

The First Presbyterian Church of Huntsville, Texas has a very long and colorful history dating back to 1848. This history has been researched and recorded in a publication by Dr. Ronald D. Johnson.

A great debt of thanks is owed to Ron Johnson. Journeys to far off places, untold hours of research, study and writing, have all gone into this volume of work. Collecting and organizing the data for writing this history were certainly made easier by the efforts of those who had written historical sketches previously and other volumes of historical information. Mr. Jack Embrey, Dr. H.F. Estill, Col. A. T. McKinney, Col. William J. Blythe, Sr. and Mr. Norman Peerce have all made historical contributions in the past that Ron was able to use in the preparation of this book.

It was for Ron Johnson a labor of love, but, for our Church it is a significant stone to set along the path on which those who come after may tread. Though this chapter may close, the story does not. We have brought the faith this far and there are those among us who will carry it on. God awaits in the future for those yet unborn who will themselves nurture what we leave. It is to them that this work is truly given, and it is in their anticipation that we pray God's richest blessings.

Below are some excerpts from Dr. Johnson's publication.

The Early Days

The First Presbyterian Church of Huntsville was organized on the "last Sabbath of June, 1848" by the Presbytery of the Brazos, with the Rev. Peter H. Fullenwider presiding as Moderator. FPC Huntsville became the fifth Presbyterian Church in Texas, the established Presbyterian Church in the United States having organized churches at San Augustine in 1838; and in Houston, Independence, and Austin in 1839.

While Texas was a part of Mexico, only the Roman Catholic Church was permitted, Protestantism being strictly and rigorously excluded. This religious climate continued until, and indeed, it was one of the prime causes of the Texas Revolution, which terminated in the victory of San Jacinto. Thenceforth, the way was clear for Protestant forces to advance into the heart of the "Lone Star Republic." However, Presbyterians had actually drifted into Texas much earlier.

Josiah H. Bell and his wife, Mary Evelyn, crossed the Sabine going west on April 22, 1821, which might be considered the date that Cumberland Presbyterianism came to Texas. Bell was Stephen F. Austin's right-hand man and was honored and respected throughout the colony.

The initial exhorter of Presbyterianism in pre-Republic days, however, was Sumner Bacon, who came from Arkansas in 1828 to become the first resident minister to make his home in Texas. He settled near San Augustine and from there conducted his extensive missionary work to include numerous visits to the early communities of Huntsville, Anderson, Navasota and Crockett. He was joined by newly arriving

Presbyterian ministers; and, in 1841 with the help of Rev. Andrew Jackson McCown, a soldier of San Jacinto, organized a Cumberland Presbyterian congregation in Huntsville. A few years later this congregation erected the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in downtown Huntsville on 11th Street, the current site of Walker County Hardware. The Cumberland Presbyterian congregation disbanded in 1886.

Founding Pastor Rev. Fullenwider actually arrived in Texas in the spring of 1834 when Spanish statutes prohibited protestant ministers and church services in the Mexican Territory. He was the first Presbyterian minister to take up residence in Texas.

As the first settled minister of the Presbyterian Church of the United States in Texas, on October 7, 1835, Rev. Fullenwider made application to the State of Coahulia and Texas and received a land grant which was "situated between the Arroyos Navasota and Bedias" at a site "marked 'W' in the survey." The property is simply designated by boundary markers such as rocks; plum, oak, hickory and cottonwood trees; and stakes of various kinds. Total acreage is not mentioned in the land instrument Rev. Fullenwider and his wife, Belinda, taught school and sold Bibles in San Felipe de Austin under the direction of the Missionary Committee of the Presbytery of Mississippi. During the "runaway scrape" in the spring of 1836, having acquired the title of "Old Ranger," Rev. Fullenwider was commissioned by General Sam Houston to conduct families to the "Stone Fort" at Nacogdoches. Following the death of his little girl, he and his grief-stricken wife returned to Mississippi in 1837.

On July 26, 1837, the Executive Committee of the Synod of Mississippi appointed Rev. Fullenwider to "labor for three months in Texas as a Missionary." He thus became the first Presbyterian missionary in Texas appointed by the Mississippi Presbytery. From this appointment he became an itinerant minister following the Presbytery's desires that "in all suitable places you will encourage the establishment of Sabbath Schools, prayer meetings, and such means as in your estimation are calculated to advance the interest of the Redeemer's Kingdom."

The Brazos Presbytery was established on April 3-6, 1840, at Chriesman's Schoolhouse near Independence, Texas; and Rev. Fullenwider was received on April 4, 1844, into the Brazos Presbytery from the Mississippi Presbytery. There are recordings of his active participation in the Brazos Presbytery, serving at times as Moderator, and of his continuing urging that a college of learning be established at Huntsville. For a number of years Rev. Fullenwider preached at various times at Montgomery, Huntsville, Danville, Anderson and Bethel before settling in Huntsville in 1847. Wherever he went, he sought to awaken interest in establishing a college for Christian education. Rev. Fullenwider died of yellow fever in 1867.

The congregation on the Sunday FPC Huntsville was founded included Samuel A. Moore, three members of his family and their servant, Ann; Robert Matthews; and his wife; Lucinda Cummings; George and Anne Allen; and Stephen D. C. Abbott. One year later this congregation was joined by Major Joseph W. Hampton, Dr. J. H. Smith, Col. A. H. Cook, Flavius I. Taylor, Alex McGilvery, Margaret I. Hume

and Jane Catherine Hamilton. In 1850 individuals received by letters to the Session included members of the Edward Jardin, Theo Baker, Robert Brown and A. Gordon families, Roena Crawford, Nancy Goodan, Margaret Causer, Margaret Galespie and Mrs. Alexander.

In 1853, Jim and Nancy Hamilton were received into the church by profession of faith. They were the Negro slaves of Dr. Calvin S. and Jane Catherine Hamilton.

FPC and Austin College

The Brazos Presbytery had a Presbyterian college in Texas on its agenda since a meeting in Columbia, Texas, on April 4, 1844. After efforts to settle on a location and receipt of \$10,000 in contributions from citizens of Huntsville, solicited by Dr. Daniel Baker, it was decided to establish the college in Huntsville at a site on a hill south of town. After rejection of the name San Jacinto College, proposed by FPC Huntsville, Dr. Baker's refusal to have the college bear his name, and a Presbyterian General Assembly notation that a "Texas Presbyterian College" had been proposed elsewhere, the name Austin College was chosen in honor of Texas patriot Stephen F. Austin.

On November 22, 1849, Texas Governor George Wood signed the Charter for Austin College which had been presented to him by S.D.C. Abbott (the second Elder of FPC Huntsville) and two other Elders on behalf of the Brazos Presbytery. The following members of the Board of Trustees were elected: Rev. Daniel Baker, D.D.; Daniel Dennison Atchinson; Andrew Jackson Burke; John Hume; Abner Smith Lipscomb; George Clark Red; James Carroll Smith; Joseph Wade Hampton; Henderson Yoakum; Dr. John Branch; and General Sam Houston.

Rev. Baker served as financial agent for the new college and was able to secure nearly \$100,000 from the eastern states and a gift from Rev. Benjamin Chase of Mississippi of 10,000 acres of Texas land as an endowment. General Houston was a trustee of Austin College from its founding to his death.

The early pastors of FPC Huntsville were in active support of college and seminary training in Texas. This followed the typical pattern of Presbyterians who insisted on an educated clergy rather than an unlearned, itinerant-type of preaching and evangelizing ministry.

Dr. Samuel McKinney, from Holly Springs, Mississippi, FPC Huntsville's fourth pastor, was the first president (sometimes referred to as principal) of Austin College. He served from 1850-1853 and was also elected to serve a second stint as the fifth president of Austin College from 1862 to 1871.

Dr. Daniel Baker, the second pastor of FPC Huntsville, succeeded Dr. McKinney as the second president of Austin College from 1853 to 1857. During his tenure, the Texas State Education Commission met at Austin College on June 16, 1854; and there were expressions of surprise and appreciation for the fine facilities and quality of education under Dr. Baker's leadership.

Rev. A. E. Thom, FPC Huntsville's seventh pastor, was the third president of Austin College with the title of Acting President for one year in 1857-58. He was succeeded by FPC Huntsville's ninth pastor, Dr. Rufus W. Bailey, the college's fourth president, who served from 1858 to 1862. Dr. Bailey had such a keen mind and ready wit that he became known as the "Walking Library."

The sixth president of Austin College during 1871 to 1878 was Rev. Samuel M. Lockett, who served as FPC Huntsville's 11th pastor. Rev. Lockett was also re-elected to the presidency in 1887 and retired in 1897. He was president when the decision was made by the Synod to relocate Austin College to Sherman, Texas, separating it from Sam Houston Normal Institute. Records seem to reflect this as a purely financial decision. However, there was an undertone of dissatisfaction with the small number of ministerial graduates, thus ending a dream born in Huntsville to have a Presbyterian college in this city. Austin College began classes in Sherman on October 2, 1876.

Although not a previous pastor of FPC Huntsville, ordained Elder H. F. Estill became Sam Houston's fifth president in 1908 when it was called Sam Houston Normal Institute. He was a member of the Institute's first graduating class and on the faculty for 26 years before beginning his 29-year term as president. His tenure was the longest of any of the institution's 11 executives, serving from 1908-1937. Under his administration the institution was renamed Sam Houston State Teachers College. Estill was President Emeritus and Professor of History when he died in 1942.

Rev. Fullenwider, FPC Huntsville's first pastor, was one of the early trustees of the College and supervisor of Christian education in Texas; and FPC Huntsville's sixth pastor, Rev. N. A. Penland, was on the faculty as Professor of Ancient Languages. These pastor-educators often served as pastors of churches while earning most of their livelihood by pursuit of the teaching profession. The shortage of educated Presbyterian ministers often meant that congregations of 10 to 50 members had to share part-time pastors with other congregations, with worship services and preaching on a once- or twice-a-month basis.

Church Property and Buildings

During its first 150 years, FPC Huntsville has worshiped in three newly constructed church buildings (1856, 1899, and 1956) in two locations, with major additions and renovations made to its last structure in 1975. After its organization as a church on June 25, 1848, the congregation worshiped in the county courthouse; the Cumberland Presbyterian Church building, and the Chapel at Austin College.

1855-1955

FPC Huntsville, anxious to have a suitable building of its own, executed a deed for the site of its first church structure on March 14, 1855, and acquired a lot on the northwest corner of Lamar and Main Street (13th and University), now the location of the HNB Professional Building, on which to begin construction of a house of worship. The building committee appointed by the Session included Dr. Daniel Baker (the church's second pastor), James H. Murray and Gen. John S. Besser. The first building was completed during 1856.

Feeling that the new building must have a bell to peal the invitations to worship and to toll the memorials at funerals and at joyous occasions, Judge James A. Baker and Gen. John S. Besser gave a magnificent bell which is in use to this day. The bell bears an inscription "Cast by A. Fulton in 1851 in Philadelphia, Pa."

The 1856 building was torn down and replaced by a new house of worship on the same site, which was completed in April, 1899. Building committee members consisted of Dr. H. F. Estill, Chairman; Col. A. T. McKinney; J. W. Clark; Rev. Luther W. Barron (the church's 17th pastor); Miss L. W. Elliott; and Mrs. J. W. Parish. This committee supervised each detail, including the acquisition of a stained glass window which also became part of the church's 1956 and 1975 structures.

In a March 6, 1899, regular meeting of the Session, the Clerk of Session was directed to notify the children of Judge James A. Baker of the "cordial approval by the Session to place a memorial window in the new church in memory of Judge Baker, once an elder in this church, and of his wife, one of its first members." Known as the "Christ Window," it was incorporated into the church's 1956 structure and now graces the entrance to the Ben Young Memorial Chapel today.

During the construction period of the 1899 building, the congregation met for worship in the old Opera House over the New York Store. The building which once housed these facilities is still in existence at the corner of 12th and University.

True to Presbyterian tradition at the time, the building, while completed in April 1899, was not dedicated until all indebtedness had been satisfied. On Sunday, January 31, 1904, a happy assemblage, in elaborate ceremony, sang praises to God and, in an eloquent sermon by Pastor Daniel Penick Junkin, finally dedicated its "new" building. This building served as the house of worship from 1899 through 1955.

1955-1973

In November 1955, the 1899 building was sold to the Huntsville National Bank. The bank's offer of purchase was for \$30,000 total or for \$27,500, not including the windows, floor coverings and furnishings. Church records reflect the acceptance of the \$30,000 offer. However, some of the windows and furnishings were used in the construction of the new building at 19th Street and Avenue R. In

addition to the Christ Window, the stained glass "Faith Window" also came from the 1899 building and can be found at the street entrance to the Chapel in the small room across from the Prayer Room. The stained glass "Hope and Charity Window" from the 1899 structure now enhances the Prayer Room. All three windows were highlighted in the church's 150th Anniversary Edition of its pictorial directory. Other stained glass windows for the 1899 church building exist in private residences and buildings elsewhere in Huntsville.

On November 10, 1955, the trustees negotiated with Robert Smither et al for the purchase of the lots at 19th and R Streets for the parking lot and new building site. This transaction was for \$8,000; however, Mr. Smither gave the church \$3,500 as a gift toward the purchase. Using the proceeds from the sale of the old church building and raising an additional \$35,000 through the sale of bonds to members and friends, FPC Huntsville's congregation built a new colonial-style edifice. During the construction of the building, the congregation met for worship in the U.S. Army Reserve Training Center building.

The architect for the 1956 structure was Hiram A. Saulsbury, and the bid of \$62,864 of R. S. Petersen for construction was accepted by the church. Ground was broken on February 12, 1956; and the building was completed in September, 1956, at a cost of \$77,526.83, including the lot purchase. The Building Committee for the new church consisted of G. H. Balthrop, Chairman; Mrs. E. J. Ezell; Mrs. G. W. Locke, Lud E. King, Jr.; and W. F. Fortner. A separate Finance Committee was comprised of G. W. Richards, Chairman; John Phillips; Elmer Frede; and Mrs. H. O. Leigh.

On August 6, 1956, the Session set Sunday, September 16, for the consecration of the new building with a 10:30 a.m. worship service and open house from 3-5 p.m. An invitation was extended to the community to share its joy at being in the new location.

By 1964 the Christian Education Program had grown to the point that more space was needed. Through the generous gift in 1963 of readily saleable buildings and property by Mrs. Stace Westmoreland, a member of the church, and also the generosity of W. A. Parish, a native of Huntsville, an educational wing was built in 1964 without an increase in indebtedness. At the same Called Congregational Meeting when plans, specifications, and costs were approved for the proposed addition to the church school, the congregation also approved bricking of the present building. Proceeds from the sale of the Westmoreland property were also used to pay the debt on the lots adjoining the church property. The church became debt free in 1970 with the redemption of outstanding Broadway Bonds which were issued initially in 1956.

On April 13, 1971, the Board of Deacons reported that a contract had been awarded to construct a parking lot for the church on church property at a cost of \$10,369.60. For permission to use the lot for parking during the week at such times that their use would not conflict with the church's use, the Huntsville Independent School District contributed \$6,100 toward the cost of the construction.

1973-Present

On October 18, 1973, preliminary plans were received by the Session for a proposed new addition to the existing facilities. The Building Committee appointed by the Session consisted of John Haney, Chairman; Winona Blalock; Bill Carmichael; Miller Erwin; Lilla Mae Gray; Gordon Stewart; and Bill Toney. On January 19, 1975, at 7 p.m. with 115 members present, the church voted unanimously to approve the construction of the added facilities and renovation project with financing by a loan from Bryan Building and Loan for approximately \$449,466. The architects were Shaw, Gray, and Wolfe, with furnishings by L. L. Sams Co. On January 21, 1975, a contract was awarded Nash Construction Co. of Huntsville for construction of the new Sanctuary, educational facilities, and certain remodeling at a cost of \$400,349 with construction time of 270 days. While the remodeling was taking place, the minister's Study was temporarily relocated to 10th and Avenue M in the office building for Davis, Davis, Durham, and Schulze, Attorneys, who also provided the minister with a receptionist and answering service.

As part of the overall remodeling and new construction in 1975-76, a part of the Sanctuary built in 1956 was converted to a Chapel. On September 1, 1976, the Session named this Chapel the Ben W. Young Memorial Chapel, following an offer by Mrs. Ben W. Young, Sr. to reimburse the church for the cost of redecorating the Chapel and for providing a bride's room and also 50 hymnals in memory of her late husband. However, the pulpit and two chairs from the 1899 church building are still in use in the Chapel. The Chapel was dedicated in December, 1976.

Many of the furnishings, windows and pews for the new Sanctuary were given as memorials to present and past members and friends of the church. Previous memorial records are scant, except for a "Book of Memorials" in the Narthex and a plaque in the Ben Young Memorial Chapel.

Housing for the Pastors

In 1886 the church purchased a lot and constructed a manse across the street south of the church at the corner of what is now University and 13th Street, the current site of the parking lot for the Region VI Education Service Center. This building was occupied until its sale in 1900.

That same year, the Session appointed a committee of Pastor W. T. Ahrenbeck, as Chairman, with Elders Col. A. T. McKinney and Professors J. W. Clark and H. F. Estill as members for the construction of a new manse. This building was also located at University and 13th Street but on the west side of the church on an existing lot between the current location of the HNB Professional Building and the Donut Wheel. Thereafter, the Session and Diaconate Minutes are replete with problems of a recurrent leaky roof and windows and doors and steps in perpetual need of repair.

Anticipating the call of a new minister and realizing the current manse was inadequate, on August 8, 1966, the congregation authorized the Diaconate to repair and sell the manse and also to appoint a five-member committee (two to be women) to survey the situation relative to purchasing a new manse.

On July 9, 1967, the congregation authorized the church's Trustees to sign all documents closing on the purchase of a newly constructed four-bedroom home at 201 Elmwood in Forest Hills. That home served as the manse until September, 1980, when it was sold and the church got out of the manse business. Since that time a housing allowance has been included as part of the pastor's terms of call.

Historical Marker and Lot Purchase

Texas Historical Marker

In May, 1990, the Session accepted a gift of an outdoor flag pole and American and Christian flags from Miller Erwin in memory of his father. One month later a ceremony was held on the front lawn to dedicate an Official Texas Historical Marker donated by Col. and Mrs. William J. Blythe, Sr. Installation of the Marker had been approved by the Texas Historical Commission in Austin recognizing the historical significance of FPC Huntsville to the community.

In anticipation of celebrating the church's 140th Anniversary in 1988, an attractive display case was constructed in the Narthex to house some of the church's memorabilia. The lighted, glass-enclosed case was designed and constructed by Elder J. B. Snodgrass, who was on the active rolls of the church from October 29, 1939, until his death on June 7, 1993. Also, in 1988 four stained glass windows from the second church building were found in storage at the Sam Houston Memorial Museum complex. They were salvaged by Mrs. Grace Longino Cox, former Museum Director, from the 1899 structure at the time of its demolition. These windows were returned to FPC Huntsville and were restored and double-mounted in the Narthex by Arthur W. Morton and John R. (Jack) King. An additional stained glass window from the 1899 building is in a local antique shop, three are in the homes of local citizens, and one is on display in the Sam Houston Memorial Museum.

One major change in the outside appearance of the church building was the restructuring of the original flat roof to a hip roof as part of the \$111,307 roofing contract completed in 1995. Also, during the summer of 1995 a completely refurbished Nursery was put into service following the swapping of the location of the Nursery with the Chancel Choir rehearsal and robing rooms.

Perhaps little known to many members of the congregation is that, through a transfer of 1,000 shares of Wal-Mart stock by anonymous donors in 1989, a trust account was established at First National Bank the income from which is to be used exclusively for building maintenance and repairs. The account funds may not be used for landscaping, new construction, debt repayment, or for other operating expenses.

Purchase of Lot in 1997

In April, 1997, the church was extended a rare opportunity to purchase additional property for any possible expansion of the church parking lot or the erection of another structure in the future. Giving first preference to FPC Huntsville, local realtor Ben Bius, who owned the lot directly behind the church parking lot, offered to sell to the church for \$15,000 0.6711 acres of a plat consisting of 1.24 acres and identified as part of Reserve Area "A" of Resubdivision of Block 11, Highland Addition No. 3. Bius intended to use the remaining portion of the land for the construction of an apartment complex.

In a Called Meeting on Sunday, April 20, the congregation approved such a purchase.