

Button Memorial United Methodist Church in Little Elm

Historical Narrative researched and written by Kristy Vivian for Texas Historical Commission (THC)
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The Button Memorial United Methodist Church in Little Elm, was organized by Rev. William E. Bates in 1853 as the First Methodist Church. (1) The church was re-named Button Memorial United Methodist in 1963 to honor another Little Elm pioneer, George Lafayette Button.

Rev. Bates (1812-1883), was born in Amherst County, Virginia, in 1812, and moved to Barren County, Kentucky, in 1820. In 1843, the Methodist Church licensed him. He moved to Denton County in 1851 near the Bridges settlement and to the Little Elm settlement in 1852. Rev. Bates organized a Methodist church in Little Elm in 1853. He then moved his family to the Hawkins settlement that same year and later built a church house and called it Zion after the old Zion church in Kentucky, from whence they came. In 1855 he had charge of the church at Lewisville and later organized the church at Denton in 1857, and churches at Montague, Gainesville, Jacksboro., Oak Grove and other frontier points. (2)

The First Methodist services in Little Elm were in a log cabin at the John House Springs, 1.5 miles east of the present church (at the NW intersection of 720 and Pecan Dr.) (3) All denominations shared the same log cabin, worshipping there in turn. After the Civil War, a new two-story building was built in the Little Elm Cemetery that

continued to serve the three denominations in Little Elm, the Methodist, Baptist and Christian. The first floor of the two-story building was used for school and church and the upper floor was used for fraternal organizations. The building was used for a number of years but it never had water except that which was carried. (4)

In 1916, each of the three churches bought land for their own church buildings. They spread out in various directions but were still in close proximity to one another. Methodists built a church on what is now First Baptist Church property at the corner of Main Street and Farm-to-Market Road 720.

Later, in 1954, when the Corps of Engineers began acquiring land for Lewisville Lake, the Methodist church was forced to move again. They bought property a mile northeast of the site taken for the lake and moved the church building there. The building is still at that site and is now occupied by the New Life Tabernacle congregation. This building served Little Elm Methodists for about 65 years.

In 1962, plans for a new church began with a donation of \$50,000 from Anne Hughey, the granddaughter of George L. Button. Mrs. Hughey paid for the construction of the church plus the price of the two-acre tract on which it stands. A total of \$50,000 was contributed and the building was named Button Memorial United Methodist Church. The belfry has the bell that the Hugheys used on their ranch near San Antonio, Texas.((5)

Mrs. Hughey made her donations to honor her grandfather and grandmother, George Lafayette Button (August 16, 1830 - January 6, 1911) and Sarah Ann White (May 18, 1834 - April 23, 1922). Jon C. Woollam, who was the preacher in charge of the Douglas District, East Texas Conference, married the couple on March 15, 1858. Their children were: Martha who married E.D. Driscoll; Mary who married James T. Young; William who died when struck by lightning; George Lafayette Button Jr. who married twice, Amanda Killingsworth and Emma Clark; John, who never married; Alice and Lucy, who died within a few hours of each other with meningitis; Oscar, who married Jennie Hodges, and Ida, who married Tom Erwin Jr..

George and Sara Button moved from Nacogdoches County, Texas, to the Little Elm community in October, 1866. Mr. Button established a harness, saddle and shoe repair business. The Buttons were active members of the Methodist Church and other civic affairs. As a steward of the church, Mr. Button would travel many miles to collect the quarterage. He was a Mason for many years and served as Justice of Peace. He became known as Squire Button. His daughter, Ida Erwin, has papers showing his appointment and certificate of elections to Justice of Peace and Notary Public. One was signed by Governor J.S. Hogg. The Button home was a place where friends, neighbors and strangers were equally welcome. They gave of their material things, time and strength to help others. After the death of two daughters and one daughter-in-law, the Buttons helped to care for seven grandchildren. Annie Young lived with the Buttons

after her mother died and her father was forced to return to Scotland. Annie remained with the Buttons until she married M.B. Hughey in 1914 and moved with him to east Texas. But she never forgot the kindness the Buttons bestowed on her. (6)

Mrs. Hughey and members of the church broke ground for the current building on July 7, 1963.

As the town of Little Elm has experienced tremendous growth over the years 2001 to 2004, so has our church. The once small congregation has now blossomed with a Sunday attendance that regularly numbers over 200. Due to this growth and the continued rise in the area's population we have begun an expansion program to meet our community's needs for years to come. Construction is well underway to add a new building and parking area to accommodate our growth and give us some much needed "elbow room", and we look forward to the continued opportunities this growth provides.

As a community oriented church, we continue to in our efforts to remain actively engaged in our local area. From sponsoring local youth groups, providing emergency family assistance, supporting local social and charitable organizations, to assisting in sponsoring a mission trip to Africa, we remain committed to assisting those inside our community as well as those around the world.

It is this spirit of involvement that has led to the diverse number of church groups and programs all dedicated to the support, education, and enrichment of those in our congregation and community at large. These groups and programs provide many ways

for our members to strengthen one another and give back to a community that has given us so much.

With over 150 years of serving the needs of this community, Button Memorial United Methodist Church looks forward to expanding our boundaries and to forever be a beacon of light for seekers of God's love. We invite you to stop by and allow us to share the blessings of our growth with you.

- (1) Mrs. J.M. Harris, *112 Years in Little Elm Community*, Page 71.
- (2) Ed F. Bates, *History and Reminiscences of Denton County*; Page 44.
- (3) Woodrow Witt oral interview, October 2003; Witt is a long-time resident of Little Elm and relative of Rev. William E. Bates.
- (4) Harris, *112 Years in Little Elm Community* , Pages 72 - 74.
- (5) *Denton Record Chronicle*, November 22, 1963
- (6) Harris, *112 Years in Little Elm Community*, Page 138.

Bibliography

112 Years in Little Elm Community, organized by Mrs. J.M. Harris, Copyright

J.Woodrow Witt, 1986; Terrill Wheeler Printing Inc., Sesquicentennial Reprint Edition,

History and Reminiscences of Denton County, by Ed. F. Bates, Terrill Wheeler Printing

Inc., Denton, TX., Third Edition, 1989

List of Pastors of The Methodist Church of Little Elm (as of 1963 known as Button
Memorial United Methodist Church.)

1853 Rev. William E. Bates

1897 Rev. E.S. Williams

1901 Rev. J.W. Clifton

1902 Rev. S.W. Miller

1913 Rev. B.L. Ely

1914 Rev. J.T. Bludsworth

1916 Rev. C.B. Fielder

1919 Rev. L.J. Wagoner

1921 Rev. C.B. Fielder

1923 Rev. Thos. E. Hardy

1926 Rev. Hubert T. Johnson

1927 Rev. Stepinson

1929 Rev. Cecil Ellis

1930 Rev. R.F. Shinn

1931 Rev. L.B. Tooley

1933 Rev. Erco

1936 Rev. T.M. Atchley

1937 Rev. Rossier
1938 Rev. M. L. Hinds
1939 Rev. Noble L. Glasco
1940 Rev. Cecil Greenhaw
1943 Rev. J. Aston Pallard
1945 Rev. Ernest E. Trietsch
1947 Rev. Walter B. Sullens
1949 Rev. Trietsch
1950 Rev. Cecil Pallock
1951 Rev. Walter Huffing
1952 Rev. Sam P. Farler
1954 Rev. Mervin James
1956 Rev. Cecil Arnold
1957 Rev. H. G. Ryan
1958 Rev. Buddy Miller
1959 Rev. C. C. Grimes
1960 Rev. Andrew Ashburn
1962 Rev. James Watson
1963 Rev. Andy Ashburn
1964 Rev. Harold Hicks

1965 Rev. Tom Ridlehuher
1967 Rev. David Milam
1968 Rev. Dan Klimpel
1970 Rev. Roy Bevan
1972 Rev. Theo Wright
1977 Rev. Thomas W. Downing
1980 Rev. Norma F. Meyer
1983 Rev. Larry Krueger
1987 Rev. Jim Connatser
1990 Rev. Michael McGregor
1991 Rev. Jerry Ott
1997 Rev. Larry Bassett
1999 Rev. John Gowling

Other Pastors that are not listed by standard church records but are listed in the Mrs. J.M.

Harris book *112 Years in Little Elm Community* are as follows. No particular year was given for their service.

Wm. (Uncle Billy) Allen, Taylor Bates, W. F. McKnight, R. B. Escue, T. M. Jenson, J.

R. Atchley, Ben Terrell

Biography of the current pastor::

From an article by Corina Miller of the Little Elm Journal, June 2003

Few have walked the same path as John Gowling, Pastor of Button Memorial United Methodist Church. He's a former Marine who finished two tours of duty in Vietnam and came home with three Purple Hearts. He also is a retired police detective who worked in such areas as criminal investigation, narcotics and crimes against persons. The pastor and his wife are the proud parents of five-year-old, Savannah Lee, whom they adopted from China as an infant.

While Pastor Gowling describes himself as "ordinary," his life has been anything but typical. While in the Marines, Pastor Gowling served two 13-month tours in Vietnam where he and his team were flown by helicopter to various sites to search for the enemy. "I was fortunate I served in that time and came back healthy." Pastor Gowling also came home with a list of military honors and citations, such as: Vietnamese Campaign Medal with three battle stars, Vietnamese Appreciation Medal, Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with Gold Palm, Good Conduct Medal, (2) Presidential Unit Citation, Navy Unit citation, Combat Action Ribbon, Purple Heart, and Navy Commendation with a combat V for

valor.

When Pastor Gowling returned home, he joined the Beaumont Police Department. Police work proved a good match for Pastor Gowling, and he remained with the police force until he retired in 1997. "I liked helping people and making a difference." Pastor Gowling describes his current role as pastor of the nearly 150-year-old Little Elm church as the answer to a calling, which became a reality. "It's not a job you choose, it's a job that chooses you." Pastor Gowling's path to the ministry began when he enrolled in the Perkins School of Theology (Course of Studies) at SMU. He then became the pastor of Button Memorial United Methodist Church on Father's Day in 1999.

Pastor Gowling recalls stepping into his role with no sense of anxiety. "I came to the point in my faith walk where it was not important where I wanted to be, but it was critical where God wanted me to be. It's not my life. It's God's life."

Pastor Gowling is a strong believer in accepting all of God's children into the church no matter what background they come from. The membership of Button Memorial United Methodist Church has grown from approximately 30 active members to about 175 over the past four years; however, continuing to hear and heed God's direction is still the church's priority. "Where we will be in the next five years, only God knows, but we will

continue to have an impact on this community. That impact involves helping others find and nurture their faith. Many members do not come from a Methodist background. Some are un-churched. They never were raised in a particular denomination, so it's a real mixed bag in a very diversified group. Everyone brings something to the table." While church members are from a variety of backgrounds, most find they have more in common than they have differences. "The main thing is our trust and belief in Christ and what you do with Him."

Pastor Gowling also feels that a primary part of his role as church pastor is to help church members as they face a variety of life struggles. "Being a policeman, I've had lots of exposure to people in bad situations. In some situations, you don't know the answer, but I believe in miracles. The struggle in life is we have to go through the storm. The good news is Christ is with us. The church, which is the body of Christ, supports you through the storm. A church should act as a true support system in times of crisis"

Supporting the community and the members of the church is another of the pastor's primary responsibilities. As a member of the ministerial alliance, part-time referee for youth sports, community service leader, and more, the pastor is out dealing with people.

"We need to be opening our arms to them and healing them and going through the healing process with them. Even in the worst of situations, a church, particularly a pastor,

must always strive to be supportive, to welcome home those who have stayed away, no matter how long they've been away. Everyone wants to experience forgiveness and restoration, and we all, every one of us, has baggage. Sometimes it's very difficult for people to forgive themselves, but there is no pit too deep for God's love." That's the message Pastor Gowling hopes to send to others. That's the message he lives day by day.