George Braxton Taylor, a native Virginian, had left the warmer winters of Middle Georgia to return to Virginia in 1894 when he accepted a “field of churches,” Liberty and Hebron in the Appomattox area. The winter of ’95 proved to be one of the coldest on record. One weekend began with a bitter wind, deep snow, and “the mercury standing at 24 degrees below freezing.” By Sunday there were clear skies but bone-chilling cold.

Hebron was 10 miles from the parsonage. The pastor’s head deacon, as well as his physician – who usually loaned him a horse – warned him not to attempt the journey. But as “the new pastor,” George Braxton Taylor did not want to miss a single service.

“I prepared myself for the bitter cold by putting on two overcoats, a pair of ‘arctics’ and leather leggings coming above my knees. The first lap of my walk was three miles up the railroad and, as the wind had swept away the snow, so far my path was clear. Next came four miles through the woods, an unbroken track. Neither wagon nor walker had passed this way since the last white fall.”

“The road was by no means easy. I was in danger of losing my way. There was not a dwelling on this road nor in sight. I became a human plow.”

“The farther into the woods I went the deeper the snow. On and on I trudged. Now I grew hot and almost faint and wondered whether my strength would fail me. The last mile was down a long hill and up another sunken road; the snow here was half a foot deep...
everywhere and, in drifts, many feet. This was for me a valley of humiliation and the ‘hill of difficulty.’”

“Now I wished I had not put on so many wraps. They became impediments. After two hours, I arrived at a deacon’s house. They caught their breath in surprise at seeing me. ‘Come in!’ There was the roaring open wood fire, big enough to roast an ox. ‘Up near the fire.’ Thank you, no; as far from it as possible!’ I was perspiring furiously and in danger of developing pneumonia.”

“After a bite to eat, in a buggy the other three miles were covered. I was on time at the church and there was a congregation of 49 who had come in 12 sleighs, by carriage and on horseback, little dreaming that their new pastor, city bred, would be there.”

Taylor’s story from an earlier century is remarkable on several accounts: his tenacity, his faithfulness, or his stubbornness. Who among us today would walk miles to church in deep snow drifts in freezing temperatures? And he was not alone. A congregation had assembled.

---

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.

For more information about the BGAV, contact:
Marilee White
Executive Director Assistant
Baptist General Association of Virginia
800.255.2428, ext. 1201
marilee.white@bgav.org

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.