

THE BAPTIST HOME STORY

Compassionate LifeCare since 1913

ARCADIA VALLEY • CHILLICOTHE • OZARK

Reflecting God's love in ministry to senior adults

The Baptist Home Grew From One Couple's Heart

In the forward to her history of The Baptist Home at Ironton, Ira Ann Hawkins makes the following observation: "What started as a history of The Baptist Home at Ironton turned into a history of the people of The Baptist Home---those who worked here, those who have supported it every step of the way. There was no other way."

Those words are especially appropriate when writing about the founders of The Baptist Home, Milford Riggs and his wife, Mary. It would not be too great an exaggeration to say that there would have been no Baptist Home, at least not in 1913, without the vision, determination and hard work of the Riggs.

When The Baptist Home opened its doors to its first "inmate" (as all residents of institutions were called at the time), it was the culmination of a dream and a calling for Milford Riggs. He had been a Baptist pastor in Missouri since 1890 and an early pioneer in Baptist development causes in our state.

While he was serving as a traveling speaker and fund-raiser for the Orphans Home, the plight of elderly Baptists---especially retired Baptist ministers, their wives and widows---began to weigh heavily on his heart.

After a lifetime of service to congregations, many of the Baptist preachers of that day lived in extremely meager circumstances, being dependent on family, the churches or "poor farms" of local county governments.

Make Ample Provision

Without sentimentality, Riggs later would editorialize in the *Word and Way* that "the Humane Society would cause the arrest of a man who would work his horse till he was



Milford and Mary Riggs on the grounds of The Baptist Home in Ironton (Arcadia Valley).

old and worn out and then turn him out unfed and unsheltered... Our denomination ought to feel itself disgraced by a condition of this kind. We ought to make ample provision for our aged and afflicted ministers whose indigent circumstances make help necessary."

First Home

By 1913, the Riggs had leased a house in Ironton and had established a board of trustees for The Baptist Home for the Aged. Emerson Mansion, as the first house was known, proved to be too small within only one year because of the numerous residents and a long list of requests for admittance.

Smith Sanitarium, a 27-room former osteopathic hospital, was purchased in 1914, and the 175-acre R.D. Lewis estate was purchased in 1919. The original building of the present Baptist Home at Ironton, now known as the Riggs-Scott Building, was completed in 1923. One can only wonder what it must have been like to round a curve on a gravel road in what was then a remote part of

the state and see the magnificent hilltop structure.

No Funds

David O. Moore, in his pamphlet on the Riggs in the Missouri Baptist Heritage Series, pointed out that when the couple established the first home, they had furnishings and food supplies but not a cent in the treasury. It was truly a work of faith.

Riggs rightly may be called "the father of development" among Baptists of Missouri,

Moore wrote. He was innovative and tireless in raising funds for the Home.

Mary Riggs was equally indefatigable in her ministry to the Home. In the early days she sometimes was the nurse, cook and laundress for all the residents. Though her efforts may not have been as visible to those outside the Home family, she was a full and equal partner in their significant ministry.

There is a note of sadness at the end of the Riggs's service to The Baptist Home. In spite of their tireless efforts on behalf of the Home, the default of payment of interest on annuities and bonds led to some severe criticism of the Home's management. All of their work could not defeat the Great Depression.

At age 65 and in declining health, Milford Riggs resigned as superintendent of the Home in April 1932. The couple departed Ironton at the end of that month.

Although he would live 15 more

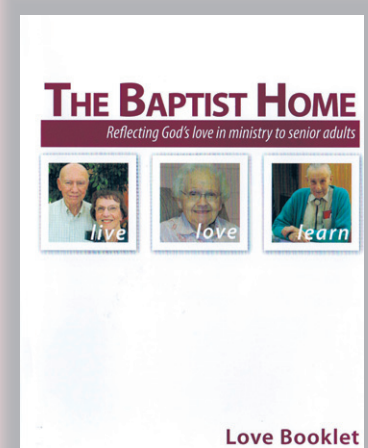
years, Riggs never returned to the Home. After his death and shortly before her own, Mary returned to visit friends in the Arcadia Valley, but she did not visit the Home.

The foundation laid by Milford and Mary Riggs now supports the original work at Ironton (now referred to as The Baptist Home at Arcadia Valley) as well as The Baptist Home in Chillicothe and in Ozark. The policies of benevolence, of seeking support from a wide-ranging donor base and of ensuring a caring, Christian environment for all residents has continued under later leadership. It is a legacy entrusted to all Missouri Baptists by the Riggs.

JWN

It is Because of You...

When considering a gift for The Baptist Home, remember that a gift of money is not your only option. Though monetary gifts are important there is always a need for a helping hand or another smiling face on campus. Getting involved is easy and very rewarding! For more information on ways you can help support the ministry of The Baptist Home, call 573-546-2709 and request your **free copy** of the *Love Booklet* or e-mail bbarton@thebaptisthome.org.



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