



## Baptist Heritage Queensland: Guide Sheet

# Resources for Compiling a Local Baptist Church History

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*Baptist Heritage Qld has published a number of Guide Sheets to assist with management and use of church records. Many of these are referred to below. They can all be found at this web site: <http://www.dparker.net.au/barc-sheets.htm>*

*Note that information from the sources described in the document may be subject to privacy, confidentiality and access restrictions.*

*For general information on Baptist Heritage Qld/Baptist Church Archives Qld visit <http://www.dparker.net.au/bhsq.htm>*

## Introduction

Requests are often received by the Baptist Church Archives and Baptist Heritage Qld for assistance in compiling a local church history. These are usually stimulated by an approaching anniversary of significance, like a jubilee or centenary. Sometimes the request is even more basic: Can you tell us when our church was commenced? (There is usually a multiple answer to this – when the first activity, usually a Sunday School, commenced, or the first regular services, or when the church was constituted – which may cover a span of years!)

For information about researching and publishing a church history, see our Guide Sheet, *How to Research, Plan and Publish your Church's Story*, which has lots of help on the entire process. For help on knowing what records your church should retain, see our Guide Sheet, *Local Church Records – what to collect?* A general understanding of Queensland Baptist history, belief and practice is necessary in any church history project. For a simple introduction, see our book, *Baptists in Queensland* (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, 2013). For general information, visit our websites, <http://dparker.net.au/bhsq.htm> and <http://dparker.net.au/barc.htm>,

This paper deals with one particular aspect of a church history project –the resources that are available for discovering the story of the church, where are they, and how can they be accessed!

To begin answering this, let us look at how Baptist churches have usually started.

## Records of the sponsoring body

First of all, there was probably some body which laid the ground work for the church – perhaps the Baptist Union through one of its departments, typically the Home Mission and then later Mission to Queensland. Or, it may be another church which expanded, or engaged in a deliberate church planting ministry, or one that just split due to some problem. It may be simpler – a group of people in a given area decided to come together and form a church, at first carrying out the leadership and ministry themselves and with the help of people they have invited in to assist, such as other Baptist churches and pastors or the Baptist Union. In some cases, these people may have been stimulated to take action as the result of a particular event in the district, such as an evangelistic crusade; perhaps the missionary has seen the potential in the district and has urged the people to begin meeting with the hope of forming a permanent church, and has even encouraged other churches or denominational officials to support the embryonic work. Finally, the church might have been a local independent church or one from another denomination that has transferred to the Baptist Union of Queensland.

Where there have been other bodies involved in the commencement of the church, the first place to look for information about the origins will be in the records of those bodies (see more below for the Baptist Union). Look for printed histories, newspaper and church magazine reports, photograph collections (church and family) and most of all, their official documents like Minutes and Annual Reports.

## Early church records – informal and official

Now turning to the new church. The main source for the earliest stages of its history may be hard to find because the original activities might have been rather informal and tentative – perhaps a Sunday School operated informally or there might have been occasional week night fellowship gatherings in someone's home or services at a local school or hall. But at some point, it became clearer that the new work was going to be permanent and someone would have started keeping records. Look for informal records (perhaps a newspaper report or advertising for the commencement of a Sunday School) and family photographs. If it was a more intentional church plant, there should be full records like Minutes and reports which were created by the sponsoring body.

Often a Sunday School was the first activity, followed by occasional church services, perhaps initially in a home but then in public building of some kind. As the work became more established, there would be meetings to discuss activities and future plans. Then, the church would be formed officially, usually done in a meeting of interested people, with a vote to establish the church and a decision to approach the Baptist Union for recognition. There would be Minutes of this meeting, which would also include the names of the founding members and the names of those petitioning the Baptist Union, as well the names of the leaders appointed and any ministers and officials from the Baptist Union, other churches or the District Baptist Association. There should also be a copy of the documents sent to the Baptist Union and its response.

## Putting the early records in order

So the first step in compiling a history is to find out what documents are available from its earliest days. They can be collected together in categories and put in order. If there are gaps in the records, make efforts to locate missing items as soon as possible. Make sure that these documents are carefully preserved and stored. Supplement the official documents with informal ones – such as family photographs, letters, newspaper and church magazine reports. If there are still people who were part of the original founders, interview them for information using Oral History techniques to capture the information they retain (see more below on Oral History).

See our Guide Sheet, *Baptist Church Archives Register (CAR) Form*.

## Local records of the on-going church

### *General Records*

From this point on, there would be regular meetings of the members and leaders properly recorded in Minute Books, supported by financial records, as well as brochures, bulletins and newspaper cuttings announcing various events. The members' roll should be available (sometimes a separate book and other times part of the Minute book), and Annual Reports. Church bulletins give a feel for the week by week life of the church and provide detailed information about dates of events and the names of personnel involved.

Similarly, there would be a gradually increasing number of ancillary organisations such as Sunday School, ladies groups (Baptist Women's Fellowship/Union, and Senior Girls' Missionary Union) and men's groups, youth work (a youth fellowship, and Boys' and Girls' Brigades) and sporting clubs. Records of these organisations such as Minute books, membership rolls, financial documents and reports should be available.

Any major ancillary ministries such as a pre-school, kindy or op-shop should have their own sets of records.

Registers are another form of documentation of church life. These include marriage registers (although in earlier years these were considered the property of the pastor rather than the church, so they are often found in family collections) and in the few churches which had cemeteries, burial registers (see below under German churches). Some churches have also kept records of baptisms and infant dedications, usually in the form of certificates published in book form with butts to retain the basic information (like a cheque book). The church should have a membership roll, often in a separate book but sometimes as part of a Minute books; it was usually revised periodically so there will be multiple copies of it. (Unfortunately, most church membership rolls only record names, and sometimes dates but very rarely addresses or names of other churches to/from which they were transferred.) There may also be books listing attendance at members' meetings. Various groups such as the Sunday School, Ladies Groups, Christian Endeavour and Brigades may keep track of their members by roll and attendance books. Visitors' book may also exist and provide interesting insights into church attendance. Note that privacy laws apply when using information of a personal nature from such sources.

There will also be official papers relating to the place of meeting (eg, a lease on a public hall, land purchases, documents relating to building projects etc) which will yield more useful information. Correlate these documents where possible with material from the local council and any advertising to do with the projects (tenders, openings etc).

Look also for advertising /publicity brochures and photographs and videos of people and events, especially major projects like buildings, evangelistic crusades, commencement of All Age Sunday School etc.

Your church may have organisations which have links to other bodies. These include the Girls' and Boys' Brigade, KYB (Know your Bible) study groups, Christian Endeavour, and sporting clubs. The parent bodies of these groups may have helpful information in their records, especially about dates of commencement and affiliation and the names and details of officers and leaders. They may also have information about district-wide events in which your church group participated.

### ***Financial Records***

Financial records provide a particular challenge both for their management and their use in compiling a church history. Depending on how conscientious the church treasurer and other officers have been, there may be very large volumes of financial records including not only account books of various types but also bank statements, cheque butts, invoices and receipts, utilities invoices, pay slips, taxation records, collection records, and all kinds of reports. They are likely to be incomplete, and very difficult to interpret after any length of time. So it is best to rely initially on annual financial statements and any explanatory notes and reports in Minutes and other publications to provide keys to understanding the financial trends of your church.

However, sometimes detailed figures may be useful for church history – eg, it may be possible to trace the giving of the church through collection records, funding for special efforts such as a building program, support for missions or how well the church paid its minister (and also what arrangements there were for his transportation – who paid for the horse/buggy or motor car and their maintenance!). Overall reports may provide interesting clues on the prosperity of the church and district. Records of ancillary organisations, especially the women's groups, will give a clear indication of how the church was supported financially. Special projects, such as a building project, a missionary support scheme or local outreach ministries will probably have their own sets of their own records.

Note that at present minimum retention periods for financial records are determined by government and other external requirements. However it may be helpful for the church to retain at least a sampling of detailed records over an extended period to give some idea of the financial history of the church. These details may be important in their own right and in any case, such records often give indications of the spiritual and social health of the church.

## **Managing your documentary and digital records**

To keep track of this array of documents, use our *Church Archive and Record Form* which will assist you to list, categorise and date all documents, and also give you a framework for the historical development of the church, including the names of its leaders, buildings and locations. A good idea is to compile large charts or spreadsheets with the required information. This will not only help you to see clearly the development and growth of the church but also spot any gaps in the records (it is important to try to fill these gaps as soon as possible).

In the early stages, these records will be all paper based (and some tape recordings, transparencies, movie films, but since about 2000, they will transition to digital records (some of which may have been printed in hard copy as well). The essential principles of managing and using digital records are the same as paper records but they are much harder to manage.

See our Guide Sheets,

- *Managing Church Records A Guide*
- *Baptist Archives How to organise & manage your Church or Denominational Archives*
- *Guide to Digital Archiving*

## **Oral history**

The memories of people connected with your church can also form a valuable source of information, although care and patience are needed to make effective use of this source. Depending on the age of your church, there may even be people still alive who were involved in its foundation. Other key people will include former pastors, officers and key people such as building committee leaders. Make every effort to track down those who have moved from the area.

Use the oral history 'best practice' to capture information from these people. Approach people with respect and be ready for alternative arrangements should circumstances change suddenly. Be responsive to the situation of your

interviewee. Plan your questions well, taking into account information already known from other sources. Prepare your note taking devices (recorders, video etc), be comfortable with their use, explain to your interviewee what you are doing. Secure permission to take notes and record the conversation.

Use some 'starters' like documents and photographs to get the conversation under way. Cross check all information gained, bearing in mind that memories are not fool-proof, especially over many years! Be content with partial information if full details are not possible and try to fill the gaps in other ways. Ask for any further documents and photographs that the interviewee may possess and be sure to handle them carefully, have permission to copy them and make sure they are returned promptly or as arranged.

If the interview is not face-to-face (eg by phone, email etc), adapt the above principles accordingly.

A productive variant of individual interviewees is the use of focus groups involving up to about 6 people at a time. The inter-personal dynamics within the group often opens up otherwise forgotten threads and memories, as well as providing a valuable means of cross-checking for accuracy. Use documents and especially photographs as effective conversation starters. Sessions can be at the church property, or for more informality, in a private home. Use the same principles as above adapted to the group situation.

## Denominational documents

Depending on how much the church has been in contact with the Baptist Union in its establishment and later life, there will be some material about the church available in the Baptist Archives and other denominational repositories.

First of all, if the church was established by the Home Mission or Mission to Queensland, there will be references to this in the records of those two bodies, hopefully including dedicated files for the church. In most cases there will be, as mentioned above, documents relating to its constitution and recognition as a member church of the Baptist Union, including application papers, votes authorising recognition and details of any official services to perform the constitution.

Most churches in Queensland have the Baptist Union as their trustee for property matters, so further documentation will relate to this area – eg, property purchases, building schemes and financial loans associated therewith. (Note that some churches, while members of the Baptist Union of Queensland, are independently incorporated - the early ones under the Religious Educational and Charitable Institutions Act (1861 - 1895), or later ones, the Associations Incorporation Act 1981.)

Similarly, most churches call upon the Baptist Union to assist with advice and help when calling a pastor. There will usually be copies of letters and other communications related to pastoral settlement. In the case of churches under the Home Mission, there will be records in the Home Mission Minutes of appointments made. If there has been any reason for the church and the Baptist Union to be in consultation (eg pastoral or property issues), there will be records documenting this activity.

More generally, look for reports and photographs in the denominational newspaper, *The Queensland Freeman/Baptist* and later *QB magazine* which have been submitted by the church, or articles written about it. In earlier days, many churches reported regularly, often monthly, and these reports often contain detailed information. Many of the reports found their way also to the national paper, *The Australian Baptist*. Both newspapers may be searched digitally in the Baptist Church Archives.

Finally, the Baptist Union published its annual reports and a year book from 1907 (and before that the same kind of information appeared in the QB). Some of these reports (eg, by the General Secretary, Home Mission) were quite detailed and often contained at least basic information about particular churches (such as dates of constitution, property developments, pastoral changes). This information can also be searched digitally at the Baptist Church Archives.

Some churches have sent copies of their printed histories (printed and now digital) to the Archives, which constitute another source of information, if not already available locally. These histories are typically small booklets of 30 to 50 pages, commemorating a significant anniversary (jubilee or centenary) often with many illustrations and lists of pastors and officers.

In addition, some older churches have transferred a large proportion of their records to the Baptist Church Archives for safe keeping. The records of churches that have closed or otherwise ceased to exist as a separate entity are required under the Constitution of the Baptist Union of Queensland to be transferred to the Baptist Archives.

Note that at various times, the Baptist Union of Queensland has had a staged development and recognition process for new churches, commencing with an informal beginning (perhaps under the supervision of a nearby established church) moving through at the church grows and becomes more secure, to a fully constituted member church of the Union. There are different relationships to the Union and different privileges and responsibilities at each stage. Different names have been used to identify these churches at the various stages including 'fellowship', Home

Mission church, Phase I, Phase II and 'constituted'. Typically there are entries in the official records (Executive, Council etc) marking these transitions.

## Published historical information

Now we can turn to historical documents which record the story of the churches and denominations. There are several different publishers and sources.

First, those published by the Baptist Union. The first is the *Queensland Baptist Jubilee*, issued in 1905, which features a short history of all the churches which had been established up to the time of publication. The second is the Baptist Union centenary history, 1977, *A Fellowship of Service*, which as well as the general history of the Baptist Union contains supplements listing of names of the churches together with membership figures and the names of pastors who have served. The latest history is *Pressing on with the Gospel: the story of Baptists in Queensland 1855-2005*, published at the time of the sequi-centenary of Baptist work in Queensland. (The latter volumes do not contain the history of individual churches.)

Baptist Heritage Queensland (BHQ) has published a number of books on individual churches as well as some regional ones, including *Something more than Gold - Baptists in Central Queensland 1862-2012*. A number of churches are covered in *Mission to Queensland, 1981-1996: a Baptist experiment in church planting*. BHQ has also produced several biographies. Many articles of the same types have appeared in its journal, *QB Forum* (published 3 times a year since 1984). For the full list of BHQ books, visit <http://dparker.net.au/bhq-order-3-13.pdf>

The Baptist Church Archives also contains a number of histories produced by local churches, and some academic theses on historical or biographical topics. There are also some auto/biographies of pastors and other Baptist people. The Malyon College library also contains some histories, biographies and academic theses, as well as general studies on Baptist life.

Another useful source of information are family histories produced by people with Baptist connections, some of which contain biographical and church information relevant to local churches.

Local district historical societies and local governments also produce historical books which may contain useful information, especially about the area, and sometimes about churches (although often the material on Baptist churches is limited in extent and value). These are usually obtainable at local and state libraries.

## Records relating to particular groups of churches

### *German Baptist Churches*

The German Baptist churches are a particular and unique feature of Queensland Baptist life. These are a group of churches located in the Fassifern area north and west of Ipswich, which were established from the early 1870s and existed as a separate identifiable group until the 1920s, for much of that period in their own 'German Baptist Conference'. These churches were found by German migrants (some of whom were Baptists before their arrival and others were converts here in Queensland), and they used the German language for services and their records up until about the First World War. In the early stages, there were mostly led by lay pastors although there were a small number of ordained ministers who migrated from Germany, most notably Rev H. Windolf (1846-1922); there was also a group of German Baptist pastors from USA serving for a short time in the early 1900s, one of whom, Rev J. Heinrich (1875-1936) remained in the country for the rest of his life. Some of the churches called Australian pastors at various times, and by about 1930, the churches had integrated into the Baptist Union. Some have since ceased to exist.

Many of the second and later generations of German Baptists moved to other areas, especially the South Burnett but did not form separate German speaking churches. These and other families and their descendants are to be found scattered across the state where they have contributed significantly to the life of many Baptist churches. Many have entered the ministry and some have served at denominational level.

The records of these churches survive in varying degrees of completeness, some with the local churches and some, especially the churches which no longer exist, are in the Baptist Church Archives. Each of the churches have produced their own history, mostly at the time of their centenary. Many of these churches had their own cemeteries, also a unique feature of Queensland Baptist life. Personal information about those buried may be obtained from the headstones (where existing), but there are many unmarked graves and illegible headstones; see our *Coleville, Engelsburg (Kalbar), Boonah & Highfields Baptist Cemeteries (Qld) Monumental Inscriptions*, by Rosemary and Eric Kopittke for details. Burial registers and other documentary records are sparse.

The Baptist Church Archives has some specialised material relating to the German Baptist churches. This includes the published histories, the records of some of the churches (in German, and some with some basic translations), some property related documents and some material relating from focused research on the movement. Of particular interest is a collection of newspaper clippings from Baptist newspapers in Germany which contain reports from the German Baptist churches in Queensland (in German and in translation).

Also of interest in the Baptist Archives collection is a number of books by Rev Hermann Windolf, who was recognized as an author and poet.

### *Mission to Queensland Churches*

The Mission to Queensland (MTQ) was established in 1981 as the church planting ministry of the Baptist Union of Queensland in remote and mining areas of the state; it replaced, in a partial way, the Queensland Baptist Home Mission which had been the comprehensive church planting and support ministry of the Baptist Union from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century until the 1960s. In the initial period of the ministry of MTQ, a number of churches were established under its auspices, and staffed by specialised church planting pastors. Its story up to 1996 is told in our book, *Mission to Queensland 1981-1996: a Baptist experiment in church planting* by Rev Mel Williams.

The records of these churches (not all of which have survived) are with the churches themselves and also in the files of MTQ, some of which are housed in the Baptist Archives, including some records of defunct churches. There were also extensive reports of the activities of the pastors and the churches published in *The Queensland Baptist*. The early life of these churches were typically associated very closely with the church planter who established them; these church planters usually issued detailed newsletters to their supporters and friends, which can be a good source of information about the church.

### *Ethnic churches*

As well as the German church, there have been many different ethnic churches within the Baptist denomination in Queensland, especially in recent years, although many had a short life. In the early days there were some Danish and Welsh-speaking fellowships and churches but very little is known of their records.

The oldest of the existing churches is the Brisbane Slavic Evangelical Baptist Church which was officially established in 1938. With the surge of immigration after World War 2, there appeared a number of different works amongst the various European groups such as the Italians, Romanian, Yugoslav, Spanish (and also Latin American) and Dutch; later still, work appeared amongst Asian cultures such as Vietnamese, Cambodian, Korean, Chinese and Burmese, while more recently, African communities have been included. Over many years, there have been some sporadic ministries amongst Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders.

Some of these various ministries were established as separate churches while others were fellowships associated with existing Baptist churches. For a time, a New Settlers Association flourished with Queensland Baptists to foster the life of these churches and to encourage outreach and church planting.

These groups are responsible for their own records, with few if any making their way to the Baptist Archives. Some information of a more general nature may be obtained from the reports and newsletters of the New Settlers Association and occasional reports in the *Queensland Baptist*. Current information may be obtained from the Queensland Baptists' Regional Coordinator for Ethnic and Multicultural ministries.

## **Basic public records**

There are many public records which can be useful for church history projects.

As mentioned above, local historical societies and museums often have information about churches, but, more generally, they will have considerable details about the district itself which is important for putting the story of the church into context. This kind of material can also be supported by information from local government sources, especially regarding property matters and developments in town planning. Family and genealogical societies usually have libraries with extensive collections of data. Some of this includes overseas information (British, European and American in particular) which is invaluable when tracing the stories of people, including pastors, who have migrated to this country from elsewhere. Other local bodies such as schools often have published histories which may throw light on the story of your church, its people and district.

One of the best public sources for information are newspapers. In earlier times, local and even metropolitan and state newspapers reported on church life in some detail, often including verbatim reports of events like weddings and

funerals, church anniversaries, building openings, inductions of new ministers, visits of denominational officials and even the preaching of evangelists, missionaries and other visiting preachers. For the period up to the mid-1950s at least, a great deal of this information is now available on-line without any cost through the National Library of Australia's Trove website, <http://trove.nla.gov.au/>. This provides access to dozens of Australian newspapers which are searchable with flexible search terms, and the results can be simply printed and saved for reference

## Other resources

For general background information on Baptists in Australia, visit The National Guide to Australia Baptist Historical Resources and Services at <http://www.dparker.net.au/ng/index.htm>. Alternatively consult the book, *Guide to Baptist Historical Resources in Australia* at <https://www.gould.com.au/guide-to-baptist-historical-resources-in-australia/utp0361/>

The standard book on Australian Baptist history is *From Woolumooloo to 'Etyernity': A History of Australian Baptists 1831-2005* (2 vols) by Ken Manley (Paternoster)

Information about overall trends of Baptist life may be gleaned from statistics published by the Australian Government Censuses (<http://www.abs.gov.au/census>) and the National Church Life Survey (<http://www.ncls.org.au/>).

## Dates and statistics of Queensland churches and ministers

The Queensland Baptist Yearbooks (also known as Report Book, Handbook, Directory) published from 1907 to the present include the names and details of member churches, and also the list of officially recognized pastors (including their periods of ministry at different appointments and their place of training and qualifications, as well as their official status – whether fully ordained, retired, Home Missionary, pastor etc).

Of particular interest in this publication was the section where the vital statistics of churches was reported. In the earlier times, this valuable source of data included full statistical information (membership of the church and its various organisations, number of baptisms etc) as well as financial information (total receipts, contributions to the Baptist Union etc) and details of the property (dates, size, cost, insurance). Unfortunately, property information has not been published since 1996, and no statistical data of any kind has been publically available since 2008.

## How to access material in Baptist Church Archives Qld

The contents and services of the Baptist Church Archives, located at the QB Centre, 53 Prospect Road, Gaythorne is available to local church historians. For full details, see our Guide Sheet, *The Baptist Church Archives, Qld. - a Guide* at <http://www.dparker.net.au/d-BaptArc-guide06.pdf>.

Note that the Baptist Church Archives is staffed on a voluntary basis and the material is not on open access. So it is necessary to contact us to see whether we have information that can help your project and to make an appointment to visit us. Email us at [archives@qb.org.au](mailto:archives@qb.org.au) or phone 07-3354 5642 and leave a message. In the first instance, give us as much information as you can about your project so far in order that we may assess if and how we may help you.

## Conclusion

There is plenty of information available for researchers to produce worthwhile histories of Baptist church and biographies of their people, even if it means some persistence in locating the details. However, more information and documents are needed, so we welcome contributions of church, family and general material related to Baptist heritage in Queensland.