

SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR THE HISTORY
OF A BAPTIST CHURCH
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This is, of course, just one person's opinion, but it might serve as a point of departure for others. It would be a rare case indeed where *all* of the suggested material could be found, especially in the case of a very old church, and where the early records have been lost.

1. The background of the church:

- a. the community- source of the settlers, e.g., settled by Scotch-Irish from Pennsylvania or emigrants from eastern Virginia, etc.
- b. the first Baptist preachers who preached in the community, including a biographical word or two about each.
- c. the "ancestry" of the church, the mother church, the grandmother church- as far back as you wish, or can, go- but by all means the "mother" church.

2. Organization as a "distinct" church-date, presbytery, number of charter members and their names- their occupations would be of interest.

3. Articles of faith, covenant, constitution- not likely to be found, if original records are lost.

4. The first pastor - a short biography- his background, term of service, his contribution to the church, etc.

5. All later pastors listed with terms of service, and short, uniform sketches suggesting their contributions- positive and/or negative- and any events of significance during their service.

6. Lists of the officers of the church, deacons, trustees, especially the first ones in each case, (include, if possible, terms of service).

7. Dates of the beginning of all church organizations: Sunday School, W.M.U., B.Y.P.U. (B.T.U.), etc. with at least the first officers listed in each case.

8. The district associations to which the church belonged with dates. Lists of delegates of the church to the associations, and any committee memberships or special contributions of the delegates to the associational work. Any queries from the church to the association and the answers given by the association.

9. The ministerial sons of the church, including their licensing and ordination, with the dates, and short sketches of their careers. List of licensed ministers of the church, who were never ordained.

10. Meetings of the district association held at the church, including any significant actions taken at these meetings- any important movements started, and any interesting or unusual occurrences.

11. Periods of exceptional prosperity and growth in membership, or declines; any splits in the church, with reasons.

12. Any noteworthy or especially fruitful protracted meeting, with names of ministers participating and appropriate statistics (and, of course, dates).

13. Any change of location of the meeting house (church building), with reasons. Also, any unusual features of the meeting house (houses), or any interesting stories involving same.

14. Any catastrophes, such as loss of building by fire and circumstances, or destruction-or misuse-of building in war.

15. Any military or secular history involving the church; e.g. used as a hospital during the Civil War, or Patrick Henry made a speech there, etc.

16. Sidelights, or anecdotes- serious, instructive, or humorous. All of these have a place- they add life and interest to the history.

17. Outstanding benefactors of the church. Exceptionally useful members and colorful members (this is treading on touchy ground and must be handled circumspectly).

18. A table giving periodic reports on membership, say every 10, 20, or 25 years, would be informative and effective. (The necessary figures could with little effort be obtained from the district associational minutes).

19. Any change of name of the church.

20. Missionaries who have gone out from the church.

21. Relations of the church with other denominations in the community.

22. Miscellaneous. Most churches have very probably had experiences- significant or insignificant- which might not be easy to classify, but yet would add an interesting and very readable section to their histories (this section could be the catch-all for human-interest items).

A concise, meaningful and readable history of your church can serve a real purpose both for your church and for others. The above suggestions provide a basis for a fairly comprehensive story of a church and its contribution to the community and beyond. If the history of your church has not been written, why not write it? If the above "menu" does not meet with your approval, make up a menu to your own liking, but WRITE YOUR HISTORY! Every year that passes makes the gathering of material for your history that much more difficult.

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(Dr. Hackley has died since this article was originally published.)

*What information goes into a church history? Dr. Hackley has listed more than a score **Of** ideas that can be incorporated into a church history. Study this list carefully before beginning, marking out any items that obviously do not apply (such as number 13, change **Of** location, or number 19, change **Of** name). During research go back occasionally and review the list to see if you are being sensitive to all **Of** the information that you are reading.*

Special attention needs to be directed to suggestion number 16, sidelight or anecdotes. Watch for human interest stories. Use them to illustrate general trends or special conditions in the church. Such stories make history interesting and will keep the reader going. They can also be the vignettes needed for the church pageant or tableau. You might use one, without the punch line, as a teaser to promote interest in the history prior to publication.

*A special point for emphasis: watch carefully for the first mention **Of** an activity. This may not be the founding date, but it will tell you that by that time the activity had been undertaken. Scrutinize the church budget closely for the appearance **Of** new programs and organizations and for new methods **Of** accounting for funds from Sunday School and WMU*

Lee N. Allen