

First United
Methodist Church

1855-2005

150 years

Serving God In Love

In the year 1855, a group of Methodist in Fairfield organized what would become the First United Methodist Church.

While much has changed over the last 150 years much is still the same.

First United Methodist Church in the year 2005 is still a community of believers, who like those charter members in 1855, still strive to serve God in love.

This short history tells our story. We hope that our story will inspire those who read it, and will encourage its readers to continue to serve God in love.

Rev. Wayne Flowers

December 11, 2005

The History of the Fairfield First United Methodist Church

There were many denominations located in the county. Two multiplied rapidly, the Methodist and Baptist each being close rivals for first place in numbers from the earliest foothold. There were lay preachers and lay readers in each settlement which were at work by 1850.

In Fairfield a Union church was established consisting of several denominations that met in the court house, and by 1851 the first church was built. The Methodist held their service on the second and fourth Sundays. The Texas Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church appointed George W. Burrows to serve Fairfield in 1855. The Methodist movement, however, indicated its social concern at an early date. One historian stated, "Though all major denominations made some effort to reach slaves, the Methodist led the way. The Fairfield Methodist Circuit led by ministers and laymen organized the Trinity African Mission before 1858.

The Union Church burned about 1872 or 1873 and soon after, a meeting of the leading citizens was called to discuss building a new church. The majority of the men attending pledged \$100 and immediately began a campaign for funds. William Bradley, a devoted Methodist, told the men that if they would build a Methodist Church he would increase his pledge to \$1,000. Jess Anderson, Jim Anderson, John Cullison, Francis Frank Tate, Dee Bradley, William Peck, Hiram Stubbs, and William Watson were in attendance. Upon finding out that Mr. Stubbs and Mr. Watson were the only Baptist, Mr. Stubbs withdrew his money and Mr. Watson gave \$100 provided the men would help build a Baptist Church next.

There was \$3,000 collected for the building. Mr. Jess Anderson and Mr. John Cullison, who were skilled carpenters, began work at once. The new Methodist Church was dedicated on the second Sunday in October 1876 with Rev. J.S. Shaw of Mexia officiating.

The first church was a colonial type with a wide porch all across the front and large pillars. The steps extended across the entire front. The south half of the block was purchased by Mr. Peck and the trustees for \$125.00 in gold from Mr. James H. Moody in March 1876.

Most of the ministers serving the Church until the late 1800's were circuit riders who held "basket" services as well as camp meetings for 25-50 families. Itinerate preachers held the revivals which was a social experience as well as a religious one.

The ladies of the Methodist Church have always been active.

"The Ladies Aid Society provided ice cream entertainment which afforded the young people a pleasant season of enjoyment." One of these events was held in July 1890 at the vacant store building of Captain Peck which was located on the west side of the square. The history of the Missionary Society dates back to 1878.

After the Fairfield Female College was torn down in 1900, Mrs. William Bradley presented the bell to the church where it continues to call the town people to worship.

In 1900 a terrible hurricane destroyed most of Galveston, and in 1902 a cyclone struck Fairfield. Several businesses and residences were damaged or destroyed including the Methodist Church which was severely damaged. In 1909 the church was moved to the corner lot, and the interior was changed. A parsonage was built where the church stood. The parsonage was erected at the cost of about \$2,600 while Reverend Tooke was pastor.

Brother I.O. Dent placed an article in the 1929 paper reporting that "the Missionary hens are coming in a very satisfactory way. However, we need a few more offerings, so lets honor the Lord with our substance (either hens or cash), and he has good price and a large free-will offering was made for the church.

It has been told that Brother Dent's wife would sit on the front porch of the parsonage in her rocking chair. The neighbors would know she was outside because she would sing as she rocked.

During a revival Pastor J.N. Vincent placed in the paper, "The next preaching services at the Methodist Church will be January 12, at that time I invite the citizenship generally to attend. If you do not get your money's worth, try it again." It may also be noted that Brother Vincent was known as the "marrying parson" since he joined many couples in succession. He would finish with one, and another would be knocking at the parsonage door.

In November 1933 after G. Condrey came to Fairfield, his family was awakened early Tuesday the 14th by a fire. “They escaped, but the story and half parsonage was lost and all contents including the church records. The flames threatened the Church building and the Tas Watson home, but fortunately the wind was not blowing in either direction. The fire is suppose to have started in the kitchen.”

Since all records were lost in the fire, members were asked to come for a special meeting at the church so the roll could be replaced.

Officials began work on Tuesday raising funds and announced Wednesday morning that dirt would be broken for a new parsonage on Thursday. By November 23, a contract for building the parsonage was let. Construction was begun as soon as the grounds were cleared of the rubble. B.F. Grounds and Sons were awarded the contract for lumber. Walter Vaughn, Luther and Lavelle McAdams did construction work; Clark and Miles completed paint and paper, and J.O. Swinburn donated brick work. Grounds donated a large part of their profits on building material.

In 1938 work began on a new sanctuary and was debt free when it opened for the first worship service in June. The brick building was complete, except for some needed in the basement. The cost for construction was \$10,000.

At the dedication in September “a corner stone was laid and several items were enclosed: Bible given to Pastor Willis by his grandmother in 1923 and used in his first sermon, copies of the Fairfield Recorder mentioning the progress of the building, a copy of its 60th anniversary edition containing historical matter, a history of the church written by Mrs. D.L. DuPuy, a stamp size booklet containing signatures of Mr. & Mrs. J.O. Swinburn and children living out of the state, and names of donor to pay cost of erection of the building.”

In the late forties, many of the members of the Mt. Zion Methodist Church transferred to this church. The Educational building valued at \$35,000, was completed in 1957 when Reverend Vodicka was pastor. Most of the planning and construction was done under the pastorship of Reverend Spann. Plans were drawn by an architect from Dallas, Howard McAdams. Mr. McAdams parents were former members Mr. & Mrs. Homer McAdams. This building provides space for the children and youth of the church even today.

A financial drive for the new sanctuary began in 1960 which would also include a fellowship room, kitchen, pastor’s study, church office and two to three

more class rooms. With a successful drive, Bentley-Ray & Associates of Cleburne were authorized to begin construction in 1964 at the cost of \$69,500.

Mrs. Mary Grace Lott Dent, wife of Reverend Frank Dent, was instrumental in obtaining a grant from the Moody Foundation. With a \$50,000 grant in the honor of W.L. Moody and the Moody-Bradley pioneer families of Freestone County, plans were made to include a new parsonage.

A three bedroom brick home was completed for \$17,500, and its location made possible by a gift of land by Mrs. Tas Watson, Sr. One week prior to the completion of the residence Reverend Bonner was transferred.

Our present sanctuary consists of 5,500 sq. ft. and a seating capacity of 250. Most of the building project was under the guidance of Rev. Bonner. Two corner stones from previous churches were placed on the side of the new church.

In 1970 additional property was obtained. Members of the Methodist Youth assisted in renovating the old house which became known as the "Youth building." The house was torn down and moved in 2005 to allow more room for growth.

The United Methodist Women of the church have always been active with ice cream socials, bake sales, Christmas bazaars, spaghetti suppers, and current Harvest Dinner. In 1974 the ladies first served turkey and dressing lunches to 250 people from 11:00 to 2:00 pm using the tiny old kitchen. It has been told that dirty dishes were handed out the kitchen window because of space constraints.

The dishes were taken to the parsonage where they were washed out with the water hose.

The new fellowship hall with the commercial kitchen has allowed the growth of the Harvest Dinner and Bake Sale. We now serve over 700, and the tickets are in great demand. The women and men of the church work diligently to make it a success. The Harvest Dinner not only provides funds it allows members to enjoy a time of fellowship.

In 1975 the carillon was given "To the Glory of God" and in loving memory of Arthur Lafayette Cameron by his wife Linnie Maude Shanks Cameron.

A memorial window made of faceted glass was placed to honor the memory of our departed loved ones and make the sanctuary a serene place of worship.

The 1980's brought about many changes. The Methodist Men's Club was formed. Additional property was purchased allowing additional parking, and the construction of a beautiful prayer park.

The current fellowship hall was built in 1984; it has a seating capacity of 350. The 5,667 sq. ft. addition includes a large commercial kitchen. The new Fellowship Hall has been a great asset for our church family.

The sanctuary was remodeled around 1989 which included the change of the choir loft. And GloriBells fill the church with God's spirit through their music ministry. The Narthex was built and dedicated in 1990 joining the sanctuary and educational wing allowing it to become one building.

With a concern for our children and youth of the community church members were called upon again. Members were asked to sponsor Boy Scout Troop 668. With stipulations in place it was approved. Trunk or Treat began in 1996; and one would have to wonder who has more fun, the children or adults. The young mothers of the community were helped with a Mother's Day Out program. In 1998 the education of our young children was addressed, and Noah's Ark preschool began.

One of the highlights of 1997 was a birthday party held for Ina Mae Williford who turned 100 in October. "Miss Mae" as she was affectionately known was a faithful member of this church. She passed away in May 2003.

During the last year Mark Woodward served here as minister the new church parsonage was purchased. Wayne Middleton was the first to move into the new parsonage in 1998. This allowed our youth minister the old parsonage for him and his family.

A sanctuary lamp was purchased in 2000, the flame originally kindled at the Altar of the Church of Nativity in Bethlehem. The fall pumpkin patch began in 2003 where children from local school come and enjoy hearing stories.

There are many community outreach programs. Our church supports several twelve-step groups, community food bank, Society of St. Stephens, Fairfield Ministerial Fellowship, 50 plus, services at the Fairview Nursing Center, U M Army, Christmas Eve Candlelight Service, prayer chain, Mother's Day Out, Noah's Ark Preschool, Bible School, the Pumpkin Patch, Trunk or Treat, Project Graduation, World Vision 30 hour famine with love loaves, and the Boy Scouts.

Each minister brings new ideas. Wayne Flowers has brought many changes which have enriched our church family. Bible studies are conducted throughout the week; and on Wednesday nights an "AWE" (Altogether Wednesday Evening),

where dinner is served and fellowship is enjoyed by all ages. At 9:00 am another worship service (The New Creation Service) was begun with Wayne Middleton in 2001. At first it was on the second and fourth Sundays, but it has grown to each Sunday with Wayne Flowers as pastor.

First United Methodist Church is again celebrating growth within our church. Soon another building project will be underway. The new building will replace the middle section of the Educational Wing and court yard. This addition will allow more Sunday school classes, youth room, new restrooms, and much more needed space for our growing church family. We are anticipating ground breaking around January 15, 2006.

This year we celebrate 150 years of Methodist Outreach in the Fairfield Community. The heritage and history of the Methodist Church is rich. Our church family has spanned years, from those who first established the church beginning in 1855 until the present day. All of those past members have contributed so much to the church making it strong and giving us a “firm foundation.” Today we carry on the traditions and work of the church marching forward into future generations.

Pastors

The following is a list of pastors who have served the First Methodist Church, Fairfield, since 1855 as recorded in the Methodist Journals. It is interesting to note that during the years from 1866 to 1882, Fairfield was part of the Northwest Texas Conference. Membership in the church in 1855 included 194 white and 34 colored. By 1861 it had increased to 175 white and 75 colored. Colored members continued to be reported annually until 1869.

George W. Burrows	Fairfield Circuit	1855-1858
James H. Addison	Fairfield Circuit	1858-1860
T.M. Glass	Fairfield Circuit	1860-1861
Byron S. Carden	Fairfield Circuit	1861-1862
S.C. Littlepage	Fairfield Circuit	1862-1864
D. B. Wright	Fairfield Circuit	1864-1865
S.C. Littlepage	Fairfield Circuit	1865-1866
Thomas Gilmore	Fairfield Circuit	1866-1869

Horace Bishop	Fairfield Circuit	1869-1870
Thomas Gilmore	Fairfield Circuit	1870-1872
S.D. Adkin	Fairfield Circuit	1872-1873
W. W. Jared	Fairfield Circuit	1873-1874
R.C. Hendrick	Fairfield Circuit	1874-1875
R.H. Adair	Fairfield Circuit	1875-1876
Gaston W. Swofford	Fairfield Circuit	1876-1878
Andrew Davis	Fairfield Circuit	1878-1879
J.F. Follin	Fairfield Circuit	1879-1880
Thomas Gilmore	Fairfield Circuit	1880-1881
John Thomas Blutworth*	Fairfield Circuit	1880-1881
W.L. Andrews	Fairfield Circuit	1881-1882
S.C. Littlepage	Fairfield Circuit	1882-1886
C.M. Keith	Fairfield Circuit	1886-1889
M.H. Porter	Fairfield Circuit	1889-1890
B.J. Guess	Fairfield Circuit	1890-1891

*appointed as a Junior to serve under Rev. Gilmore was licensed to preach in 1878 and ordained in 1882.

T.B. Graves	Fairfield Circuit	1891-1892
W.F. Brinson	Fairfield Circuit	1892-1894
D.S. Thompson	Fairfield Circuit	1894-1895
F.O. Fayre	Fairfield Circuit	1895-1897
J.W. Holt	Fairfield Circuit	1897-1901
J.L. Russell	Fairfield Circuit	1901-1904
O.A. Shook	Fairfield & Dew	1904-1905
J.A. Kenny	Fairfield & Dew	1905-1906
W.T. Ayers	Fairfield & Dew	1906-1907
E.M. Myers	Fairfield & Dew	1907-1909
Allen Tooke	Fairfield & Dew	1909-1913
W.A. Craven	Fairfield & Dew	1913-1914
R.O. Wier	Fairfield & Dew	1914-1916
P.R. White	Fairfield & Dew	1916-1918
J.B. Bell	Fairfield & Dew	1918-1920

S.A. Weimer	Fairfield & Dew	1920-1922
I.O. Dent	Fairfield & Dew	1922-1929
J.N. Vincent	Fairfield & Dew	1929-1933
G.C. Condrey	Fairfield & Dew	1933-1936
R.B. Moon	Fairfield & Dew	1936-1937
Walter Rabb Willis	Fairfield & Dew	1937-1939
O.F. Lindstrom	Fairfield & Dew	1939-1940
Jester White	Fairfield & Dew	1940-1941
W.B. Oliver, Jr.	Fairfield & Dew	1941-1943
J. Coy Williams	Fairfield & Dew	1943-1946
Francis Fischer	Fairfield	1946-1948
G. Wayland Elmore	Fairfield	1948-1951
J.H. Malone	Fairfield	1951-1953
E. Hal McCombs	Fairfield	1953-1955
Harold G. Spann	Fairfield	1955-1957
Stanley Vodicka	Fairfield	1957-1959
Leon Peacock	Fairfield	1959-1961
Jesse Roberson	Fairfield	1961-1963
Billie B. Bonner	Fairfield	1963-1965
Donald G. Willis	Fairfield	1965-1969
Louis Knight	Fairfield	1969-1970
Thomas E. Gray	Fairfield	1970-1973
Sherrill Hall	Fairfield	1973-1976
Dan Jones	Fairfield	1976-1978
Claude DeCelle	Fairfield	1978-1982
Robert Pickney	Fairfield	1982-1983
William B. Gandin	Fairfield	1983-1988
Bert Bagley	Fairfield	1988-1992
Fred T. Lang	Fairfield	1992-1994
Ron Petty	Fairfield	1994-1995
Mark B. Woodward	Fairfield	1995-1998
A. Wayne Middleton	Fairfield	1998-2001
C. Wayne Flowers	Fairfield	2001-2007
T. Paul Kethley	Fairfield	2008 -

From 1892 to 1909 Fairfield was in the Calvert District. In 1910 moved to the Marlin District and remained there until 1940, then moved to the Jacksonville through 1948. In 1948 Fairfield was placed in the Palestine District which we are still a part.

There have been several youth ministers, we appreciate their devotion to the youth of our congregation. They are :

Jerry Neff

Jimmy Clark

David Castleberry

Ricky Fleckenstein

Bob Anderson

David Pomerinke

David Filis

Jennifer Thames

During our 150 years we have been known as
The Methodist Episcopal Church South
The First Methodist Church
The First United Methodist Church (1968)

The History of The Methodist Women

The history of the Missionary Society dates back to 1878. From this time the women of the church have had many changes, yet much has remained the same.

In 1890 the Ladies Aid Society held ice cream entertainment for the youth and community. Some of these events were held at Captain Peck's vacant store building, on the west side of the square. Other events included Christmas bazaar, Valentine dinner, served the Junior/Senior Banquet in 1937, conducted Bible School, bake sales, and the current harvest dinner.

The United Methodist Women address the needs of the community, as well as global ministry. Some of the projects have included baby quilts and layettes for

Africa, needs of abused women, cleaning supplies for flood and hurricane victims, food for bereaved families, and needs of the local church.

Several years ago the UMW saw an opportunity for more of an outreach within the church family. A new committee, Women of the Methodist Church, was formed, allowing all women of the church to be involved.

The United Methodist Women have helped in many aspects. They have purchased items needed for the church, such as choir robes, remodeling the sanctuary, items for the fellowship hall, Bibles for seniors, and paid the salary for one of the youth ministers.

The United Methodist Women continue to address the critical needs and concerns of women, children, and youth. It is as urgent today as it was a century ago. As women organized for mission, United Methodist Women seek the wholeness for themselves and others through programs, Bible studies, and global ministry.

History of the Church Bell

The Fairfield Female College opened in 1858. The building stood on the prairie east of Fairfield (now the Manor Nursing Home.) Soon after the opening, plans were made to have a bell cast for the college. All the young ladies asked to be allowed to give some of their jewelry and money to give tone to the bell. Seven hundred dollars in silver was added to the jewelry by the citizens of Fairfield and sent to England where the bell was cast. It was shipped to Galveston and was hauled by wagon overland freight. Mr. J.J. Stubbs, with his 8 to 10 oxen, was the freighter.

When the bell arrived it was too heavy to place on top of the College building, so a frame was made for it. In 1860 or 1861 it was placed on the end of the front gallery, where it stayed until the College building was torn down in 1900.

The bell was then presented to the Methodist Church by Mrs. William Bradley, where it continues to call the town people to worship to this day.

The above record was prepared by Mrs. J.R. Bell, Miss Lizzie Anderson, Miss Nannie Anderson, and Mrs. C.B. Steward in 1955. These ladies's devotion to recording significant facts helps us today have a better look at our past.

The Mt. Zion Methodist Church

The first Mt. Zion Methodist Church was built in 1854 in what is called "Doddy Hallow," near the head of Doddy branch. Near the church was the home of Mr. G.W. (Uncle Wash) Walker, who was the first pastor of the church. He with Timothy Green, who was also a preacher, were the founders.

Among the first settlers were the Claridge family, the J.E. McAdams, John C James, Elisha Hobbs, Asbury Simpson and John Black and their families. They settled in the Mount Zion Community and built a log cabin structure for their church.

In 1860 there was a need for a bigger church. Rev. Timothy Green, Elisha Hobbs, and John Black, who were the first trustees, bought a tract of land from Mary A. Holder for \$1.00. The church was then moved on the land that is now the cemetery. John C. James and Asbury Simpson were the first Stewards.

On the 12th of May, 1880, A.G. Anderson, T.W. Sims, G.W. Everett, S.J. Lake, J.L. Emmons, W.C. Lane and A.P. Vaughn, circuit Trustees, bought a tract of land from the J.L. Moody Estate and the church was moved to the new site. The building was a combination of church, school and Grange Hall. Later the church was moved to where it now stands across the highway.

The Mt. Zion property, located on highway 84, east of Fairfield was held by the Texas Conference through the board of trustees after it closed in the late 1940's. A request was made that the property be placed with the local church and in 1964 it was transferred to the First Methodist Church in Fairfield.

Rev. Billie Bonner with the Methodist Youth Fellowship cleaned up the 2 acres around 1968. During this time they built the cross and alters which are still there. It was reported that those involved in building the park wrote prayers and sealed them in the alter.

Roster of Preachers and Presiding Elders:

G.W. Walker	1854-1860
Timothy Green	1860-1869
Adkins	1867-1869
Tim Gilmore	1869-1873
G.W. Swaffer	1873-1875
J.K. Lane	1875-1877
A. Davis	1878-1881
A.C. Littlepage	1881-1885
M.L. Story	1885-1887
C.M. Keith	1887-1890
D. Compton	1890-1892
B.J. Guess	1892-1893
T.B. Graves	1893-1896
F.O. Favre	1896-1897
Benson	1897-1899
J.W. Holt	1899-1903
D.S. Thompson (Hammond)	1903-1904
M.H. Potter	1904-1905
W.T. Ayers	1905-1907
C.M. Myers	1907-1909
Allen Tooke	1909-1912
W.A. Craven	1912-1914
W.O. Wier	1914-1916
P.R. White	1916-1918
J.B. Bell	1918-1920
S.A. Weimer	1920-1921
I.O. Dent	1921-1929
J.N. Vincent	1929-1933
E.C. Condrey	1933-1936
R.B. Moon	1936-1937
T.M. Smith	1937-1939
J.D. Whitley	1939-1941
D.J. Davis	1941-1942

Edward Mitchell

1942-?

This was transcribed from “The Salt Shaker” 1963, which was copied exactly from a 1942 fund raising leaflet by the pastor at that time Edward Mitchell...This history was obtained from county clerk records, church records, and Mrs. Bettie Vaughn Benson of Lampasas.

.....Some information was obtained from 1984 Fairfield Recorder

*denotes the only change made by Billie Bonner.

First United Methodist Church

Approximate date : early 1900's

First Methodist Church dates between 1913 and 1933 (early 1920's.)

Looking north: Parsonage beside church farther up street Tas Watson,
Henry McIlveen homes and Col. Peck at the top in the trees.

Methodist Church

Built in 1938

Methodist Church

Built in 1964

This history has been written, being careful to obtain correct dates and events. As with any publication, there will be omissions and errors, but hopefully these will be few.

Compiled by : **Kathleen Davis McKee**

October 2005

Information for this history has been obtained from many sources:

History of Freestone County, Vol. 1.....First United Methodist Church by Maurine Calame and Betsy Keller

Freestone County Museum

Fairfield Recorder....1890, 1902, 1927, 1929, 1933, 1934, 1935, 1938, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1974. 1975, 1983, 1984, and 1985

UMW records

Administrative Board Minutes

Quarterly Conference Minutes

Pastor's reports

History written by Thomas Gray 1970

"The Salt Shaker," newsletter 1963

Billie Bournias

David Lott

1876 deed for lot

