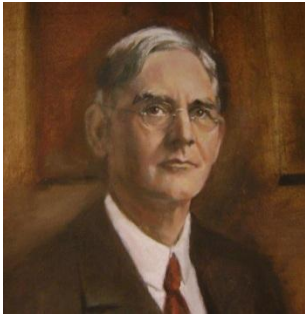


## Who Was the Man the Church Is Named For?



In 1933 the name of the church was changed from the Hiawassee Baptist Church to McConnell Memorial Baptist Church in honor of Dr. F.C. McConnell – Fernando Cuello McConnell. Dr. McConnell was never a pastor of the church, but he played a huge role in the community by establishing and guiding the school known as Hiawassee Academy.

Affectionately called “Ferd” McConnell, he was born and raised in Hiawassee, the son of a wealthy merchant – W.R. “Bill” McConnell. His mother – Jane McConnell – was reading a novel about a “Robin Hood” style Spanish pirate named Fernando Cuello when Ferd was born. She so admired the hero of the story that she named her newborn son after him. Ferd must have been proud of his name for he named his firstborn son Fernando Cuello, Jr., and the name continued through at least one more generation. However, there is a letter in the church files from Ferd’s younger brother, Samuel Elisha McConnell, which states that he was sure glad his mother was reading the Bible when he was born.

Ferd was born on August 2, 1856, six years before the outbreak of the Civil War. He could only get eight grades of elementary education in Hiawassee, so he felt severely handicapped for several years. After Ferd was married and had two children he decided to go back to school at the age of 24. He had to leave the county to do that, but earned his high school diploma in North Carolina from Hayesville High School, then called the Hicksville Academy.

Dr. McConnell’s dream upon graduation was to establish a high school in Hiawassee. With financial help from his father and assistance from several friends, he established Hiawassee Academy, naming his cousin George W. Truett as the school’s first principal. Ferd went on to Mercer University and to seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, and in the years following, pastored six churches in Georgia, Virginia, Texas and Missouri. Although he never lived in Hiawassee again, he never forgot his roots. Coming home each year for a vacation, he conducted seminars for the pastors in Towns County who lacked the training that he had enjoyed. On at least one occasion, Dr. McConnell conducted revival at the church that resulted in several salvations. Throughout his life he kept his hand on the pulse of Hiawassee Academy, guiding it through several crisis situations.

Dr. McConnell served the Georgia Baptist Convention and the Southern Baptist Convention in several capacities. He was on the first board of directors of the Christian Index after it was acquired by the Georgia Baptist Convention in 1920. He served as Secretary of the Home Mission Board from 1901 to 1903, and it was his influence there that resulted in the

Home Mission Board acquiring Hiawassee Academy as the first of seventeen Baptist sponsored high schools in the north Georgia mountains. He was a popular “favorite son” of Hiawassee and a respected servant of the Lord in Baptist circles nationwide.

The next historical article will relate the crisis events that led to the church changing its name to honor Dr. McConnell.