

Kathy Hillman: 175 years and counting—Blest be ties that bind

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As I unlock the door to my office, pictures of grandchildren, along with photographs of current and former students, focus my attention on the future. An oversized desk reminds me faithfulness in the past makes possible our present. I chose the beautiful desk, not because it fits well in the space. It doesn't. Instead, I use it because of its significance. I'm told it once graced the office of W.R. White, well known for concise sermons, love of football and dedication to Texas Baptists.



Kathy Hillman Ordained at age 18, “Billy” White attended Baylor University before the recurrence of childhood malaria forced a climate change to Brownwood, where he graduated from Howard Payne University. God’s call led him to pastor in Glendale, Greenville and Lubbock. After chairing the Baptist General Convention of Texas finance committee, White became executive director during the darkest days of the Great Depression.

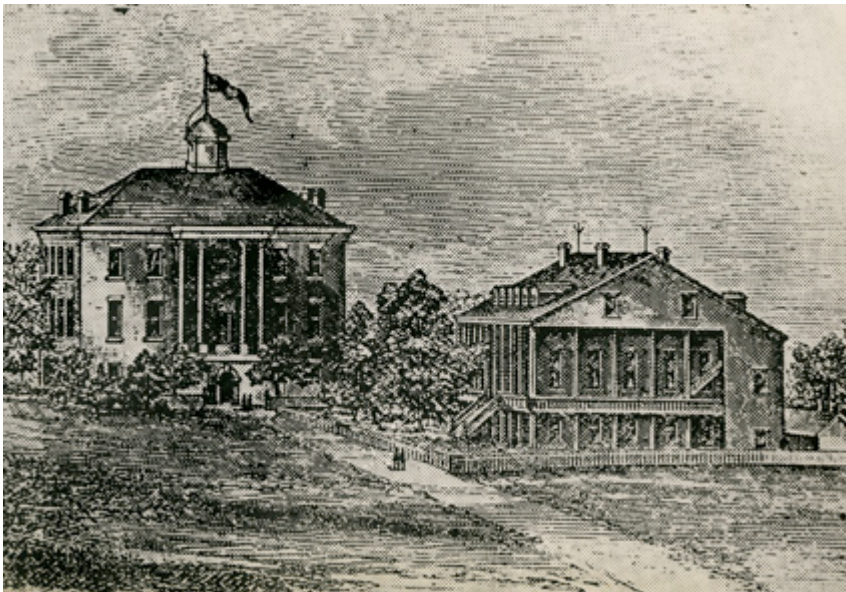
After a noteworthy tenure, he returned to his first love as pastor of Broadway Baptist Church in Fort Worth before leaving for First Baptist

Church in Oklahoma City. Trustees at Hardin-Simmons University enticed him to accept the school's presidency. While at HSU, the BGCT elected him convention president. After serving briefly at the Baptist Sunday School Board, he returned to pastor First Baptist Church in Austin. In 1948, trustees at Baylor chose "Mr. Texas Baptist" to lead the school in the challenging post-war era.

W.R. White's education in Baptist schools and his service as pastor, convention leader and college president remind us the history of Texas Baptists and the history of our educational institutions are intertwined, and blest be ties that bind.

- **October 8, 1840**—Messengers from three churches representing 45 Baptists formed Union Baptist Association and elected R.E.B. Baylor corresponding secretary. The following year with six churches added, Judge Baylor recommended establishing a Baptist school to educate ministers and laity. In typical fashion, the association appointed a committee. Reporting at the same meeting, it presented a resolution calling for creation of an education society. The resolution passed.

- **February 1, 1845**—



Drawing of the early

buildings on Academy Hill in Independence. (Courtesy of the Texas Collection, Baylor University)The society's achievements bordered on miraculous. In early 1845, William Tryon and Baylor appealed to the Republic of Texas on behalf of a Baptist college. Congress granted and President Anson Jones signed a charter for Baylor University on Feb. 1, 1845. The coeducational school in Independence became the first major accomplishment of Baptists in Texas. Later, the male and female departments began operating separately.

- **September 8, 1848**—In Anderson, 55 men from 22 congregations gathered to establish the first cooperative body of Texas Baptist churches for missionary and educational purposes. Judge Baylor convened the meeting. After voting to form the Baptist State Convention, messengers elected Baylor President Henry Graves as convention president. One of the primary purposes was to support Baylor University morally and financially, raise money for ministerial student scholarships and elect trustees.

- **June 29, 1886**—Cooperation lasted five years. Tensions flared. Eventually, five conventions crisscrossed the state. Of the two strongest, the Baptist State Convention focused on Baylor, while the Baptist General Association supported Waco University. Rufus Burleson's decision to vacate the presidency of Baylor to lead Waco University didn't help. Baylor's enrollment declined. Waco's increased, but both lacked essential resources. The two became aggressive rivals. Baptists desperately needed unity for either to succeed.



Baylor University President Ken Starr, University of Mary Hardin-Baylor President Randy O’Rear and Executive Director of Texas Baptists David Hardage at the rededication of the Baylor columns on Academy Hill in Independence in October 2013. (Kathy Hillman Photo)After lengthy conversation and prayer, the various conventions established joint committees. In Waco on June 29, 1886, Texas Baptists unified, forming the Baptist General Convention of Texas. Messengers voted to merge the two universities, retaining the name Baylor but with the men’s department moving to Waco. Because many Baptists opposed coeducation, Baylor Female College, which later became the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor, remained separate.

- **1886 and beyond**—Although Baylor and Mary Hardin-Baylor were the

first, the convention continued to focus on education by founding or affiliating additional institutions—Howard Payne University (1889), Hardin-Simmons University (1891), Dallas Baptist University (1898), San Marcos Baptist Academy (1907), Wayland Baptist University (1908), East Texas Baptist University (1912), Baptist University of the Americas (1947) and Houston Baptist University (1960).

For 175 years, the histories of Texas Baptists and educational institutions have intertwined. Without the need for education, the convention might not have formed or consolidated. Without Texas Baptists and the convention, the colleges and universities likely would not have been chartered or survived.



Indeed, blest be the ties that bind past, present and future.

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Sources:

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