

1953

A Religious Revival in Tallahassee in 1843

Nathan Hoyt

 Part of the [American Studies Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

Find similar works at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq>

University of Central Florida Libraries <http://library.ucf.edu>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by STARS. It has been accepted for inclusion in Florida Historical Quarterly by an authorized editor of STARS. For more information, please contact STARS@ucf.edu.

Recommended Citation

Hoyt, Nathan (1953) "A Religious Revival in Tallahassee in 1843," *Florida Historical Quarterly*. Vol. 32 : No. 4 , Article 5.

Available at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq/vol32/iss4/5>

A RELIGIOUS REVIVAL IN TALLAHASSEE IN 1843

by THE REVEREND DR. NATHAN HOYT

(edited by GEORGE C. OSBORN)

In the Woodrow Wilson Papers in the Library of Congress there is a manuscript narrative (here reproduced) of a religious revival held in Tallahassee in 1843 by the Rev. Nathan Hoyt, grandfather of Ellen Axson, wife of President Wilson. He was then pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Athens, Georgia. Evidently, Georgians of that period considered Florida as a field for missionary work.

The *Tallahassee Sentinel* (March 10, 1843) has the following:

A deep religious feeling now pervades this community. The Rev. Dr. Hoyt of Athens, Georgia has for the last five or six weeks favored us with his ministerial labors, which have been eminently successful, under God, in awakening a general interest upon the momentous subject of religion. A protracted meeting is now in progress in which all denominations of Christians participate, which we doubt not will result in great good. The altar is crowded by the old and middle-aged, and young, whilst a deep solemnity is depicted upon the countenances of the crowded auditory that day and night visit the sanctuary. We earnestly hope that this work may extend until our whole populace, regenerated, shall be embraced in the arms of Divine Compassion.

The *Sentinel* (March 17, 1843):

The religious excitement mentioned in our last still continues with unabated strength. It seems to be universal.

The Rev. Dr. Hoyt writes:

To the pious or benevolent mind, it is truly appalling to contemplate the moral condition of certain portions of Georgia, of Alabama, of Mississippi, of Florida, to say nothing about the immeasurable regions which he farther West and South.

As I have just returned from a long & most interesting visit

to Florida, I can speak from actual survey. And I solemnly declare that, to my mind, few subjects are more replete with intense interest than that of our Southern wide-extended moral waste.

At the earnest and repeated solicitation of my old friend, Dr. William W. Waddel of Tallahassee, I left home with the cordial consent of my people about the 20th of January last, and past rapidly into Florida.

From some cause, I felt a strong & irrepressible desire to make this tour & to preach the gospel "in regions beyond" where I had hitherto travelled. I believe the fervent prayers of many of my church ascended to Heaven for a blessing upon the labours of their absent pastor. I concentrated most of my labours upon Tallahassee. There I spent all my Sabbaths while in the Territory, with the exception of the last, (which was spent in Quincy.) there I met the most cordial reception from the polite, hospitable inhabitants, whose attentions to strangers cannot be excelled; and there it was my happy lot ultimately, to witness & to enjoy the marked, the powerful expressions of the Holy Spirit.

Tallahassee is situated in nearly the center of Leon County & contains perhaps two thousand inhabitants collected from almost all parts of the United States, & from various countries in Europe. Among the inhabitants of the place & its vicinity, there are talent & intelligence & considerable wealth.

Until within the last two or three years, Tallahassee was noted for its wickedness, Such as its nocturnal riots, its assassinations & murders, besides other *affairs*, considered more *honorable*, but not less morally wrong in their character in the Light of God, nor less deadly in their results as to the welfare & peace of Society. But how changed is this city. Now the moral past of the community exert a paramount & a most Salutory influence. They have a vigorous, energetick Police with the Hon. Francis Epp[e]s (nephew or grandson of Mr.

[Thomas] Jefferson) at their head & altogether, the place is one of much good order & regularity.

Some months before my arrival in the place, the Temperance cause had arrested the attention of the people, & its progress has been onward & its results glorious. Some of the most full, pleasant and profitable Temperance meetings I have ever attended in my life, were held in Tallahassee. To their credit be it spoken, the first ladies in Society there gave their countenance to this good cause.

After preaching to overwhelming & attentive congregations, twice on Sabbath & occasionally thro the week, for about five weeks in succession, the Revnd. J. Phelps (who has charge of the Presbyterian Church) & myself commenced a protracted meeting on the 1st day of March, intending to continue the exercises four or five days.

Soon after the meetings began it was manifest that the Holy Spirit was moving upon the minds of some of the people. One lady, after pungent convictions, was brought happily to rejoice in hope. She and three other ladies, who had previously been led to the Saviour by more gradual influences, united with the church on the Sabbath, & for the first time sat down at the Communion table, to commemorate the love, suffering & death of their Redeeming Lord. That Sabbath (5th of March) was a memorable day. Backsliders were reclaimed, God's people quickened & animated, hard hearts softened, and stupid sinners awakened. An awful solemnity seemed to rest upon the large assembly; & yet the deep emotions which struggled within were not so prominently developed as to enable us unhesitatingly to decide whether it were proper to continue the meeting. Under these circumstances, Mr. Phelps, at the suggestion of the Elders, without consulting me, just before it was time to close on Sunday night, arose & stated to the people that we were somewhat in doubt as to the propriety of continuing the meeting; & suggested to the congregation that if they wished

us to protract the exercises, it might be well to manifest their desire by rising. In an instant, that vast congregation were standing. The question was settled. In the voice of the people, we recognized the voice of God—we determined to proceed.

From that night, the good work assumed a decided & marked character. Thro all that week we held two prayer meetings in the church in the day & had preaching every night. The house, especially at night, was crowded to overflowing; & yet all was still & silent as the house of death. The people, with the utmost eagerness would hang upon the words of the preacher, while in different parts of the assembly, were seen many weeping penitents, whose hearts were melting beneath the power of Divine truth as applied by the Spirit of God.

Cases of deep and pungent conviction, mostly among the first classes in Society, multiplied rapidly. The work was powerful & marked in its character. The distress of the anxious was very great; but usually it did not last long. When divine light was poured upon the darkened mind, the change was striking & in some cases, the Joys of the new-born Soul were truly inexpressible, old things past away; & all things became new.

Some of the converts spoke of themselves as having been asleep all their lives—as having never viewed any thing pertaining to this world, or that to come, in a proper light. Man's totally depraved & lost condition and absolute necessity of regeneration. . . were kept prominently before the minds of the people in our exhortations & sermons.

. . . The Episcopalians, the Methodist & the Baptists (there are very few of the latter in the place) generally & cordially united with us in our delightful solemn meetings. And many of them shared richly in the divine blessing—their own Souls were abundantly refreshed while some of their relations & friends were brought to rejoice in hope. I know not that I ever witnessed in any revival of religion more delightful har-

mony, more sweet cordiality among different denominations of Christians.

They did appear for the time, as if they believed that they were all one in Christ and that they were all going to one blessed holy heaven. This unity appeared to be the means of carrying conviction to the minds of the unconverted. The prudence, cordiality and aid of Rev Mr. [W. M.] Choice, pastor of the Methodist Church, of Rev Mr. Dunwoody, a local Methodist preacher, of Rev Dr. Nash a protestant Methodist preacher, & of Rev Mr. Fitzgerald, a young Presbyterian preacher from Virginia, will not soon be forgotten by the Writer nor by the Pastor & Elders of the Presbyterian Church in Tallahassee. Besides this, we were favored with occasional pleasant visits from several other clergymen, particularly from the Rev Mr. [Thomas C.] Benning, presiding Elder of the Methodist Church in that District.

On the 1st day of March we began & on the 19th (Sabbath) we closed our protracted meeting. On that day 18 of the converts (13 males & 5 females) made a public profession of their faith in Christ by connecting themselves with the Presbyterian Church; four united with the Methodist Church; Eleven others handed in their names under a pledge to join the Episcopal Church as soon as an opportunity should offer of being then regularly recd. Several of these have been previously confirmed in the Episcopal Church. While nearly twenty of the hopeful subjects of the Words (some of them then just beginning to hope) preferred taking more time for reflection & self-examination before making a public profession of their faith.

The communion lesson of that day was one of unusually solemn & intense interest. There were at that table, Methodist, Presbyterians, Baptists (one at least) & Episcopalians. The number of communicants was great, though not precisely known, and to above thirty of them. The scene was entirely novel, as they had never before commemorated the suffering of their

Lord. Such was the melting tenderness which pervaded the vast congregation that the place was truly a *Bochim*. * Few who were present on that occasion can easily forget the deep solemnity of that interesting, most memorable scene.

A large proportion of the Subjects of this revival are among the first & most influential classes in society. Several of them are male heads of interesting families; & it was delightful to see about seven family altars erected in Tallahassee & vicinity within a few days. Humble supplications & grateful songs of praise, as the fruits of recently renewed & joyful hearts were offered up in the domestic circle by voices & tongues, which, to say the least, were a few weeks before, very differently employed.

When in the sanctuary, we saw at the altar, either weeping or rejoicing, husbands and wives, parents and children, brothers and sisters! There we Saw Physicians, Lawyers, Merchants, Planters & Legislators. And there too, we Saw those who had not spoken to some of their neighbors for months or years, rising from their knees & approaching those against whom they had been prejudiced, cordially offering the friendly hand. Enemies became warm friends.

As for open opposition to the revival, except for a very few cases, it appeared not to be known in the place. The people generally manifested great respect for the subject of religion & were anxious to attend the meetings.

It is a remarkable fact that in this revival, more males than females were hopefully converted. When we closed our meeting, there were no indications that the feeling was subsiding or that the good work was done. But while the spirit was willing, the flesh was weak. Both ministers & people were greatly exhausted. And we seemed to hear a voice saying to us, "Come ye yourselves apart to rest a while." We closed while the banner of the Almighty over us appeared to be love.

* *Bochim*, the weeping place of the Israelites.

Happier days & nights than some of those recently spent in Tallahassee or brighter manifestations of the love of God to his soul, the writer never anticipates this side of holy heaven.

NATHAN HOYT

Athens, April 11, 1853.

Query: By the blessings of God, has not great good resulted from the sacrifice made by the Athens Church, in giving up their Pastor for a few months to labour among the destitute? If so, will not other churches go & do likewise?

NATHAN HOYT

From the *Star of Florida* (March 9, 1843):

The Rev. Dr. Hoyt of Athens Ga. an eminent clergyman of the Presbyterian order, has been laboring in this community for several weeks past, with great and visible effect. A protracted meeting convened in the Presbyterian Church in this city on Thursday last; and the press of anxious listeners has been greater than ever before witnessed here. The depths of the human heart have been laid open by the powerful voice and moving eloquence of the pastor, and feeling and emotion, long pent up, have welled forth again, it may be hoped, to soften and fructify a soil long scathed and scorched by the blasts of human passion and of vice. The blessings of many in this community will follow his footsteps, wherever the hand of Providence may hereafter lead him.