The goal of the Historical Commission of Oklahoma Baptists is both to preserve our history and aid churches in realizing the historical significance of their work in evangelism and missions. and to encourage them to continue their faithful service.

Learn more about the Historical Commission and it’s work at

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March 10, 2010
Gaskin Baptist Archives
Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma
3800 N. May Avenue
Oklahoma City, OK  73112

Preface

While I have attempted to provide a readable text, please observe that items in bold print, such as these five words, will indicate especially important materials that need special attention.

The overall theme of this writing might be to do your best, make it a finished work, and always consider what needs to be included that will cause anyone to want to read what you wrote. I have chosen to use a more informal style of writing by saying “I have…”, rather than “This writer has...” within the text. If you desire a formal setting, wear a bow tie or Sunday dress while reading this material.

I am greatly indebted to my beautiful wife Freida, who serves as my Ministry Assistant at the Gaskin Baptist Archives, of the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma, and attempts to keep me within the limits of fairly normal behavior. Her expertise with computers, use of grammar, and cooking, have allowed me to complete this writing. I’ll still take the blame for any errors. I am also indebted to Dr. J. M. Gaskin and others who have provided a vast amount of research materials for this project.
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Chapter I

WHY ARE YOU WRITING A CHURCH HISTORY?

The first question one must consider is just why do you desire to write this history? Quite often a major anniversary is approaching and this causes people to begin talking of the need for a church history. Occasionally an older member will realize the church has no written record of the past (other than some membership records and minutes), and thus, sees the need for such a document. Whatever the reason for writing, a church history is extremely important.

Church histories reveal the hearts and lives of those who first established the church. A church history is the record of the faith of our forefathers. It is a living record of the triumphs, trials, and tribulations that teach us how they solved conflicts of the past, and how to deal with future similar situations. It is a story of our parents and grandparents, and often reveals previously unknown insights into their personalities, habits, and spiritual desires.

One of the most fascinating blessings is when a church member says, “I didn’t know that about my grandparents. I wish I had known them better. They were really wonderful people.” In other cases, unusual information is revealed. One lady recently discovered that her long deceased grandmother, who was a saintly church member in her older age, was the wife of a well-known mobster in the 1930’s. She remembered her grandmother as a kind, Bible reading person. Grandma had changed her name, and only by extensive research was the truth made known. It’s amazing what research will reveal. Incidentally, that note about “Grandma” didn’t make the church history book.

Occasionally history of the community can be discovered by reading the old church minutes. This writer has experienced various church records from the 1920’s and 1930’s telling of why a church helped the community fund the local youth center, plan
a airport, build neighborhood tennis courts, fight against political corruption, stand against evolution, and aid the local authorities in cleaning up speakeasies.

Other church records (during the 1940's and 50's) have provided communities with lists of those in the military service (especially during WW II), war time rationing standards, community services, air raid shelters, and many other long forgotten aspects of live during that era. One church helped their small town discover where legal agreements were located regarding public property. The records had been destroyed in a courthouse fire, but the church had recorded the events in their 1930's minutes and the location of other copies of the court documents.

The second logic question regarding the church history is who is going to write this history? One who desires to paint pictures may never be regarded as a painter. One who prepares meals may never be a good cook. Likewise, not everyone who desires the write will be a good writer. The church must take care in who is selected to write and produce the church history.

The writer must first have the desire to take on such a task. While others might supply some information and records might be available, there is a tremendous amount of time and skill needed to produce a good writing. The one basic question to be asked by every writer is: Why would anyone want to read this writing? Much more will be said about this later, but basically speaking, most folk just don’t sit around reading a church history unless there are unique elements that compel a reader to continue. I have often advised folk to use a lot of pictures in their church history, because that’s the only part about three-fourths of the people will ever see. Even now, this writer is questioning why anyone would have read this portion of this chapter so far. The point is, make the writing readable and user friendly.

The writer must have a very good working knowledge of grammar and syntax, and the ability to use human interest stories. Facts might build a basic skeleton, but human interest stories put flesh on the structure. Again, this writer praises the Lord every time he realizes what modern computers can do for a rather plain writing. Speling, grammer, an sin tax isn’t won of my best trates. Praise the Lord for spell check and grammar notes. The church history writer is representing the quality of the past and the image of the church, and must reflect that in the writing.

The writer must never take on the job assuming there will be great recognition for the work. While some will applaud the effort, others will be quick to point out what the writer left out or reported wrongly. Unfortunately, those critics (if they are really right) didn’t share the information they had prior to the writing.

The church must assume that a good history will be costly to produce. A simple bulletin sized synopsis, or three page 8 ½ by 11 history, may be easily reproduced, but will never be the adequate record that is needed to reflect the true church history. A later portion of this book will give details on the various formats of an extensive document.

Why are you writing a church history? It is because a history is needed. It will bridge the gap from the past to the future for the church. In most cases, it should have been done years ago.
This writer hopes you enjoy the journey through this book as we explore how to get this matter done properly. So sit back, relax, and sail with us from the shores of the present to the depths of the past, and back again. Let’s journey together through the years of time and see what great mysteries, marvels, and spiritual motivations compelled our forefathers to invest in this thing we call “our church”.

Chapter II

HOW TO GATHER MATERIALS FOR WRITING

When searching for treasures or clues to a deep mystery, we are told to make sure all stones are overturned. The idea is to look everywhere for the gems that will make the search more productive. The more we find, the better the results. In writing, the same principle applies. The more you research, the more you will find materials for the church story. The big problem is: Where will one find the information about which to write? In addition, when are we finished searching? While the places to find information will vary, we never really finish researching. The best we can do is to go until we don’t think we can go anymore. Researching and writing a church history is like reading the Bible. The more you do, the more you realize you need to keep doing. To begin this journey into gathering the gems of time, let’s find some very suspicious stones to look under.

THE LOCAL CHURCH

The most logical place to start with gathering a church history is at your local church. You might begin with legal papers. Most churches have a church covenant which will give the writer a sense of what the church was trying to accomplish in its formation. Unfortunately, most church covenants are merely restatements of the standard church covenant developed and published by early Baptists as part of the Philadelphia Confession of Faith (1742). This will mean that, in most cases, the covenant will not contain true local church input. In fact, most churches that say they have a church covenant may not know where to find such a document. Some churches used to paste them in the front of their hymnbooks, and the covenant was a simple 3 x 5 inch card. In many cases the only element of the church covenant that anyone ever mentions is the part about, “not selling or using alcoholic beverages.” In a few churches, a covenant was actually developed by the local church, and will provide a good source of what was happening in the church that caused the covenant to be written.

Property deeds and organizational papers can be extremely helpful. Quite often questions regarding where the actual original church property was located can be discovered. These legal papers may tell of long forgotten agreements between the seller and the purchaser of the property. Occasionally a church will discover that a piece of property, that was believed to have been purchased by the church, was
actually given by some person in town who might not have even been a member. That has all the earmarks of a great beginning story that needs further research.

The _minutes of the church_ business meetings are where most people usually think to begin their research. It is well known that churches are often poor stewards of church records. More than one church told me that Mrs. Emma (or whomever) was the church clerk for over forty years and did a wonderful job in recording all the business (and additional notes). In fact, she was so good she would even keep the records at home for safety. Unfortunately, when Emma died they never found those forty years of records. Several churches have told me how a new pastor came in and, since he knows that nothing of importance has every happened before he arrived, he saw fit to throw out the old and begin the new. It is this writer’s hope that every church will see that their historical records are kept in a safe, fireproof, permanent place.

_Have duplicate records._ In this modern age, there is no excuse for not having duplicated the minutes and important events of the church life, and placed them in a vault, lock box, or other place of safety. Never place the duplicate records in the same place as the originals. One church made three duplicate keys for a particular door at the church. These were the only keys. They hung them for safety on the key rack on one clearly labeled key ring. Within two weeks someone used and misplaced the whole key ring. Keep duplicate records at alternate places.

Once the minutes are collected, _analyze every detail_ of each page carefully. Never assume that a major event didn’t get recorded just because the first 40 pages of minutes seemed to repeat the same items. You can never tell when a particular note during one session will affect the future of the church. One church passed a motion (70 years ago) which stated that if the pastor felt any member was causing him a problem, he had the authority to dismiss that person from membership. It is still on the books. Occasionally history will change a church and its people. A very happy church in Oklahoma City is multiracial with red, brown, black, and white members. They are a perfect example of who our churches should be reaching for Jesus Christ. What the church doesn’t realize is that the sale of the property back in 1949 had a clause stipulating the congregation would never sell to anyone but Caucasians. But then, it hasn’t. Some old motions and decisions are better off if they are forgotten or quietly (but legally) rescinded.

_Committee records_ of the church, if they exist, can also provide a wealth of information and insight on what has happened in a church over the years. It sometimes amazes people when they discover what a deacon body, building committee, or other group was able to do without bringing the matter before the entire church.

_Membership records_ can be another source of interesting historical knowledge. While this might include the charter members, it can also provide information on a pastor, his family, or former staffers, when all other sources seem inadequate. One church recently called our office, to find the name of their church pastor’s wife from the early 1950’s. Another church discovered a man they thought had pastored the church in the early 1900’s had never been the pastor. He only filled in a couple of
Sundays. They also found out the “non-pastor” had two brothers in the church who were deacons, and the family had donated property to the church. All these matters might become good human interest stories if properly handled. The brothers were actually more influential than the one who preached twice.

**Church publications** such as a church paper, Sunday bulletins, mail-outs, brochures, revival pamphlets, and other paper trails can really be helpful. Be sure to repeatedly ask older church members to look at home for old publications. Some people collect such items. Family scrapbooks may also reveal a church related picture or event.

**Association records** are also a prime source of information. They will reveal when your church started and who were the various staff and elected leaders. These records often tell the size of the town, who were the annually elected church members to the associational meeting, how much the church gave and to whom it was given, the value of church property, and special church events during the year. They always state the growth trend in membership and the number of baptisms by the church. It is usually of great value to look page by page through the individual association annuals. One church called our office in 2009 to confirm their church started in 1909. They missed their anniversary by eight years. By a simple investigation of the association annuals, it was discovered the church began in 1901, was probably disbanded between 1903 and 1905, and began again by 1907. The first building was built in 1908. The association annual of 1901 clearly stated who the pastor was and what members came to the association meeting that year. The names of the elected messengers to the meeting were people who would have otherwise been forgotten. They were part of the charter members. Unfortunately, the church has never written a church history. The associational minutes, their publications, executive board meetings, and pastor conference notes (and recordings), could greatly enhance your search for local church materials.

**The Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma** (BGCO) is another great source of information. The *Baptist Messenger* office has kept copies of every issue since its beginning in the early 1900’s. If your church, for any reason, had an historical event occur at the church, there is probably an article about the occasion. Revivals with evangelists, new church building dedications, and major church events may be recorded in old *Messenger* articles. For many years the *Messenger* office has kept files on every pastor and staffer in the state convention. There is a good possibility that a former pastor, of which you have little information, will have a several page file from small state newspapers, major events, or church articles at the *Baptist Messenger* office. Often they have photos of the pastor in those files. In addition, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) will have annuals, articles, and biographies on people that may have been in your church.

**Local Libraries and Newspapers** are one of the best sources for church history. If your church is in a smaller town or open country, there is a very good possibility the local weekly paper has several articles, announcements, or advertisements related to your church. When I get a call at our office in the Gaskin Baptist Archives (BGCO) from a church hoping we have some history on them (and we occasionally do), I
always suggest they visit their local library and newspaper office. If the library
doesn’t have a collection of the local papers over the years, the newspaper office will
have them. The weekly newspaper makes their sales by including all the local events.
They often have a file of old photographs regarding your church or its history. One
smaller church in western Oklahoma asked me to come on a Wednesday evening to
talk with their committee on how to gather materials. I arrived in town early and
stopped at the local library. I asked the librarian if there was any local history of the
area and did they have the weekly newspaper on file. The church was pleasantly
surprised when I showed up with several articles and sources they had never known
existed. I like to think of researching for a church history as detective work. You
begin with only little clues, and end up with an amount of material that would be
considered good evidence in any courtroom. Never overlook these small town public
sources.

The Oklahoma State Historical Library is another place to look for information.
This library has one of the largest collections of state and national newspapers in the
world. Its newspaper library exceeds that of any of the other 49 states. It also
contains an exhaustive amount of documents on Native Americans, the Dawes records,
national census records, state and county maps, and thousands of other items.
Likewise, the Gaskin Baptist Archives, located at the BGCO, has an untold number of
resources.

County Records are another place to consider researching. One church in
Oklahoma City knew when and where they began, but no one knew what building was
on the first church property. Two houses were now on the property, and they were
both very old. Only one was there at the beginning. Which one was the original
church building? The church history writer canvassed the neighborhood and
interviewed two families who were they about the time the church started. Since
those still alive were little children at the time the church started, they couldn’t
remember just which one was the first church. By going to the county records it was
discovered only one building was there and the records showed the exact location and
configuration of the structure. Is it proper to say “bingo” (i.e.—I have it), in a writing
of this nature?

Pictures of the church and families around the time of the beginning date are also
often helpful. When I look at old pictures of a church, I look for details in the
background of the picture. A certain automobile model may provide information on
an undated picture. The apparel of those in the picture is often strong indications of
a particular time frame. I once saw some old photos of an Indian church and ask them
what was the meaning and purpose of symbols and structures in the background.
They explained most of the symbols, but some were lost in history (for now). A
building in the background was designated as the “preacher place”, that is, the place
where the circuit riding preacher stayed on the week-ends he was at the church. I
was then told by an older member the significance and importance of the structure.
Most had forgotten that building was in the background, and its history had never
been mentioned. Look for details that will provide information into the history of a
church. Family pictures (of older people) may tell you who the possible early church
members might have been, and will often result in an oral history from an older
family member that had never been revealed prior to this time. Old photos can be like the popular 1940’s song that says, “Little things mean a lot.” Little details in a picture may mean a lot of history is uncovered.

**Oral histories currently rank as one of the greatest sources of historical material.** Owing to the importance of this form of history, the entire next chapter is devoted to the subject.

While the suggestions in this chapter are not exhaustive, it will serve as a good starting place for gathering materials for a church history. It is now time to sail on and explore other islands that may provide historical considerations.

### Chapter III

**HOW TO GATHER ORAL HISTORIES**

One of the most important sources of a church history is from the stories told by people who have been associated with the church for several years. The number of people needed to gather the oral materials depends upon the size of your church. A committee may be necessary, or one person might be the primary collector. The following criteria will help in producing a good oral history.

- **Determine if a committee is needed.** If the church believes that a substantial number of people will need to be interviewed to achieve a good oral history, they must decide on how many interviewers are needed. It might be a good rule to assign no more than three or four persons to be interviewed by each committee member. Oral histories can be very time consuming.

- **Select the best interviewers.** It is essential to assure the interviewer is one who is good at allowing others to do the talking. A talkative interviewer will probably dominate the recorded session and will gain less information. A training session on how to conduct an interview might be needed. Guidelines must be set on how to gathered materials and how the information will be collated into the church history.

- **Prepare equipment for each interview.** Proper equipment for recording the interviews must be obtained. Use the best available recording devices within your budget. This is an ever changing field, and while cassette tapes were once the standard, newer video equipment, CD’s, or more modern audio devices are far advanced. The best method for long storage and usage should
be used. Since many of those being interviewed will be elderly, it is most likely the interviewer will be going to a location accessible to the “interviewee” (A term used by Dr. J. M. Gaskin and other historians). The interviewer must take all equipment he or she might need. A check list of materials such as a recording device, extra batteries, extension cords, a note pad, and other equipment will be needed. If the interviews can be conducted in a church library or smaller conference room, then several people can be interviewed at varies times without a lot of moving of equipment.

• Prepare a basic list of questions. While each interview will be unique, there are probably several items of history that each account will contain. These will vary with each church, but will usually deal with people, dates, events, and structures of a particular time period. Some being interviewed will have more stories about a certain era than others.

• Before the interview. Make sure you have an appointment firmly set up with the one you are interviewing. Be on time, or a little early, and make sure the equipment is set up properly for recording the session. When you make the appointment, inform the interviewee you will be bringing a number of questions related to your interview. Make sure the interviewee has a copy of the basic questions well ahead of time so that person will have a few days to gather their thoughts (and materials they might have kept) on the subject matter.

• During the interview. The setting for the interview must be quiet, comfortable, and free from interruptions. Dr. J. M. Gaskin says, “Actually, I like sitting at a breakfast table or someplace like that. We can even sip some coffee as we talk. It will make our interview more enjoyable. Let’s just plan to have fun doing it.” (A Handbook... , p. 30) In many cases, you will know the person being interviewed, and the coffee idea is great. It is probably best to not mention having coffee. Most people will usually ask if you want something to drink, and that can open the avenue for a more relaxed setting. The goal is to present a comfortable place that will aid in gathering the oral report. It is important to record the introductory details of the session. For example you might say, “This is Eli Sheldon and I’m speaking today, March 10th, 2010, with Mr. Eldon Shelly, a longtime member of Soandso Baptist Church. We are enjoying this morning while seated in the Shelly's comfortable living room.” An option would be to record the time, place, and names on the recorder prior to arrival.
What should be asked during the interview? While this will vary greatly, one might assume there are certain basic questions. These might include (but are certainly not limited to): When did you first come to Soandso Church? What age were you at the time? Why did you come to this church? Who was the pastor at that time? Who were some of the major leaders in the church? What was the funniest or most interesting thing that happened? What are some of your most pleasant memories? What were things like when you were a child? It is extremely important to realize these are only “springboard” questions. That is, they may be used to spring the conversation to other relevant information.

In a recent interview at a larger church in Oklahoma City, I asked a lady why she (in 1940) came to the church. She merely answered, “Well, it was the only church around.” I then prodded the conversation by saying, “Can you tell me more?” This opened a wealth of information including the following: “I was only nine years old at the time. We lived about a mile down the dirt road from the church. None of the streets, except Portland Avenue, were paved. All the east-west streets were dirt. There weren’t many houses, about ten or so by us, and none near the church. There were no other churches around. We walked to church because hardly anyone had an automobile. Only one man who lived a mile north of us had a car. Sometimes he would give the children from our corner of houses a ride. We had Sunday school under this big tree. The church building was really small at the time. When it rained we had our Sunday school class in this man’s car. There were about five of us that came regularly.” Because I took notes as she spoke, I was able to go back to each statement and get even more information.

There are other forms of reports. Occasionally a church will ask members to write their memories of the church from the years past. The information is usually then bound, or inserted, in a collection of materials. I have found these to be rather enjoyable, even when the writer’s abilities are somewhat limited. If a church uses this fashion, they might want to determine before time if someone in the church will have editing rights to the submitted materials, or will each article stand on its own as an example of the personality and writing skills of the one submitting the article. The church will also need to set standards for submission. For example, will handwritten accounts be acceptable, rather than typewritten materials? Will those handwritten stories be legible and capable of being reproduced on a copy machine?

Allow enough time for the interview. A good recording session may vary from 30 minutes to an hour. It might be better to plan a second session if you need more time. The sessions should not be so long they become uncomfortable to
the interviewee. The session might be more time efficient if the one being interviewed has sent a response to the basic questions to you prior to your first visit. While most church people aren’t used to this method, it can give great direction for the actual interview. Interviewing church members for a church history is very different from interviewing a prominent church leader. If you are interviewing a pastor, staffer, or well-known denominational or church worker, you will want to include questions concerning their family, education, civic achievements, and other more personal matters.

• **After the interview.** Make sure you keep all your notes from the interview. Very soon after the session, review your notes to assure that you can read them and to help recall other matters of which you might want to inquire. It is essential to preserve the initial recorded session and to make copies whenever possible. I prefer to have a typed transcript of each session—which is very time-consuming. It is much easier to review a written record than to find a sentence or two on a video or oral recording. If possible, save the transcript on a computer backup system by thumb drive, CD, or other electronic means. It might be helpful if an editor or committee member is emailed a copy of the transcript.

Well, now that we have our information from every known source, how does all this fit into our sailing schedule? Just how and when will we arrive at our final destination?

It seems that the next couple if islands must deal with the grammatical aspects of the journey.
Chapter IV
HOW TO WRITE EFFECTIVELY

Now we come to the area that most folk either consider the beginning of their task, or forget to consider at all. That is, how will I, as the writer, be able to produce a well done church history?

A friend of mine, who lives in Ohio, has served for years as an editor and proof reader for various publications and newspapers. He is currently compiling a book on misquotes and typos from published newspapers. He has repeated told me of the dilemma he has in the smaller town where he now lives. People, he often knows, submit articles for publication that, in their own mind, must come near to canonization for its quality and significance. In reality, some of the articles are very poorly written and lack almost any sense of value. While that’s a very critical statement, I know what he means. Effective writing must include an extensive analysis by the writer has to value and readability of the material. This chapter will cover some basic considerations for the production of a readable church history.

You should know your task before you even begin. Having a clear concept of what you hope to achieve is extremely important. Lori Warren, Ministry Assistant, for the BGCO Leadership Development, recently presented a session for BGCO employees entitled Tips For Effective Writing. While the session was designed for business writing, much of it applies to other forms of written communication. The following several paragraphs are not direct quotes, but thoughts which are revised from her excellent presentation.

You must know your readers. You must always consider who your reading audience might be, and how you can communicate and relate to them. What information do you expect to give to your readers? If you have done oral interviews, have you quoted them directly, and given proper credit to those sources? Is your history designed for reading by church members only, or do you want to provide a
record for the general reader? Some professional publishing companies, when determining whether they want to publish your material, will require the writer to state who he or she believes is the target group of the writing.

You must know what you want to say. Your writing should provide all the information your readers will need to interpret the material. Your writing should be clear and understandable to everyone. For example, rather than to just mention a particular event, matter of church business, or physical structure, you must provide the reader with details that will help them understand what this is and how it affected the church and its history. How will the reader be able to relate to the story?

As I visited Silver Springs Baptist Church near Tiger Mountain, Oklahoma in 2008, a longtime member, Mrs. Tiger, showed me the “preaching rock” out behind the church. From what was just stated, what visions come to your mind? How does the reader mentally relate to this picture of the rock? Before continuing in the reading, pause to imagine what you see from the last statement?

Isn’t it better if I describe the preaching rock as being 30 feet long and approximately ten feet wide? Shouldn’t I tell of how completely flat it is, how the early preachers (like John McIntosh) stood to preach while on the rock, and how the congregation sat on logs encircling this natural platform area? Isn’t it important to describe how the site slopes down to the rich flowing Silver Springs, and how the view toward the eastern sky is breathtaking against the rich blue sky and the beautiful rolling hills in the distance? I was enthralled by the way Mrs. Tiger described how the settlers would use their horses to lower their wagons toward the stream in order to fill their barrels and buckets with water supplies. Can your mind now conjure the scenes and ancient songs and chants of the congregation as they raised their voices in praise to the Lord from this peaceful hillside?

While I have only briefly described the scenes from this amazing location, perhaps you can see the importance of adding enough details to provide the reader with a more complete picture of a particular event. The church history must not consist of a simple statement of fact, but must lead the reader on a fascinating journey through time. You can never tell what peaches look like if all you ever see or hear described are the pits. Be sure to put the sweet meat of the peaches around the pits of historical information.

When is the best time to first write a church history? Do not wait any longer than the first anniversary of the church to write a history. The basic information of the beginning of the church is still fresh in the minds of the members. Fifty years later those people will be gone, and current members will want to know why the church was formed, who was involved, and what difficulties were faced in getting the church started. A general guideline is to produce a good church history a minimum of every ten years. I usually suggest adding approximately five to ten pages every five years.

Should controversial or negative events be included? Writers differ on the matter of including the “bad stuff” in a church history. Some would say, since it is
part of the history, negative events should be included. These writers urge that
discretion be a part of the inclusion. Obviously, no one wants to put a church and the
writer of the history in a position of liability. I know of no one who would advocate
stating the details of scandals within the church. Others have advocated not
mentioning the events at all. Bob Mathews, former television newsman, award
winning writer, and longtime writer and columnist for the Baptist Messenger, once
stated. “Decide at the start if it will be an honest, factual history, warts and all, or a
‘laundered version’.”

“Good Church” Oklahoma had a pastor back in the 1940’s that resigned the church
rather suddenly, and accepted a position as area missionary. He served several years
in the mission field and was known as a great servant of the Lord. Some within the
church conveyed to me that he was one of their best pastors. A few years later I met
an old retired pastor, who quite freely (and loudly) often expressed his opinions. He
was quick to tell me how the pastor of “Good Church” left the church because of an
affair. Please note that the only credible information I got from that conversation
was that the loud mouth was a gossip. Would you have included the gossip’s story in a
history of the church? Of course you would not. It is my position that a church
history should state known facts, substantiated by research and credible witnesses. If
those facts have a negative light, they could be stated in a very careful or positive
fashion. What glory would it be for the Lord if I had attempted to verify the loud
mouth’s story? In the case of the “Good Church” pastor, the history could reflect his
ministry and how he resigned to accept another ministry position. Nothing need be
said about an unsubstantiated moral problem. From experience, I have learned, most
people, even in their own church, do not know when a man had to leave because of a
moral and ethical problem, and most don’t want to know. It is of no benefit to the
Lord, or the church, if such details were included in a church history?

Before you begin writing (and before each section of material), ask yourself why
you are writing this document. What do you hope to get out of it, and to convey to
the reader? What is the best way for you to achieve this goal in your writing? How
will you arrange the overall history? How will you arrange the materials within each
chapter? Even as I write this paragraph, I realize many of these questions are not only
a beginning consideration, but are page by page considerations. Fortunately, modern
computers allow easy revision, even as we write. This helps to continuously review
and revise the text. Praise the Lord for modern equipment.

During your writing, you will need a lot of revision. Dr. J. M. Gaskin, former
Historical Secretary for the BGCO, in his booklet entitled A Handbook for Church
History Writers, on page nine, relates this:

When you have finished your research, then write. Be yourself. Use
your style, not that of another. Don’t just wait for an “inspiration” to
hit you... it may not come. Writing is work. One must decide to do
it, then go to work. And don’t worry at first how it comes out as you
write—just write. Let your thoughts flow freely to the printed page.
When you have written, then rewrite, and rewrite.
Do not discredit the probability you will write your copy three or more times. In the rewrite you are polishing up your copy. You are looking for errors in spelling, dates, punctuation, and formal style. These things you will care for in your rewrite—do not worry about these items on your first draft.

In addition, Dr. Gaskin gives the logical advice that the writer should allow plenty of time to do the writing. A “rushed” job is always “sloppy” at its best. He conveys the idea that a year or more should be allowed for a book length church history. I have found that a longer time is even better.

When I finally finished the extensive history of my last fulltime church, and we had the book printed, I discovered almost immediately new materials (especially oral histories) from former members who showed up at the anniversary celebration. I could have easily added twenty more pages to what I had considered a fairly complete history. A church history is like a live person. The longer one exists, the more one realizes how much more they have discovered and understand about themselves—past and present.

Proofreading the text is one of the most critical aspects of writing. Bob Mathews, previously with the *Baptist Messenger*, often quoted Dr. Jack Gritz, a former *Messenger* editor, who would say, “Proofread, proofread, and then proofread it again.” At the Gaskin Baptist Archives, we annually produce four, two-page Oklahoma Baptist Historical Society newsletters, two *Oklahoma Baptist Chronicles* (each approximately 50 to 60 pages in length), and hundreds of letters and other articles. Every piece of material is proofread a minimum of three times, and often several more. Need I say more? It amazes this writer (or whatever you might call me), how often a typo or grammatical error will be spotted—after it is published. It always “bugs” me to read any professionally published book and see typos. While I always question why that typo wasn’t caught by the author, a proofreader (copy editor), or the general editor, I am humbled by simply reading something I wrote some time ago, and then observe the errors of my supposed literary achievements. Needless to say, I don’t send any of my writings to my editor friend in Ohio.

One aspect of writing that is often overlooked is the need to allow time between the writing of the text and the actual final production. Most writers will tell you it is best to set your material aside for two weeks or more after writing it, and then, after this period, proofread the material again. While this is difficult for newspapers to do, owing to daily deadlines, the church history writer can usually afford the time separation between the final draft and the actual printing date. When the inspiration of writing occurs, the writer may produce several pages at one setting. The author will often write the wrong word or use an incorrect sentence structure, and will not catch it if the proofreading is done almost immediately. The tendency in proofing immediately after writing is to read into the text what you meant to say, rather than what you actually put in the text. A proofing at the time of writing is essential, but will usually need several proofreading. The break between writing and re-reading will
allow the writer to look at the text as a fresh document, and will more likely catch overlooked errors.

Chapter V

HOW TO USE YOUR ENGLISH SKILLS PROPERLY

It has already been stated that good usage of the language is essential. A pastor was once asked if he understood the “King’s English”. His reply was that he understood the queen was English too. Some who attempt to write have that level of comprehension.

Dr. J. M. Gaskin once said:

There is no substitute or alibi for anything other than being accurate! Use your dictionary to check doubtful spelling. Double check yourself on dates, places, the role played by a person in an event; and by all means: **Use correct grammar!** Case, number, gender, and punctuation are becoming “foreign” to today’s student. He may try to learn German or Greek, but he should first learn English! Good writing calls for good English. Sentences should be complete---subject and predicate, with proper modifiers (A Handbook, p. 10).

While footnotes were the common practice in Dr. Gaskin’s days, most writers and publishers now prefer endnotes (occasionally at the end of each chapter). **You must use documentation.** Your writing will be greatly enhanced if you include clear references for the sources of your material. It is plagiarism to use a quote from any source without giving the author the credit for the material. In some cases, a modified style of writing might be an exception. For example, there are a few extended quotes in this book taken from Dr. J. M. Gaskin’s *A Handbook for Church History Writers*. While I only used a “modified identification” of Dr. Gaskin’s booklet at the end of each quote (and in the actual text), a full endnote is included in the bibliography at the end of this writing. All sources used by the writer in gathering information found within this booklet will be clearly and properly indicated in the bibliography. A good church history must also have such documentation. The point of the documentation is to give credit to an author or person who made a statement, and to provide the reader with a primary source with which to further research a
matter, if they so desire. Don’t shortchange your writing by failing to give credit to the source.

**Use grammatical aids as often as needed.** I am greatly indebted to several people who have provided me with various handouts from clinics and conferences which help with proper English. Among those is Lori Warren, Ministry Assistant, for the BGCO, Leadership Development Team. While I made a reference to her in chapter three, I am compelled to reference her again. Her presentation of *Tips For Effective Writing* has been invaluable to me. While the 12 page handout for that clinic was primarily designed for formal letter writing, there was also a one page handout on online sources for proper English. Seven sources and three reference books were stated. With her permission I have reprinted a portion of that sheet. It is obvious you will not need all the resources, but you will find them all useful.

**WRITING AND GRAMMER RESOURCES**

**Online resources:**

[http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammer/](http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammer/) (This one emphasizes punctuation.)


**Printed resources:**


*Ministry Office QuickSource, Guide to Essential Office Functions*, compiled by Donna Gandy (It’s available at Lifeway Book Stores.)

*The Elements of Style*, by Strunk and White

It is also good to know some of the more common errors and aids used by writers. Unfortunately, this booklet is too limited to allow an extensive review of such matters.

It would be helpful to find a list of common proofreader’s marks or editor’s symbols. In addition, one might seek a listing of common writing faults. Both papers are available through our office, online, or from several other sources. One must always consider ways to eliminate verbose (or unnecessary) words. If the same thing can be said in fewer words, the article or writing will probably be improved.

Examples of “wordiness” might include the following:

Concerning the matter of (could be shortened to)... About

During the course of the next During the next

Regardless of the fact that it is Because it is

In my opinion, I think I think
In the event that
At that point in time

While this list is very short, it reflects common wordiness I have used over the years. Good editing will catch most of these, and provide the reader with a much smoother narrative.

When I prepare articles for our quarterly Oklahoma Baptist Society Newsletter, I often find I’m several lines too long to fit the space allowed. I am amazed how much better the article reads if I’m forced to edit out a few sentences. This is usually done by eliminating unnecessary words rather than the sentences themselves. This helps me revise and retain the thought in a simpler fashion. Publishers appreciate the shortened versions owing to print space and compensation to the writer (if the writer is to be paid for the work). The writer looks better due to his editing, and the reader appreciates the clearly statements.

Again, if I can draw from the writings of Lori Warren, she gives these tips … Wait a minute! Isn’t that an example of what I just said I shouldn’t write? Let’s start again:

Lori Warren gives these tips on editing and proofreading:

- **Editor**: Print the entire document, including the original draft, at least once. If it's on screen, print it out. Read through to see if the print is legible, easy to read, and the fonts are consistent. If you're working on a long document, it's possible that you could have made a change in part of the draft and not noticed it. This is a good time to review the grammar, spelling, and punctuation of the entire document.

- **Proofreader**: Read the entire document to check for errors. Look for any inconsistencies in formatting, such as different font sizes or styles. Make sure all references are consistent and that the references are properly formatted.

- **Copy Editor**: Read the entire document to check for any errors. Look for any inconsistencies in formatting, such as different font sizes or styles. Make sure all references are consistent and that the references are properly formatted.

Some tips that apply to both editing and proofreading

- **Get some distance from the text!** It’s hard to edit or proofread a paper that you’ve just finished writing—it’s still too familiar, and you tend to skip over a lot of errors.

- **Decide what medium lets you proofread most carefully.** Some people like to work right at the computer, while others like to sit back with a printed copy that they can mark up as they read.

- **Try changing the look of your document.** Altering the size, spacing, color, or style of the text may trick your brain into thinking it’s seeing an unfamiliar document, and that can help you get a different perspective on what you’ve written.

- **Find a quiet place to work.** Find a place where you can concentrate and avoid distractions.

  *If possible, do your editing and proofreading in several short blocks of time, rather than all at once.*

  (Tips For Effective Writing, p. 10)
When proofreading, don’t rely entirely on computer grammar and spell checks. For example, the computer I’m currently using does not recognize the word “pastor.” It may automatically change it to “pasture.” Read your text slowly, and read every word. Often, reading out loud will force you to consider the wording from a different perspective (and drive your husband or wife crazy while you do it). Be diligent in securing and using every grammatical aid you can find. The better it reads, the better you will look as the author.

Chapter VI
HOW TO FORMAT YOUR CHURCH HISTORY

Sesame Street, the children’s television show, several years ago stated what is in every good story. I believe it was the character Bert who explained to Ernie that every good story has a beginning, a middle, and an end. A good church history also has a logical arrangement of material.

• Selecting a Title. One would think that a title would be the beginning point of your writing. Actually the subject about which you are to write is the more proper beginning. For example, a church history might be titled The History
of Soandso Baptist Church. This direct approach gives the reader a good knowledge of the subject. Quite often a writer will state the title from a theme that is found throughout the text. For example: Seventy-Five Years of Faith. While such a fancy title might seem attractive to some folk, it is far better to add a sub-title regarding the primary subject. For example: Seventy-Five Years of Faith, (With the sub-title) The History of Soandso Baptist Church. It is also important to know that quite often a “final” title isn’t added until the document is completed. Often the research and materials will lend itself to a modification of what the writer originally thought he or she would use.

• Table of Contents. This is usually a one or two page outline stating the various chapter headings and the page number at which each chapter begins. There isn’t too much more you will need to consider for this page. Occasionally a chapter is subdivided into headings within the chapter. In that case you may (or may not) desire to list each subheading in the table of contents with its beginning page. If the history is a lengthy one, listing the subtitles in the table of contents might be helpful in finding the subsections. These subheadings often look best if they are center-of-the-page captions.

• Arrangement of Materials. How the history is arranged is usually at the discretion of the writer. The most common format is to develop a history that is presented in a chronological order. Each chapter might cover subsequent ten year entities. Creative chapter titles might add to the interest. For example: The Early 1900’s, The Roaring Twenties, The Great Depression and Scopes Trial, The War Years, The Fabulous Forties, and so on. Others have used more direct references to the church life such as: The Beginning Years, The Time of Growth, The Declining Years, and so forth. I have never liked the method of using the former pastors as the criteria for organizing the materials. In this method the title may be named for a particular minister. For example: The Dr. Jonathan Doe Years. To include the pastors in the history of the church is a natural progression of the writing, and such specific references to a particular minister are unnecessary. Too often one pastor’s more-lengthy ministry is magnified over those of men who served well for shorter periods. Also, a history written by one person will often glorify their “favorite pastor” while neglecting men who might be better thought of by other church members. It is far better to include the pastor, staffers, and major church members in the narrative of a particular era.

• The Selecting and Use of Photographs. A good church history will usually include a good number of photographs. Bob Mathews, formerly with the Baptist Messenger, was one of my best sources for advice on using photos. The following is a combination of his and my suggestions regarding this matter.
Where will you find photos for your church history? Often the church offices have kept copies of photos used in promotions and church publications. A church pictorial directory may be another quick source of pictures, but be aware that you should contact the pictorial directory service for permission to use any photographs they took for your church. If pictures are used from a published pictorial directory, which were taken by your own church people, you usually do not need permission to use them. The directory publisher’s occasionally include a clause saying you can’t use “any photographs” published in the directory, but normally your own church photos are acceptable. Your church library-media center may have additional pictures. Other common sources for pictures are from past and present church members, youth encampments (like Falls Creek or children camps), and church outings and retreats. Next try the Baptist Messenger and their files on pastors and staffers, local newspapers, and associational offices. Even an area historical society or museum may help your search. Make your need for photographs known through the church newsletters, and especially through the older Sunday school classes. It’s always interesting how many old photographs elderly church members have tucked away in some drawer at home. All photographs should be handled with extreme care. Never put your fingers on the face of a photograph. If the picture is to be labeled on the back, do so with a light ink pen marking, but never with a felt tip pen. Do not press down heavily with the pen. Once you have made a light mark of the back of the picture (preferably on a back edge), examine the photo to see if there will be any bleed through or indentions from the back side. If you can’t label the picture with ink, put a clearly labeled stick-on label on the back. Let all people know you will either make clear copies of their photographs or will return the originals. Obviously, a good commercial copy is the better option. Do not include blurry, unclear, or extremely dark photos in your church history. It is a real pain in the neck to see a church history printed that has photos you can’t see clearly. Sure, the one who contributed the photo can tell you who or what it is, but no one else can. Unclear photos are totally useless and drastically reduce the quality of your church history presentation. Never submit or print photographs that are not clearly labeled as to who or what is in the picture. To read of Bro. Doe’s great ministry, and then include with it a picture of an unlabeled building or scene is unacceptable.

Including earlier documents. While early church records are not photos, they serve in a similar function as the photographic image. If they or pictures of them are included in a church history they must be clear images. I recently saw a church history that contained the first page of the minutes from a very early Oklahoma church. It was a photograph of the written page, and was not well focused. The larger heading could be identified (since the copied image
was labeled beneath the document), but no names or business items could be determined.

How does one get such a document into the church history? While old records are often very fragile, they won’t get any better—even by archiving the items for preservation. If you have a valuable document, I recommend very carefully placing it on a good copy machine or scanner and then making a duplicate. Further copies can be made (if needed) from the duplicate. You can now archive and preserve the original document. If you can get the document flat, you might turn it down upon the copier glass by placing it between 8 ½ by 11 inch white sheets of good bond paper. White bond paper is almost acid free, and is a fairly good inexpensive substitute for the extremely expensive archival materials.

- **How many pictures or old documents should be used?** The number of church documents might be limited to some very unique materials, but the more pictures used, the greater your history will be enhanced. Documents might include the first service bulletin, the first minutes, perhaps some WW II ration statements, or other special interest details. These will often have a quick story related to each piece included. Pictures and their labels (cut line, usually beneath the photo), not only break up longer sections of type, but will also be seen and read by more people. Often the chapter will give the major emphasis of the material, and the cut line might suffice, instead of an additional full page article. The thought here is to not short change your church history due to a lack of pictures. While it is best to locate the pictures with the related text, the cost and work of the printer may dictate a separate section for photos.

- **What size of pictures should be used?** Large group pictures are usually available, but are seldom useable for a church history. It is the custom of many churches to take pictures such as a Sunday school class or the entire congregation. Any group photo larger than a five by seven picture will be difficult to reproduce in a church history. If it is a choir picture, the names are not usually stated beneath the picture. Usually pictures with fewer people are better if they can be identified. If the picture has too many people, their individual images will be very hard to distinguish.

- **Should you use black and white or color?** While either may be used, older pictures may only be available in black and white. That actually may be an advantage. With computer photo programs, the color images may be converted to black and white and may show up better in the final
production of the church history. Most pictures are taken from too far away and may need cropping (cut down to fit your need). Cropping can be done by image adjusting and seldom requires an actual cutting up of the picture. When you crop a picture and enlarge a particular part, it will tend to blur the image. No picture can be made sharper by enlarging. Interestingly, Bob Mathews, in his three page handout on selecting photographs, says, “Often a slightly out-of-focus picture becomes acceptable if it is reduced.” In the final production of the book, color photos will prove to be one of your most expensive elements. In addition, any photo used that was taken from a published source (such as a book, newspaper, etc.), must meet the legal requirements for publication.

• **Producing and publishing the final product.** Again, we are assuming this is not a two or three page project. You need to produce the best quality your church can afford. If the church wants a nice, finished looking history you must not cut costs. If the history is produced by a commercial printer, their company representative will be able to guide you through the best options for your history based on the extent and size of the material. For example, will the book be 8 ½ by 11 inches, 5 by 8, or some other size? What type of binding is your church willing to pay for, and which binding is most appropriate for its size? Generally speaking a “saddle stitch” is a stapled edge, a glued edge is called a “perfect binding”, and spiral bindings are either the good wire (or plastic), or the cheaper “comb” form. Occasionally a church will go really cheap (and it looks it) by using a three ring binder. Will the cover be professionally designed, have a color photo, or a graphic art production? As of this writing (2010), a commercially produced color cover photo on nice slick paper will cost around $1.00 - $1.50 per book. What does the church want the cover to represent for the history? In every case, the final cost should be discussed and agreed upon by the church, the history committee, the writer, and the publisher. Owing to the amount of work involved, the writer of the church history is usually offered a modest compensation (but don’t be surprised if this aspect is not considered).
Chapter VII

THE GASKIN CHURCH HISTORY AWARD

This chapter is to make the reader aware of the annual award for the best history from a church, association, or denomination submitted in a particular year. Only one church wins this award, and the presentation is made at the annual BGCO meeting each November. The award consists of an attractive certificate presented to the writer during the annual state convention session. The current practice is to present that award at the convention on Tuesday during the afternoon business portion of the meeting. The church also receives an award, but it is presented to the church on another occasion.

***** Special Announcement! *****

We need two copies of every church history for our Gaskin Baptist Archives. This has nothing to do with any awards. We just need each church’s history. Whether you desire your submitted history to be considered for the Gaskin Award is beside the point. Your church history becomes a permanent record of extreme value to us. Please send (or deliver) two copies of the history to the Gaskin Baptist Archives, Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma, 3800 N. May Ave., Oklahoma City, Ok, 73112. These will be archived in our library and will become the permanent property of the Gaskin Baptist Archives, BGCO. Quite often a church will produce a limited number of copies of their church history and 25 years later no one can find a copy. We will have one for information purposes. This writer cannot stress how important it is to get us those two copies.

“Now, back to our regular programming!”

Whether the history is in book form or a manuscript, the entry must bear the imprint of the year it is submitted. It amazes me how often I pick up some church pictorial directory (for example) and there is no dating anywhere in the directory. How will people 20 years from now know when the directory was produced?

All entries will be judged by a committee from the Oklahoma Baptist Historical Commission. Judging will include: The quality of the cover; the whiteness of the interior pages; the title of the history; the table of contents; the arrangement of the materials; the readability of the text; the human interest of the writing; the number, arrangement, and clarity of photographs; and, of course, grammar, syntax, and proper references. All submissions must be typed and presented in their final form. Documentation for all quotes and sources is required. Endnotes should be used, rather than footnotes. It is preferred that endnotes be at the end of the book, instead of at the end of each chapter.

If in the opinion of the judges, there is the rare case where more than one entry shows equal “winning” value, each recipient will be given a certificate. Conversely, in another rare case, if the judges feel no entry has been submitted worthy of the award, no church or writer will receive an award that year. Owning to the
requirement that submissions may be received until December 15th of a particular year, and allowing for the judges to do their evaluations, the award for one year is actually presented during the annual BGCO meeting of the next year. For example, the best history for 2008 was awarded in November 2009. An actual list of the grading criteria is available through the Gaskin Baptist Archives, BGCO.

In a few cases, the editor of The Oklahoma Baptist Chronicle may contact the writer for permission to use quotes, or a portion of the history, in a particular Chronicle publication.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Note: Most handouts listed below are available from the Gaskin Baptist Archives, 3800 N. May Avenue, Oklahoma City, OK 73122. Telephone (405) 942-3800. E-mail esheldon@bgco.org


