

Kathy Hillman: Texas Baptists' 'Hall of Fame'

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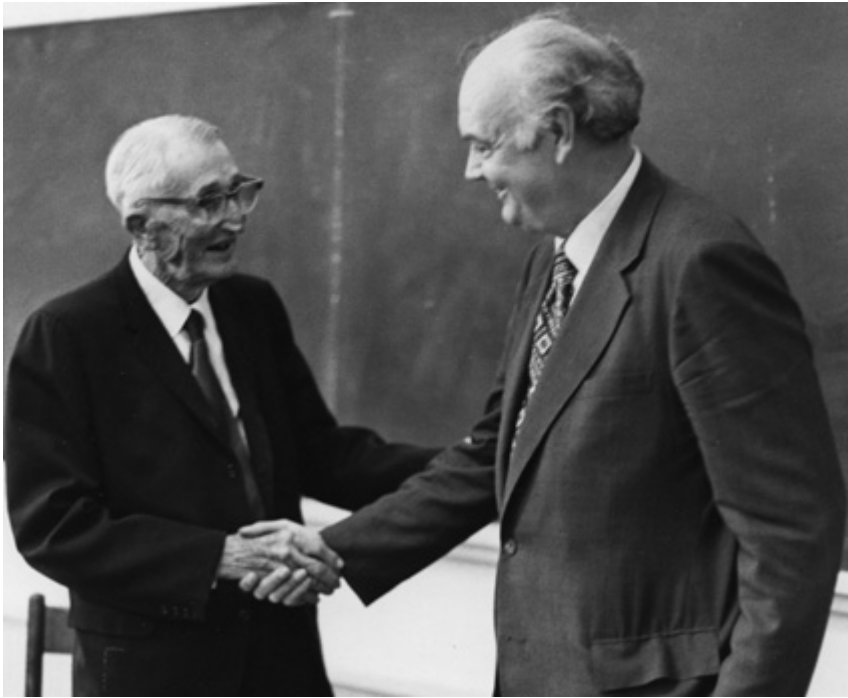
The first Sunday in June, Texas Baptists gather at the historic Independence Baptist Church. Most years as I travel to Washington County, my husband lovingly teases that I'm headed to the Baptist General Convention of Texas Hall of Fame induction. Our younger son, Michael, always enjoyed making the trek, since in typical Baptist fashion, "dinner on the grounds" follows the "induction" worship service.



Kathy Hillman Indeed, the event seems to meet the Merriam-Webster dictionary definition of "hall of fame" as "a group of individuals in a particular category (such as sports) who have been selected as particularly illustrious." The Texas Baptist Legacy Award and its predecessor designation, Elder Statesman, honor individuals who have made lasting contributions that significantly impacted Texas Baptist life, particularly in Christian education and missions. No awards are given posthumously.

From 1959 through 2012, 61 individuals earned the title "Texas Baptist Elder Statesman." Since then, six have received the Legacy Award, including Jim Culp and Bernie Spooner, who will be honored June 7. Many of the names are familiar. Some are not, but all represent a lifetime of

work, dedication and service to the ministry of Texas Baptists.



J. M. Dawson (left) was named Elder Statesman in 1959. He's shown here with Judge Abner McCall who was honored in 1985. (Photo: Courtesy of the Texas Collection at Baylor University) I've been in Baptist churches since birth, so I speculated as to how many of these men and women I had met or listened to preach or teach. I also wondered about the names I didn't recognize, and I obtained a list from the Texas Baptist Historical Collection and began my research.

Occupations range from judges, to hospital chief executives, to businessmen, to writers, to homemakers, to newspaper editors, to musicians, to college presidents, to professors and preachers. The first recipient, J.M. Dawson, championed religious liberty. The second honoree, Judge T.M. Kennerly, helped form the Texas Baptist Foundation.



Inside Independence Baptist Church during the 2010 awards service. Shown are two recipients, Joy Fenner (2010) and Bill Pinson (2005). (Photo: Kathy Hillman) Several were leaders in the Youth Revival Movement of the 1940s that resulted in thousands of decisions to follow Jesus. W.R. White, Forrest Feezor, T.A. Patterson, James Landes and Bill Pinson were executive directors of the Baptist General Convention of Texas. Along with their other accomplishments, businessmen Dewey Presley, J.T. Luther and Fred Roach provided valuable expertise in making the Baptist Building a reality.

Of the honorees, I recall being in the same room with 44 of them, though others made a difference in my life. Many I heard preach or teach at Paisano Baptist Encampment, including Kyle Yates, L.L. Morris, Woodson Armes and Robert Naylor. When I was a junior high student, Troy Campbell let me sing in his Paisano choir, and later so did Euell Porter. The *Baptist Standard* arrived in our home every week, so from the time I could read, editors E.S. James and Presnall Wood impacted me. Leon McBeth wrote the sesquicentennial history I refer to often.



Kathy Hillman with

Wilma Reed, a 2013 Texas Baptist Legacy Award recipient, at the “dinner on the grounds.” (Photo: Kathy Hillman) Some I met or heard through Baylor University or Woman’s Missionary Union. Ray Summers substituted in a religion class. I worked under Abner McCall and Herbert Reynolds, served on a committee chaired by Winfred Moore and learned to love Bob Feather. Marie Mathis, Millie Bishop, Joy Fenner and Wilma Reed mentored me. I idolized Eula Mae Henderson as a girl and read Sybil Armes’ poems.

The most amazing revelation came with J. Earl Mead. I staffed at Glorieta Conference Center between high school and college. He led our daily devotions. I had no idea he was so important to Texas Baptists. I simply knew he was important to me.

In researching unfamiliar names, I discovered College Station pastor R.L. Brown, who urged inclusion of state schools in the BGCT’s student ministry program and became the leader at Texas A&M. Rupert Richardson held various positions at Hardin-Simmons University, including president, and wrote scholarly books about the “old” West. Texas Tech President E.N. Jones left Lubbock to become secretary of the Christian Education

Commission.



Historic organ and bell inside Independence Baptist Church. (Photo: Kathy Hillman)BGCT Treasurer R.A. Springer served during the tough years of the Great Depression. Olivia Davis held the same position with WMU. The Texas Hospital Association named its distinguished executive award for Earl M. Collier, who saved Hendrick Baptist Hospital and mentored other health-care administrators. Pastor Harold Branch blazed trails for African Americans in life and in Texas Baptist life.

Certainly others could have been chosen, but those who earned recognition heard and heeded God's call throughout their lifetimes. The landscape of our state would be vastly different without their legacies. So I drive to Independence to celebrate Texas Baptists' "hall of famers" and remember countless other Christians who are "hall of famers" every day.



“Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Hebrews 13:7-8).

Kathy Hillman is president of the Baptist General Convention of Texas. She also is director of Baptist collections, library advancement and the Keston Center for Religion, Politics and Society at Baylor University.