



***A History
of the
First Methodist
Church
of
Brownwood Texas***

1875-2022

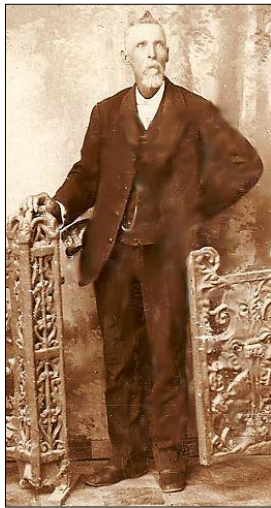


The Beginning

Brown Professor Thomas R. Havins, in his "History of Brown County," records that the first church established in Brown County was organized by two Methodist ministers, George Vest and William Mayberry, both ministers of Comanche County, in 1863, in the Hannah Valley community. The next new church to be organized in Brown County was on Jim Ned Creek, above the present town of Thrifty.

The Cumberland Presbyterian Church was organized by Rev. S. M. Lewis of Little River Presbytery on September 18, 1875. Rev. R. W. Lewis was their first pastor. Their new building was to play an important role in the organization of the Methodist church in Brownwood.

The first time that the West Texas Conference Journal of the Methodist Episcopal Church mentioned Brownwood was in the Comanche District, and was listed as the "Brownwood Mission." The Comanche District would send out circuit riders to preach in Brown County. The Comanche District called Brownwood, "Little Sister," and the circuit riders kept coming from Comanche to Brownwood until a church was organized.



F. M. Cross wrote about Reverend Hugh M. Childress, one of the circuit riders was known as the "Bear Hunter Preacher." (Childress pictured on left) "Just after the close of the war (Civil War) I went with him on the whole round of his circuit. As the Indians were often passing through the country and everybody had to carry guns, the old preacher carried a shotgun always, and a six shooter. I saw him often go late into a house where he was to preach on Sunday and set his gun against the wall, lay his six shooter on the table, get out his Bible and go to preaching. It did not seem to embarrass him in any way."

Rev. Peter W. Gravis, another circuit preacher in Brown County, wrote that "I have often preached with my two pistols or revolvers belted around me, and my gun in arm's length."

The Methodists were the pioneer organizers of churches. Before regular churches were organized, religious services were held periodically in the homes of settlers, as itinerant ministers (known as circuit riders) came into the county.

The Original Methodist Church in Brownwood

Thomas R. Havins in a column published in the *Brownwood Bulletin* on April 10, 1960, called *The Evergreen*, gave the following information about the founding of the original Methodist Church in Brownwood.

“Recent available information on the original founding of the original Methodist Church in Brownwood confirms that had before been supposition, although the exact date remains in doubt.

“Previous information has pointed to Peter W. Gravis as the leader in the movement among Methodists to form a church. The year has been a question since some indications point to 1875. Others indicate the action as occurring in 1876.”

Will H. Mayes (pictured on right) wrote in a *“Reminiscent Sketch of Brownwood Church”* the following, quoting Peter W. Gravis.



“When I came to Brownwood something over twenty years ago, the Methodists were worshipping in the old Central School building a room about 27x40 feet in size, used also by all the congregations of the town as a place for worship. John C. S. Baird was the pastor, preaching in Brownwood one Sunday a month. About that time the church acquired as a parsonage a one room log house, with rawhide floor and shed lean-to, situation over close to Adams branch about the end of Baker Street. The only Sunday school, of which G. S. Howard, deceased, was the superintendent. Later the Methodists organized their own Sunday school at Coggin Academy, now the dormitory of Daniel Baker College, and when the Presbyterian church was completed held Sunday school in the afternoon in that church until the completion of the Methodist church, for a time also alternating with the Presbyterians to the use of their building as a place for church worship.”

The First Church Building



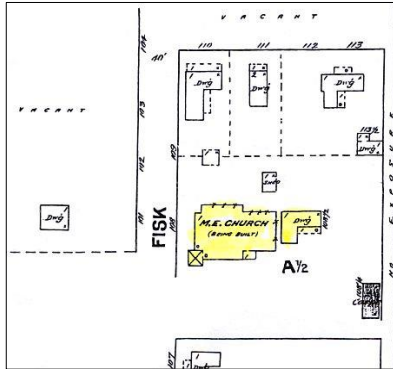
The parsonage is shown to the right of the church, with the church building on the left.

Blanche Dabney Johnson, in *“Looking At The Past,”* wrote, “Our first sanctuary was built under the pastorate of Dr. John R. Nelson in 1887-88 on the corner of Fisk and Austin. The land had been purchased for \$300.00.”

William H. Mayes, Secretary of the Building Committee, in a story found in the cornerstone when it was opened in 1969 said, “On Tuesday, May 1st, 1888, the corner

stone of the new Methodist church building at Brownwood, Texas, will be laid with Masonic ceremonies under the auspices of the Brownwood lodges.

Rev. J. R. Nelson stated in the 4th Quarterly Conference of October 15, 1888, “With the advantage of our new church we hope for still greater attendance and interest.” Due to being

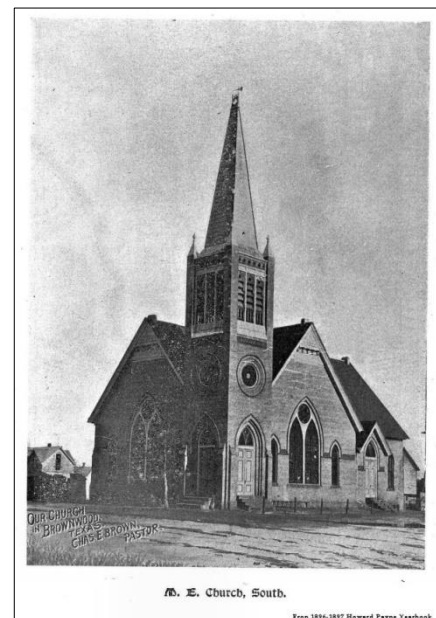


able to meet now in their new church building, the Sunday school was able to meet in the mornings at the church instead of Sunday afternoons at another location.

This picture, from the 1888 Sanborn Insurance map, shows the location of the first church and parsonage.

Note that the map only shows Fisk Street. The parsonage was located just behind the church as show in the photo to the right.

A story in the *Brownwood Bulletin*, dated January 31, 1895, gave a good description of the church. "The M. E. Church South has a membership of 350. Their building is of brick, fifty-five by fifty-five feet with a lecture room thirty by thirty. The building is elegantly furnished and has splendid stained glass windows. Rev. C. E. Brown, one of the most eloquent preachers in Texas, is the present pastor of the church. Rev. W. M. Shelton, the presiding elder of the Brownwood district also resides here and adds much to the strength of the church. The M. E. Sunday school has 175 pupils. The Epworth League meets Sunday afternoon at 3:30, prayer meeting on Wednesday night, cottage prayer meeting, under the auspices of the League, Tuesday night. This church also has a neat parsonage on the lot adjoining the church lot."



Here is a picture of the church from the "Catalogue of Howard Payne College, 1896-1897."

The Third Quarterly Conference report on September 8, 1896, reported that "Both auditorium and lecture rooms are supplied with both lamps and electric lights It is enclosed by a good fence and the church membership has improved the grounds by setting out trees and shrubbery. The membership has also had the street leading to the church from the Santa Fe. R. crossing graded and graveled."



The *Daily Bulletin*, on Thursday, June 2, 1916, had a story on its front page that had a headline which said "Parsonage Foundation Started This Morning." It went on in a sub headline to state "Methodists Will Have Modern and Well Appointed Preacher's House Ready." The story that followed said, "When the Brownwood Methodist church announced that they would build a pastor's home, they meant business as today marks the beginning of work on the foundation. The building will be a two story structure and the walls will be brick veneered. Trenches

for the foundation are being dug today and the work will be pushed until the building is completed and ready for occupancy

By the end of 1922, the church had 1,060 total members on their rolls, about what we have on our rolls today, give or take a hundred. The church had certainly grown from the 350 members on the roll in 1895, just 27 years ago.

On January 1, 1923, while the clock struck midnight the previous night, "Dr. M. L. Brown mounted a step ladder and removed two bricks from the wall of the church, thus starting the work of demolition of the old building in order that room may be had as quickly as possible for the building of a new church. "

The *Brownwood Bulletin* story continued to say that "Until the new church is finished the congregation will worship in the auditorium of Carnegie Library upstairs, which recently has been greatly improved."

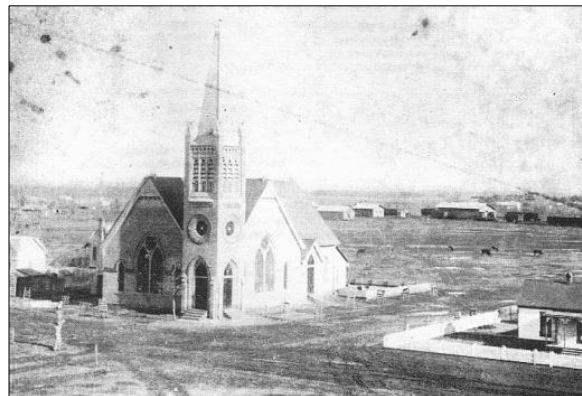


At some point in time the trustees removed the steeple, as shown in this photo.

When the church was first built, the sanctuary was illuminated by lantern and candle light. People came to church by walking and riding in their buggies, wagons, or on horseback and bicycles. By the time the two bricks were removed by Dr. Brown, they came in automobiles and the church was powered by electricity, however, it was still hot in the summer and cold in the winter as

there was no central heat or air conditioning. Hand held fans were very much in use.

This is the earliest known photo of the first church. Notice that there is almost nothing around the church but vacant land. The street running from left to right is Fisk Street and the street running from the lower left hand corner to the cows in the pasture is Fagg Street, named for the family that owned the land. The name of the street was later changed to Austin Avenue.



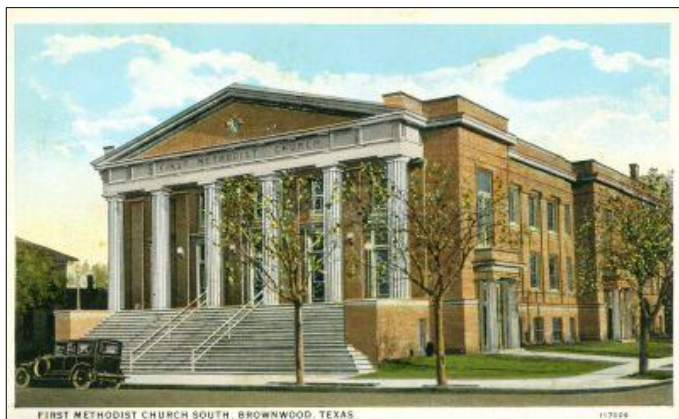
The Second Church Building

Blanch Dabney Johnson wrote "By October 1922, groups began talking of building 2 churches - one on the present site and one on the south side in the new Coggin addition. In November 1922, the church divided and the group leaving became the Central Methodist Church. In the

1922 quarterly conference minutes we find, "We hate to lose them but in Christian Spirit wish them God speed."

It was not until 1924 that the second church was finished on the same site as the first church. The congregation had worshiped in this first church for some 35 years.

So once again in 1923, under the Rev. C. Q. Smith's leadership, a building committee was appointed, and a large Greek Revival sanctuary was built on the corner of Fisk and Austin in 1924. The cornerstone was laid on June 17, 1923. The striking ceremony took place at 3:30 on that warm June Sunday afternoon. The cornerstone is now located in the center garden of the present church.

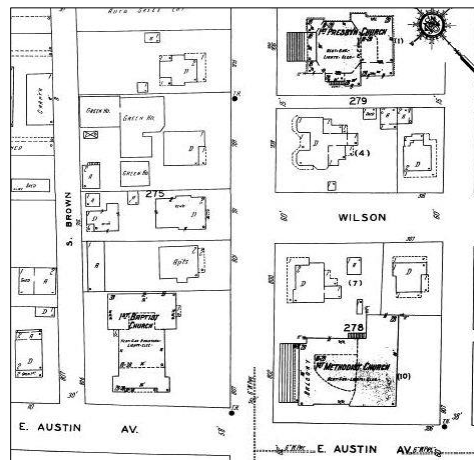


"The building was not entirely completed, but work had progressed sufficiently that it could easily be seen what a magnificent place of worship for this congregation. When finished it will take care of a maximum audience of about 1200 in its main auditorium, and provide for the accommodation of a Sunday school of 1200 members."

"There were about fifty class rooms of various sizes, five assembly rooms, pastor's study, reception room, parlor, a completely equipped kitchen, gymnasium, showers, etc. The plant, when finished will cost in the neighborhood of \$95,000 which cost includes a magnificent pipe organ now being constructed, and soon to be ready for shipment, by the Estey Organ Company."

"How I wish there were time to share some of the glorious reports from the quarterly records of the good years when the church grew from 334 in 1923 until a report in the early 1930's shows 430 in Sunday school alone," wrote Blanch Dabney Johnson

1930 Sanborn Map showing location of second church. Lot is now Oncor Electric.



Name Changed

Blanch Johnson wrote, "On May 10, 1939, we changed our name. The Methodist Episcopal Church South, the Methodist Protestant Church, and the Methodist Episcopal Church united to become the Methodist Church.



The parsonage that was already on the property when the second church was built in 1924 was remodeled and painted. This picture was taken by Leslie C. Boone, Jr., son of Rev. Leslie C. Boone, as an amateur photographer just prior to his entering the Army Air Corp in June, 1944. Note the soldier in the foreground. No doubt he was posted at Camp Bowie. The parsonage, out of view, was the two story wooden structure on the left side. In 1949, the two story wooden

parsonage was torn down and a new brick veneer parsonage was built with five rooms, two baths, and a double garage.

The *Brownwood Bulletin*, on March 12, 1963, had a story that said, "Plans to sell the present church building and property were made by First Methodist Church in a meeting Sunday night.

"The members voted by a 20-1 majority to seek a buyer for the property and made plans to relocate the church on the south side of town.

"The building was constructed in 1923, and is located on a city block bounded by Fisk and Austin avenues and Hawkins and Wilson streets. The site has been rated by businessmen as a top retail business location. The parsonage, located at the side of the church and facing Fisk Avenue, will not be sold, but will be relocated. The parsonage was built 12 years ago.

"Three principal reasons for relocating the church were given by a special committee of 16 men, who made a study of the congregation and its needs. The committee, headed by W. W. Dees, reported that a majority of the members live more than a mile from the present location of the church, remodeling the church would cost too much, and parking is a problem at the present church.

"Approximately two-thirds of the present membership of 785 persons live in the area of Coggin Avenue, the committee reported. Like many churches built during the 1930's, First Methodist has high steps and other features which are costly to remodel. The committee also pointed out that there is no space for a parking lot at the present location. The last service was held in the church on September 24, 1967. The congregation was in this second church for 43 years."



The church property was finally sold to the Texas Power & Light Company in October of 1968, a year after the congregation had moved into their new church at 2500 Eleventh Street. W. M. Streckert, TP&L Brownwood district manager, said that it would be several years before a new district office would be built on the site, but TP&L

would shortly go ahead and remove the church building that was on the site. A new building for the power company was built. It is still there today and is owned now by ONCOR Electric Delivery. An auction was held on Saturday, November 4, conducted in the basement of the church to sell everything in the church.

The Present Church Building

The church began the process of moving the church from its Fisk and Austin Street location in 1963 by first moving the parsonage to a new location. The parsonage bricks were removed and the parsonage, now 12-years old (built in 1949), was moved to a new site at 2209 10th St. (at the intersection of 10th St. and Ave. O). This is a picture of the former church parsonage at its present location taken in 2013.



It was not until three years later, on September 18, 1966, that the church was able to have a groundbreaking ceremony for the new church to be located at 10th Street and Good Shepherd Drive. Bishop W. Kenneth Pope presided at the ceremony. Bids were being accepted for construction of the new church. The church on 10th Street was consecrated Sunday, October 22, 1967. Some 500 people attended the service, presided over by Bishop W. Kenneth Pope.

Name of the Denomination changed again.

In 1968, a year after moving into our present church, the Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren Church united to become the United Methodist Church. The symbol for the new name was the Cross and Flame.

Church Parsonage

A new parsonage was built and an open house was held on Sunday, May 12, 1974, at 2506 Good Shepherd Drive. It still serves today as our parsonage. The parsonage was built by members of the church.



Christian Life Center

By 1997, it became apparent that we needed to reach out to the people in our community by adding a "Family Life Center" and additional classrooms. A building committee was appointed to survey the church family.



Christian Life Center finished in 1999.

A ground breaking ceremony was held on Sunday, February 13, 1998. Construction was then started on the \$1,200,000 facility. We were in the new addition by Easter of 1999. The Christian Life Center has been used for many different activities, from recreation, dinners, community events, receptions, weddings and worship services.

Voted to Disaffiliate from UMC in 2022

In a Church Conference on August 22, 2022, attended by 215 members, the body voted on a resolution to disaffiliate from the United Methodist Church. The vote was 150 yes, 56 no, and 9 abstained. The percentage was 69.7 %. It required a 2/3 vote to disaffiliate so it passed.

A Congregational Meeting was held on September 12, 2002, at which time the members selected the new name of "The First Methodist Church of Brownwood" as their official name and voted to join the Global Methodist Church.

Pastors of First United Methodist Church



Jay Frazee, Current Pastor, pictured at left.

The First United Methodist Church has been blessed with forty-five pastors since its organization in 1887. The two longest serving pastors are Rev. Leslie A. Boone from 1937 to 1946, and Dr. Donald H. Scroggs, from 2005 to 2018. Three pastors served during the construction of the three church buildings. They were Rev. John R. Nelson, Rev. C. Q. Smith and Rev. John Dowd. Rev. Don Scott served during the construction of the Christian Life Center.

1887-1889	John R. Nelson	1937-1946	Leslie A. Boone
1890-1892	J. T. Putnam	1946-1948	Roy A. Langston
1893-1893	G. W. Putnam	1948-1948	H Brown Loyd
1894-1897	Charles F. Brown	1948-1952	A. S. Gafford
1898-1899	M. S. Hotchkiss	1952-1956	Hubert C. Smith
1900-1901	J. S. Chapman	1956-1960	C. D. Wooten
1902-1905	W. B. Andrews	1961-1964	Ben H. Feemaster
1906-1907	S. A. Steel	1964-1966	Allen A. Peacock
1908-1010	C. R. Wright	1966-1968	Carroll H. Thompson
1911-1912	W. E. Boggs	1968-1969	Cecil Ellis
1913-1916	K. P. Barton	1969-1974	Bobby R. Weathers
1917-1917	H. W. Knickerbocker	1974-1978	John Dowd
1918-1918	L. A. Webb-	1978-1980	Bob Briles
1919-1919	Rex B Wilkes	1980-1985	Richard W. Jenkins, Jr.
1920-1921	Frank E. Singleton	1985-1987	Robert Richmond
1922-1924	C. Q. Smith	1987-1990	John Lukert
1925-1925	C. O. Shugart	1990-1992	Marcus Childress
1926-1927	G. E. Cameron	1992-1996	Scott Youngblood
1928-1930	J. S. Cook	1996-2001	Don Scott
1931-1931	John N. Renfro	2001-2005	Ruth E. Huber-Rohlfs
1931-1934	P. E. Chappell	2005-2018	Donald H. Scroggs
1935-1935	W. T. Whitehead	2016-	Joey Wilbourn
1936-1936	Harold G. Soggins	2018 -	Jay Frazee

The First Methodist Church of Brownwood 2022 Staff

Jay Frazee, Senior Pastor
 Joey Wilbourn, Associate Pastor
 Kathy Brando, Administrative Assistant
 Stephanie Salter, Finance Secretary
 Alex Bingham, Director of Youth Ministries
 Landon Clark, Director of Technology Ministries
 Brittany Paget-Faught, Children's Director
 Tara Davis, First Look's Coordinator
 Jonathan Dunlap, Praise & Worship Leader
 Eric Evans, Sanctuary Choir Director
 Dean Kiesling, Sanctuary Pianist
 Pat Bicknell, Sanctuary Organist
 Priscilla Monson, Sanctuary Organist
 Sandy Benson, Weekday School Director
 Richard Garza. Accommodations