They numbered 6,786 and the collections were \$56,939.59.

Bro. Campbell was succeeded by the present incumbent, Rev. T. L. West, in October, 1897.

The number of professions from that time to date is 29,327—average for nine years, 3,258, and the collections for the same period are \$160,319—average for nine years \$16,812.

Now the work of state missions is on a firm basis in the hearts of the great body of our membership and only has to contend with the natural indifference of the unconsecrated, or of the uninformed.

The work has been greatly helped in times of financial stress by the endowment funds which have been given by devoted men and women whose influence thus lives after them in blessing. This fund now amounts to \$19,667.29. The average rate of interest on it is six per cent. This sum is invested in safe and profitable securities under the wise trusteeship of Bro. John A. Guthrie.

In view of the small beginnings, the great difficulties, the often virulent opposition and the blessed results, well may we exclaim with profoundly grateful hearts, "See what God hath wrought."

This condensed historical sketch may well be followed by a brief consideration of the influence of the state mission work other than that which has been tabulated above. An enterprise of this kind cannot put its results all in figures of baptisms and contributions. Beneficent as these are, they perhaps, measure not half of the good done. The general influence upon the life, work and spirit of the brotherhood in this state has been of untold good. It has been the greatest unifying force in the life of the denomination. It has been the rallying center for the faithful, uniting their hearts, hands and means in a common loved work of sending the saving gospel to the lost. Thus coming together in co-operation, they have learned to know and love each other and to put the interests of the cause of our beloved Lord above personal prejudices, passions or preferences.

The great interests involved, the arduousness and often difficulty of the work, the perplexing and delicate problems to be solved, and the need of large financial resources, have all combined to develop thoughtfulness, patience, courage, faith, Christian statesmanship, loving fellowship, unselfish motives and earnest zeal.

In addition to this, the work of state missions may justly be claimed to be the fruitful mother of all our benevolences. The preaching of the Gospel is the foundation of Christian life and character, and

all their subsequent manifestations spring from this original source.

Rooted in Christ, state missions is the trunk and our educational and benevolent work, in their various forms, are the branches. No denominational fruitage in our widely developed activities but can be traced to the common center at the meeting in 1834 where state missions originated and through that center, back to the churches and men whose devotion found its consciousness and expression on that historic occasion.

Again, state missions have been the potent factor in the development of a higher spirituality, deeper consecration, and wider vision on the part of many of our churches and members.

The agency that calls a new church into existence by its missionary labors, becomes by that very fact an inspiration to that church to carry the work further. All true missionary work is reproductive. This principle is demonstrated in the historic fact that there are few influential missionary churches in the state that are not themselves, directly or indirectly, the product of state missions. If indeed, there be such, they, too, are doubtless the products of state missions elsewhere whose influence has come to them through other forms.

State missions have either developed or enlisted the talents of as able and noble a band of men as ever gave their lives to the betterment of their country. Wildernesses blossoming in spiritual beauty and deserts fertile with gospel harvests owe those men grateful remembrances and zealous emulation.

The enormous labors of devoted secretaries should never be forgotten. Nor should the less arduous and less conspicuous but valuable services of the officers and members of the board be without appreciation.

Today the field for state missions is greater than ever. The vast unbroken geographical expanse of this territory when Bethel church was organized, was but as a garden spot to the ever enlarging field and need among the millions now here and coming.

As three millions are to a few thousand, so is the work before God's people today to the work then. As three millions now are to the unknown millions that are coming, so is the present to the vaster call of the ever widening future.

State missions have a great field in extent of territory and population, but even more, the field has become great in that the doors of the churches and the hearts of the brotherhood are open to their claims.

This is a glorious stage in the beneficent progress of a religious agency, but it is only a prophecy of greater things to come when, awakened, informed and quickened, that large part of our denominational body which is now an inert mass, shall be alive and responsive to the call of Zion and of God.

Then we shall be "like unto them that dream and our mouth filled with laughter and our tongue with singing. Then shall they say among the nations, God hath done great things for them. God hath done great things for us whereof we are glad. My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord's house," to see them filled with all the host of God, serving him.