

God can use any willing servant

by ALAN LEFEVER | Director, Texas Baptist Historical Collection

As the Civil War was drawing to a close in 1865, a 22-year-old soldier from Texas returned to Caldwell after being injured in the Battle of Mansfield in Louisiana. The young man bore both the physical scars of war and the emotional scars of divorce and heartbreak. Although baptized as a boy, he quickly asked for his name to be removed from the church roll because he remained unconverted. The church's refusal to honor his request, as well as his failed marriage, made him openly hostile to Christianity. In fact, when chaplains came to preach to the troops, he often mounted a stump and spoke against Christianity, many times attracting larger crowds than the preachers. Before he was wounded, he told friends he never would darken the door of a church again.

He did not keep his vow for long, as he soon acquiesced to the wishes of his mother and attended a Methodist camp meeting. The preacher asked, "You that stand aloof from Christianity and scorn us simple folk, what have you got?" Moved by the preacher's question, the young man responded to the invitation by walking down the church's aisle on his crutches at the close of the meeting, still not sure what he was feeling. When he returned home that night, after a conversation with his mother, he realized he had found God. He spent the night reading *Pilgrim's Progress*, and by the next morning, knew he not only had been converted, but also called by God to preach.

A few days after his conversion experience, this young man, B.H. Carroll, was baptized and quickly began working with Texas Baptists. During his 49 years of ministry, Carroll served Texas Baptists in a variety of ways. He was pastor of three churches, including First Baptist in Waco, where he ministered more than 29 years. Carroll played a major role in the formation of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, his fund-raising efforts saved Baylor University from financial ruin, and his commitment to ministerial training led to the establishment of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. All from a self-proclaimed infidel who, after a bad experience at a church and the heartbreak of divorce, once vowed never to darken the door of any church again.