

First Methodist Church, Bryan, Texas

Author unknown

c. 1950¹

Methodist in Bryan is as old as the town. Prior to establishment here, circuit riders had held some services at Ferguson Crossing on the Navasota River, as early as 1843 at Boonville up to 1866. Soon after the close of the War Between the States, the H. & T. C. Railroad, now a branch of the Southern Pacific System, continued its lines from Millican and by 1867 trains were reaching as far as where Bryan was growing up. Most of the businesses and inhabitants of Boonville moved to Bryan and a circuit was extended to include this busy place. Rev. H. V. Philpot was on the circuit in 1868 and 1869 and Rev. Robert Alexander was Presiding Elder of the District.

Bryan was made a station in 1869 and Rev. H. G. Horton was sent to it as a “supply”. After his superannuation (retirement) he wrote many interesting articles to the Texas Christian Advocate, one of which about 1902 tells of his experience in Bryan: “I was in Galveston on my way back from Georgia to my own conference when the Texas Conference convened and I was assigned to Bryan. When I reached it, the place was the biggest cotton market and the livest (sic) town in Texas. We had no church building. I preached on Sundays in an old theatrical hall with a saloon underneath – the theatre running six nights and the saloon seven days and nights in a week. The Railroad Company had donated a lot for our church. I immediately started a subscription list for building a church on the lot. T. T. Smothers gave \$100, Harvey Mitchell \$100, Capt. Trice \$100, five or six persons \$50 apiece, three \$20 and \$10 in many cases. The lumber man gave \$50. A large frame building was put up. Soon the walls rang with gospel and song. I asked Smothers to dedicate it, which he did, preaching an eloquent sermon. H. V. Philpot, James Addison, and a great crowd were present. Being a bachelor I had constructed a 14’ x 14’ room on a corner lot for a house and “boarded around”. Robert Alexander was my Presiding Elder. Some grand sermons I’ve heard from

¹ Editor’s note: This history was written prior to 1951, although the application for the Texas Historical marker was submitted in 1976.

him in that church. Bishop Marvin and Dr. O. Fisher preached for me there several times; yes, and Dr. Mood, B.T. Kavanaugh, and Homer S. Thrall.”

The “lot” referred to by Bro. Horton consisted of lots 6 and 7, Block 49, where the present brick building stands. The deeds were signed by W. R. Baker and A. Groesbeck, Agents, March 22, 1868. A consideration of \$1 was recorded and the record date seems to be Sept. 26, 1869. Trustees were L. J. Wilson, James Walker, Joseph Collins.

The “large frame building” was sold to a Negro Baptist group after more than thirty years of service. The first brick building was erected by 1902 in the pastorate of E. L. Shettles. It was heated by hot air conducted by wooden flues and burned down in 1906. The architect was F. E. Flanders of Dallas and the contractor was George Jenkins. Before he put any material on the ground he suffered an accident which caused his death. His brother, C. E. Jenkins, carried out the contract; and, after the fire of 1906, was awarded the contract to build the present building on the same foundation at a cost of \$16,000. This was during the pastorate of I. F. Betts.

During the 1920’s the building of classroom shacks was begun by the Men’s Class under the leadership of Oak McKenzie. These served for banquets and fellowship purposes as well as for small group meetings of many kinds. It was in this decade also that the three lots – 3, 4, & 5 – were bought from the Castles Estate and the rooms of the residence made into classrooms. During the pastorate of Rev. Ervin Jackson petitions [Ed. Note: probably “partitions] were knocked out of the lower story, posts and braces were put in, and the improvised Fellowship Hall now in use was constructed.

Rev. Jackson also succeeded in getting a brick parsonage erected on the Southwest corner of the lots, using lot 5 of the “Castles” yard. For many years two lots across the street west of the church had been the location of the parsonage. In 1941 under the pastorate of Ira F. Key these lots were given to the district; and as soon as the legal requirements of quarterly conference approval could be carried out throughout the district, Bryan instead of Marlin became the home of the District Superintendent and the Bryan District came into being. Rev. C. W. Lokey was superintendent then and he built the present district parsonage.

Rev. Key conceived the idea of accumulating funds for construction of additional buildings – education and recreational – on the ground where Fellowship Hall stands; and from the nucleus thus began the funds that build the present sanctuary grew.

Rev. W. R. Willis led in moving the parsonage to a tract donated by Mr. & Mrs. F. W. Kazmeier; and on the same site and the rest of lots 3 and 4 the sanctuary offices, and adult rooms were built under the leadership of Dr. Harry V. Rankin.

The Bryan church has experienced some great revivals, chief of which was that during the pastorate of E. L. Shettles in 1901 with Rev. George R. Stuart doing the preaching. More than one hundred were added to the church and the results still abide. The entire city was touched and all the churches were helped in many ways. Some years later under the pastorate of T. H. Morris the Methodists were joined by five other denominations in a cooperative revival with Rev. Lockett Adair of Dallas doing the preaching. Again the spiritual life of the city was helped up and some three hundred conversions were brought about, the Methodists receiving about one hundred ten of them.

Sunday School work began definitely about 1870 under the superintendency of H. M. Deckman. He was followed by Judge J. D. Thomas, W. B. Philpot, Mason D. Cole, T. S. Minter, R. O. Allen, C. M. Bethany, Oak McKenzie, Sam Crenshaw, R. C. Franks, Geo. W. Johnson, E. R. Bryant, and Theo Mahler. Sunday School after this became a part of Church School under a director of religious education, as it now is.

The first Ladies Aid Society was organized in 1883 with Mrs. J. W. Hall as president. Other names remembered in the early days were Mrs. W. H. Webb, Mrs. Mason D. Cole, Miss Lillie Hall, Mrs. J. W. Coulter, Mrs. R. H. Chatham, Mrs. Jim Mitchell, Mrs. J. D. Thomas, Mrs. Walter South, and Mrs. Dorcas A. Lawrence. To list all the services and the names and deeds of this department would take volumes; but suffice it to say that it has grown “in wisdom and stature and in favor” with the whole church because of the loyalty and devotion to the cause.

Pastors assigned by the annual conferences over the eighty-five years are as follows: H. V. Philpot, H. G. Horton, S. C. Littlepage, N. A. Craven, C. S. Smith, A. E. Goodwin, F. T. Mitchell, F. J. Mezell, T. A. Buchanan, E. D. Mouzon, J. F. Follins, C. R. Lamar, Geo. W. Briggs, J. B. Cochran, E. L. Shettles, I. F. Betts, J. B. Turrentine, Thos. H. Morris, Glenn Flinn, C. T. Talley, E. W. Solomon, P. T. Ramsey, H. C. Willis, H. H. McCain, R. S. Marshall, E. J. Harris, T. B. Elrod, Irvin Jackson, Ira F. Key, W. R. Willis, Guy H. Wilson, and Harry V. Rankin. (Jas. Heflin supplied after the death of Ira F. Key in 1943.)

Names recorded in the preceding paragraphs are only a few of the most prominent in service. Among others whose piety and loyalty may be written of in bright pages are Dr. and Mrs. John H. Webb, Mrs. Deport Smythe, Walter H. South, Mrs. Doskie Tiebout, Mrs. Matie Barton Hall, The Ayers Family, Mrs. D. Nicke, Sr., Mr. & Mrs. T. J. Dearing, Mrs. Mattie Webb, Mr. & Mrs. D. M. Mize, Sr., Miss Lillie Hall, Mrs. Cynthia Castles, Mrs. S. M. Derden, Mr. & Mrs. J. N. Cole, Mrs. J. W. Johnson, Capt. and Mrs. W. E. Saunders, Mrs. Mattie Johnson, Mr. & Mrs. Hammit Hardy, Mr. & Mrs. E. C. Harder, Mr. & Mrs. T. P. Wooten, Mrs. Rosa Stubeurauch, Mrs. P. A. E. Collins, Mrs. Josie Lawrence, Mrs. D. A. Lawrence, Dr. W. H. Lawrence, J. H. Allen, R. O. Allen, Malcolm Carnes, C. E. Jenkins, Mrs. Hattie Welch, Mrs. Mary Shelburne, Mr. & Mrs. E. Hall, R. S. Webb, Mr. & Mrs. J. H. Webb, A. M Waldrop, Mrs. E. J. Jenkins, Dr. G. W. Emory, Mrs. R. M. Dansby, T. A. Adams.

INSTITUTION OR ORGANIZATION CHECK LIST²

1. What is the exact name of this subject?

Site marker, on First United Methodist Church, Bryan, Texas
Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1868-1939: First Methodist Church, Bryan,
Texas 1939-1972: First United Methodist Church, Bryan, Texas 1972 to present.

2. When and where did the institution or organization originate?

Originated in 1868 as an organization of Methodist. First meeting place in Bryan over a saloon in a theatrical hall. (Brock and Groginsky store). [Handwritten insert: From 1866 to 1868 services were held by a circuit rider.] Before 1868, Bryan was on a circuit. Rev. H. B. Philpott was one of early circuit riders.

3. Who was the principal individual(s) responsible for the founding of the institution or organization?

Land was donated in 1861 by Houston and Texas Central Railway, and was accepted by the Texas Conference of the Methodist Church, after which the first frame building was constructed, and Rev. H. G. Horton was assigned in Nov. 1868, as the first minister.

4. Trace the ownership of the property on which the subject is, or as, located from patenting to present.

Baker and Groesbeck of Harris County, directors of the Houston and Texas Central Railroad, bought this land from William Joel Bryan, of Brazoria County, Texas, nephew and heir of Stephen F. Austin who inherited League No. 9 of Brazos County, that had been granted by the Mexican Government to Stephen F. Austin.

The lot consisted of lots 6 and 7, Block 49, where the present church stands. The deeds were signed by W. R. Baker and A. Groesbeck, Agents, March 22, 1868. A Consideration of \$1 was recorded and the record date seems to be Sept. 26, 1869. Trustees were L. J. Wilson, James Walker, and Joseph Collins.

² Ed note: This document is a questionnaire submitted to the Texas Historical Commission in 1976 as a part of the marker approval process.

5. Trace the physical facilities, including structures, of the subject throughout its existence.

In 1869 a subscription for a building was started. A large frame building was put up with an aisle down the middle, men and boys seated on one side and women and girls on the other. Soon the walls rang with gospel singing. In 1902 a brick building replaced this first building. J. F. Flanders of Dallas was the architect and George Jenkins of Bryan was the contractor. Plans were obtained from the Methodist Conference. The brick structure burned in 1906 and was replaced by the same type building.

This was used until 1951 when the present sanctuary was built on the opposite corner of the property in Gothic Style.

6. What has been the role of the subject in community issues?

This church has had numerous revivals and evangelist programs which had distinct effect on the community. The strict moral standards of the Methodist Church helped to improve conditions in Bryan and attracted many outstanding individuals to the community. All the Bishops of the Methodist Church, Texas Conference have visited the church. Several Mission churches were founded by First Methodist Church.

7. Is this subject affiliated with a state, national, or international organization?

Member of the Texas Conference of the United Methodist Church of the U.S.A.

8. Have any prominent individuals been associated with the local institution or organization?

Prominent citizens and local office holders as well as members of the faculty at A&M have been members. Ministers of this charge have often advanced to larger city churches. A number of the young persons in the church have assumed roles in the missionary field of the Methodist church and in the ministry.

9. If this subject is no longer a viable body, when and why did it cease to function?

Inapplicable.

10. State reasons for desiring to commemorate this institution or organization.

The organization is an old one – dating from 1868, a period of 108 years in the city of Bryan. The church has been located on the property to be marked since 1869, so it is felt that this long, continuous life in the community is historically important and has enriched the lives of those living in Bryan and those who are members (past and present) of the church.

11. Attach a bibliography or list of published or printed material, a list of oral interview sources and dates, and the name(s) and address(es) of the author(s) of this historical narrative.

Attached are pictures of church. History compiled at the 100 birthday of the church is available.

References:

Deed Records, Brazos Co. Court House, Book I, page 469.

Texas Christian Advocate, 1902, Sections reprinted in Bryan Eagle May 8, 1934, Author Rev. H. G. Horton.

C. E. Jenkins, “History of the Methodist Church in Bryan.”

“The Early History of Bryan, Texas,” by Lois Wilcox. Thesis M.A. Univ. of Texas 1952.

Narrative by C. M. Bethany, April 16, 1953, member of church 1902, now deceased.

Centennial Supplement, “A Century in Growth of Our Church Building Program,” by Will K. Gibbs, July 1968.