

“The Spirit of Falcon – 1911”
2011 Merger Centennial Celebration
Falcon, North Carolina
January 31, 2011
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On January 31, 1911, in the camp meeting village of Falcon, North Carolina, an event took place in the octagonal tabernacle that loomed large in American religious history, the merger of two southern Holiness-Pentecostal churches that were destined to play a major role in the future of American Pentecostalism. After months of discussion and a day of debate, the thirty eight persons gathered in Falcon voted to bring into union the Fire-Baptized Holiness Church and the Pentecostal Holiness Church of North Carolina to produce the present International Pentecostal Holiness Church.

A sad fact of the merger was the absence of four important persons who had been founding fathers of the two denominations. They were Benjamin Hardin Irwin who founded the Fire-Baptized Holiness church in Iowa in 1896 and Abner Blackmon Crumpler the founder of the Pentecostal Holiness Church in 1898 in North Carolina. Also missing was Joseph H. King at that time the General Overseer of the Fire-Baptized Holiness Church who was on a world tour in 1911, and Gaston Barnabas Cashwell who had brought Pentecost to the two churches in the famous Dunn revival known as Azusa Street East in 1907.

Thus, the merger process was in the hands of followers of Irwin and Crumpler who for various reasons were no longer members of the churches they had founded. The leading persons in the drama that unfolded in Falcon, however, were George Floyd Taylor, Alman H. Butler, and Julius A. Culbreth from the Pentecostal Holiness Church and Francis M. Britton, Samuel D. Page, and Albert E. Robinson from the Fire Baptized Church.

The roots of this historic event lay in the great Holiness revival of the late Nineteenth Century and the worldwide Pentecostal revival of the early Twentieth Century. The two merging churches were both heirs of the most radical wing of the Holiness movement. Irwin’s Fire Baptized Holiness Church was the first to postulate a “third blessing” of Holy Spirit baptism separate from the “second blessing” sanctification experience. It also maintained a holiness code that exceeded all others. Fire-Baptized members were forbidden to eat pork, to wear neckties, to use tobacco, to drink any alcoholic beverages, or to attend any places of worldly amusements. They emphasized the “fire” in all aspects of spiritual life. In 1922 in an article in

The Pentecostal Holiness Advocate, G.F Taylor described their fire experiences:

The testimonies on fire were very interesting. Some said they felt the fire burning in their souls, but others claimed it as burning in their bodies also. It was felt in the face, in the tongue, in the fingers, in the palm of the hand, in the feet, in the side, in the arms, and so on. Then the Bible itself often felt warm in those who had the fire in them. The church would seem to be lighted with fire, and the trees of the wood would appear as flames of fire, the landscape would seem to be baptized in the glory of the fire. As some rode from one appointment to another, according to their testimonies, they seemed to be enveloped with the holy fire. The noise of the engine seemed to sound notes of praise to God, and the clatter of the wheels beneath cars seemed to be saying Glory to God, *hallelujah!* The coaches themselves were fire-lighted, and the wheels beneath seemed to be wheels of fire. Fire! Fire! Holy Fire was the ring of their testimonies.

The Pentecostal Holiness Church of North Carolina, on the other hand, was a clone of the Methodist Church but with a fiery emphasis on sanctification which could come with shouting or falling out in the Spirit. Worship was noisy with much shouting, jumping, and even dancing in the Spirit. Some critics accused Crumpler of hypnotizing his followers, or of dusting “magic powders” on the seekers causing them to shout or swoon in the Spirit. In his unforgettable words, Taylor described the charges that were made against Crumpler and his followers:

It was stated that these sanctified preachers carried gangs of women around with them to help stir up things. The preacher would clap his hands, jump into the air, and the women would yell and scream to the top of their voices, we were told. This would be kept up until many nervous people would become excited and join in with the rest. The preacher and the women all carried some kind of powders with them and just at the critical moment, they would sprinkle the powders on the excited ones. And they would fall as dead, and this was called going into a trance.

Taylor also added:

“many said that that it was the best side show they had ever attended.”

And these were all Methodists!

Although the Church forbade the use of tobacco and alcohol, it also forbade its members to attend county fairs, ice cream socials, or oyster stews. A major attraction was Crumpler's claim of not having committed a single sin since his experience of entire sanctification in 1890 in Missouri under the ministry of the famous Methodist evangelist Beverly Carradine. By 1900 he claimed an entire decade of Christian perfection as taught by John Wesley. George Floyd Taylor described the reaction of a local "no hellite" acquaintance who, when he heard of Crumpler's claim of sinless perfection:

would "get so mad over the thing that he would wiggle in his seat, rise, take off his hat, walk the yard, and charge.... that he wanted an opportunity to tell that preacher that he committed a sin every time he said such a thing."

The Raleigh newspapers took notice of Crumpler's meetings with lurid editorials claiming that since Crumpler was "unwashed in a decade, this was a matter for the sanitation department."

But all this was changed by events all the way across the continent in California that was to change the two churches forever.

In 1906, only five years before the merger, a mighty Pentecostal revival began in a humble mission on Azusa Street in Los Angeles, California, that struck the church world like a spiritual thunderclap, spreading the Pentecostal message around the world. Led by a Black Holiness preacher, William J. Seymour, the movement was based on the teachings of Charles Fox Parham, another Holiness preacher from Topeka, Kansas, who taught that speaking with other tongues was the "Bible evidence" of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. This movement began in the Holiness Movement that had shortly before separated from the American Methodist Church over the question of second blessing sanctification as taught by John Wesley. Two churches produced by this movement were the Fire-Baptized Holiness Church started by Benjamin Hardin Irwin in Iowa in 1895 and the Pentecostal Holiness Church begun in North Carolina in 1898 under the leadership of Abner Blackman Crumpler, a fiery Methodist evangelist.

In November 1906, a member of Crumpler's church, Gaston Barnabas Cashwell, journeyed to Azusa Street where he received the Pentecostal

experience. He then returned to Dunn, North Carolina, where, in a month-long meeting in January 1907 dubbed "Azusa Street East," most of the ministers in these two churches experienced speaking in tongues. In January of 1908 the Fire-Baptized Holiness Church adopted the words "initial evidence" in their official statement of faith, the first church in the world to adopt that language. This wording, probably crafted by J. H. King, was adopted in the new document. After becoming Pentecostal churches, both denominations experienced rapid growth. Since they both now had a common faith and operated churches in the same territories, a movement began to unite the two churches based on their common experience and faith.

By 1908 the idea of merger began to be the talk of both groups, with very little opposition in sight. In the Falcon Convention of the Pentecostal Holiness Church in 1909, a motion carried to appoint a committee of three "to confer with a like committee from the Fire-Baptized Holiness Church for the purpose of suggesting a basis of union between the two bodies." J. A. Culbreth, G. F. Taylor, and A. H. Butler, President of the Church, were named to constitute the committee.

The Fire-Baptized Holiness Church responded by naming a like committee to represent their church in the General Council that met in Chadbourn, North Carolina, in 1910. Named to represent this group were five men. They were Samuel D. Page, A. E. Robinson, F. M. Britton, M. D. Sellers, and E. D. Cannon. The General Overseer of the Church, Joseph H. King, who strongly favored the merger, was not one of the delegates since he was on a world tour at the time. This committee was larger than the P. H. committee due to the larger size of the F. B. H. Church. Although invited to join in the talks, the Pentecostal Free Will Baptist Church in North Carolina did not respond to the invitation to name a committee.

The place chosen for the meeting of the convention that would decide the fate of the two denominations was Falcon, North Carolina, home of the now widely-known Falcon Camp Meeting. The setting was both quaint and appropriate. Located in Sampson County near Dunn, this had for some years been a center for populist unrest in North Carolina. In the late 1890s, even as Crumpler was holding the sensational revivals that produced the Pentecostal Holiness Church, Senator Marion Butler had led a historic struggle to establish the populist party in North Carolina. His paper, *The Caucasian*, had been used to vilify the Wall Street monopolists, the railroad giants, and the banking moguls of the Northeastern "establishment" in the name of the common man. It was in this area that Crumpler, in 1896, also in the name of the common man, had defied the officials of Methodism to

establish the Pentecostal Holiness Church. It was fitting that a new church, dedicated to the spiritual welfare of the common man, should be forged by merger in this place.

The eight committeemen named to study the possibilities of merger met together in Falcon in April 1910 to do the necessary negotiating previous to the convention. Although the discussions were lengthy, the men finished their work in two days. A tentative "Basis of Union" was worded and adopted for presentation to both bodies. It was decided to call the new organization by the name of the younger and smaller group, "the Pentecostal Holiness Church." The chief general officer would be designated "General Superintendent," while the head of each regional convention would be called simply "Superintendent." The annual state gatherings would be called "conventions," and the general gatherings, "General Conventions." Many other minor points were agreed upon in addition to the more important doctrinal and governmental compromises. The proposal was then published and copies scattered over both organizations for due consideration.

The next convention of the Pentecostal Holiness Church, which met in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, in 1910, received the report of the committee. After one reading, G. F. Taylor made a motion, which was seconded by H. E. Oxendine, that the P. H. Church of North Carolina consolidate with the F. B. H. Church on the basis of the April agreements. The motion carried unanimously. A motion then carried that one committeeman be selected to meet with one committeeman from the F. B. H. Church, the two then to select a third person from either church, to "write out a *Discipline*, under which the two churches may consolidate." G. F. Taylor was elected to represent the Pentecostal Holiness Church.

The Fire-Baptized Holiness Church had no general convention after the committee reported out the proposed "Basis of Union," and it seemed that the merger might be delayed. A further complication was the fact that the General Overseer of the church, J. H. King, was absent on a world tour at the time. Before leaving, King had named his Assistant General Overseer, F. M. Britton, to act in his place during his two-year absence. Rather than wait for King's return, Britton acted quickly to accomplish the merger. He named himself to represent the Fire-Baptized Church and suggested that J. A. Culbreth, of the P. H. Church, serve as the third member of the committee. This was agreeable to Taylor. Thus the Fire-Baptized Church entered the merger proceedings without ratification of the initial plan of union.

The desire for merger was now overpowering. During the Christmas holidays of 1910, the committee met in the home of G. F. Taylor to write a new *Discipline* that would adequately express the desires of the two bodies.

The new document was drawn up on the general lines of the April agreement. The committee then called for a "general representative gathering" from each church to meet in Falcon "the last days of January 1911."

On January 30, the last of the representatives had arrived for the historic deliberations. The two delegations met separately the night before the merger session to map out their strategies for the important session on the next day. The representatives of the Pentecostal Holiness Church met in the school house while the representatives of the Fire-Baptized Holiness Church met in the Falcon residence of Rev. Samuel D. Page. Each group considered the proposed *Discipline* which they read and criticized, adopting some parts and rejecting others. The P. H. representatives finally agreed to the entire document with only minor corrections of grammar and punctuation. The F. B. H. representatives were more cautious, being the larger group. They voted not to receive the document as it stood, but to offer some changes in the general meeting the next day. Late on the evening of January 30, both sides retired to await the very important meeting the next morning.

January 31, 1911, dawned bright and unusually warm (the temperature was 72 degrees) in the village of Falcon, North Carolina, a time and place to be very important in the annals of the church. At 9:00 A.M., about forty persons gathered for the great occasion in the octagonal-shaped tabernacle, home of the Falcon Pentecostal Holiness Church and center of the Falcon Camp Meeting. Representatives for the Pentecostal Holiness Church numbered only six persons: A. H. Butler, G. F. Taylor, J. A. Culbreth, R. B. Jackson, J. T. Herring, and B. B. Pleasants.

Being the smaller group, these men had much more to lose in the talks with the much larger delegation from the Fire-Baptized Church. Yet, they had much to offer to the union, not the least of which was the name, "Pentecostal Holiness Church," a name that the Fire-Baptized people were more than happy to assume.

The representatives of the Fire-Baptized Holiness Church were led by their Assistant General Overseer, F. M. Britton, who acted in the place of the absent General Overseer, J. H. King. Their delegation also included the following persons: G. O. Gaines, J. J. Carter, M. D. Sellers, Harry P. Lott, E. D. Reeves, C. M. Wheeler, Mrs. F. M. Britton, J. H. Blake, Samuel D. Page, Ralph Taylor, A. E. Robinson, J. H. Inman, J. M. Howell, J. H. Spain, J. T. Crumpler, C. O. Daniels, Howard Sellers, J. A. James, and M. H. Israel. Another twelve persons completed the delegation, making a total of thirty-two.

After prayer and singing the gospel song "Look for me, I'll be there," the first act of the convention was to elect A. H. Butler, President of the host denomination, as chairman *pro tem* and J. A. Culbreth as secretary *pro tem*. After the singing of a hymn and an offering of prayer led by Britton, the convention got down to the serious business of working out a merger. Both churches began by offering resolutions which were thoroughly discussed *pro* and *con*. The Pentecostal Holiness delegation informed the convention that it was prepared to unite "on the basis of the entire document (*Discipline*), granting a few changes in punctuation, etc., which were merely mistakes of grammar and composition." The Fire Baptized Holiness Church was not so ready to unite, offering the resolution that it would be ready to merge "on the grounds that we elect the officers first, and then proceed to the adoption of the *Discipline*. A parliamentary deadlock then ensued that actually threatened the success of the meeting, as both sides debated the propriety of electing officers before adopting the basic frame of government. Though the committee had plainly suggested the adoption of the *Discipline* first, the debate became so bitter that one Pentecostal Holiness delegate reported that "it seemed for a while that the union was going to fail."

As the discussion moved toward a climax, Fire Baptized Holiness representative A. E. Robinson arose and startled the delegates with a motion that the convention adopt the document *verba et literatim*. With breathtaking suddenness, the vote was placed before the group and on a rising vote, the convention voted 36 to 2 to adopt Robinson's resolution. Thus the deadlock was broken in a few seconds, and a new united church was born in the short time it took to cast the vote. As the delegates realized the significance of the historic moment, a great tide of emotion and praises to the Lord swept over the assembly. All business ceased as the happy delegates broke out as with one voice in singing "The Old Time Religion." Shouts of praise echoed through the tabernacle. The group then sang "Blest Be the Tie That Binds" as delegates from both sides of the newly-united church "shook hands, hugged each other's necks and shouted the victory." Heaven descended and the "old-time power" filled the place in a scene reminiscent of the Upper Room on the Day of Pentecost. "The spirit was most manifestly present," wrote Robinson into the *Minutes* of the session.

In the ecstasy of the moment, the delegates forgot about the polity of the meeting and even the election of officers, taking an impromptu offering for a Brother Edgerton "who has been sick for a long time." There was a contribution of \$11.77.

The spirit of unity caused by the consolidation vote caused a rapid conclusion of the business that, in a less spiritual atmosphere, might have

stymied the convention. It was decided to elect one "General Superintendent" and two Assistants, one to serve over "home missions" and the other over "foreign missions." Nominations for General Superintendent included J. H. King, S. D. Page, and G. O. Gaines, all formerly of the Fire-Baptized Church. Samuel D. Page was elected on the second ballot over J. H. King. Page then assumed the chair from Butler. In quick order A. E. Robinson, a layman, was elected "General Secretary" while A. H. Butler was elected "Assistant General Superintendent" for the home field and J. H. King for the foreign fields. Another layman, J. A. Culbreth, was elected "General Treasurer." Harry P. Lott, F. M. Britton, and G. O. Gaines were elected to complete the General Board. Named to serve as "General Trustees" for the new church were: S. D. Page, G. O. Gaines, H. P. Lott, J. A. Culbreth, and A. E. Robinson. Since there were now two overlapping jurisdictions in North Carolina, the Convention decided that the incumbent superintendents should "continue their oversight of their respective works until the next annual convention." Other housekeeping decisions concerning credentials and the printing of the *Minutes* and the new *Discipline* of the church completed the work of the convention.

The church thus formed in 1911, was not large, having only about 2,000 members in six state conventions. The conventions and their superintendents at the time of the merger were listed as follows:

1. North Carolina, A. H. Butler, Superintendent
2. Eastern North Carolina and Lower South Carolina, J. J. Carter, Superintendent
3. Georgia and Upper South Carolina, G. O. Gaines, Superintendent
4. Florida, H. H. Smith, Superintendent
5. Virginia, E. D. Reeves, Superintendent
6. Oklahoma, H. P. Lott, Superintendent
7. Tennessee, C. M. Wheeler, Superintendent.

With the exception of the North Carolina Conference, all the above men were formerly of the Fire-Baptized Holiness Church. In order to make the merger official, the charter of the Fire-Baptized Holiness Church, which had been recorded in Franklin County Courthouse, Georgia, in 1905, was amended to include the name of the Pentecostal Holiness Church. One of the signers was W. E. Fuller, a Black preacher from South Carolina. Thus the history of the main body of the Fire-Baptized Holiness Church merged into the history of the Pentecostal Holiness Church according to the 1911 Basis of Union. The African-American Branch which separated in 1908

under W. E. Fuller, continued its separate existence and grew to be an important Pentecostal group among the blacks of the nation.

The merger brought immediate growth to the newly united church. In 1910 there were about 2,000 members in both bodies, with 799 in the Pentecostal Holiness group and about 1,200 on the Fire Baptized side. The next year after the merger, the numbers went from 2,000 to 2588, a gain of 28% in only one year. Steady growth as the church expanded all over the United States and in mission fields in many nations.

Today the International Pentecostal Holiness Church numbers over 4,000,000 adherents in 100 nations of the world and is a leading and respected part of the worldwide Pentecostal/Charismatic Movement. The little band of leaders that met in Falcon on that warm day in January 1911 could not have dreamed that they were forging a union that would one day touch the world with the five fold message of Jesus Christ as Savior, Sanctifier, Baptizer in the Holy Spirit, Healer, and Coming King.

THE SPIRIT OF FALCON

In 1986 I spoke at the 75th anniversary of the 1911 merger and made the point that Falcon is known for the spirit of unity rather than the spirit of disunity that have marked much of Pentecostal History. The church now has experienced two mergers, the one at Falcon in 1911 and the one in Canon, Georgia, in 1915 that brought the Tabernacle Pentecostal Church and the Pentecostal Holiness Church into union. There has only been one major division in the history of the church, the one that produced the Congregational Holiness Church in 1921.

For its time, the 1911 merger was an ecclesiastical miracle, bringing two similar, but different churches into union. In our time it would be as if the Church of God of Cleveland, Tennessee, merged with the Pentecostal Holiness Church.

The Spirit of Falcon proved that the ties that bind were stronger than the walls that divide. Would to God that the Spirit of Falcon could come alive again in this our day and bring together Pentecostal brothers and sisters of like precious faith into the unity that Jesus prayed for in John 17, "that they may be one as I and the Father are one that the world may believe that you have sent me." So be it!