For many years November has been the month set aside for the annual gathering of the tribes – the annual meeting of the Baptist General Association of Virginia. It was not always held in November.

In the beginning it was held in the warm and pleasing weather month of June, which must have been more conducive for schedules and travel and horses. In fact, the meetings popularly were known as “the June meetings.”

The “Grand” old Association is a remarkable organization. Messengers come from affiliated churches and they are free to cast their opinions on business issues which may surface on the floor of the meetings.

Across the long years – dating from 1823 – there have been many issues and many strong-willed and highly-capable messengers; but the General Association seldom has known rancor in its deliberations. The messengers act like Virginians! They also act as Christians!

Let us say another word about the chief characteristic of Virginia Baptists: Courtesy. It runs like a thread from 1823 to date. There have been many differences of opinion and debates which were great and earnest.

There have been deep controversies stretching back to the anti-missions movement in the early 19th century. But courtesy ruled and at the end of the day, community prevailed.
Robert Healy Pitt, editor of the Religious Herald for a half-century and himself a president of the BGAV, once offered the following observation during a possibly volatile time. “The blessed and unbroken fellowship which has characterized Virginia Baptists found beautiful and impressive illustration. Not an unbrotherly word was spoken in public and in all our mingling privately we did not hear an inconsiderate or unreasonable utterance.”

“Of course, there were differences of opinion and discussion. No one man, however honored, respected and influential, could expect to get everything he wished. There was utmost freedom of opinion and discussion, but when at length conclusions were reached all fell into line heartily and gladly.”

Ministries like this one are made possible by the generous Cooperative Missions gifts of Virginia Baptist churches affiliated with the Baptist General Association of Virginia. Read more Kingdom Stories at BGAV.org/Blog.

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Fred Anderson, executive director of the Virginia Baptist Historical Society, is retiring in June 2017 after serving for 38 years. We’re sharing a few of his adapted stories about Virginia Baptists’ rich legacy. For the full stories, visit BGAV.org/Fred.