

PILOT POINT CHURCH OF CHRIST

Researched by Rebecca Hollar  
% Pilot Point Church of Christ  
408 S. Jefferson  
Pilot Point, Texas 76258

Pilot Point, Texas, is one of the oldest communities in present Denton County, having been settled by Peters colonists who began arriving as early as 1845. According to local tradition, Pilot Point was named for a hill, the highest point for miles around, which was clearly visible to travelers who used it as a "pilot's point." As the settlement grew, several religious groups developed and met for worship in private homes. In 1862, the local Methodists erected a building (which is now owned by the Masonic Lodge) and the various denominations met there until they could build their own places of worship. Included among the religious groups was a congregation of the Church of Christ, which organized in the U. S. around the end of the Civil War.<sup>1</sup>

There are no records indicating the exact date of the church's organization. Researchers have always had difficulty in securing data in regard to this movement, a distinct characteristic of this religious body throughout its history in Texas. Church records, town records, county records, and newspapers afford little or no information for this early period.<sup>2</sup> Church records indicate that the first preacher known to have served the Church of Christ in Pilot Point was B. F. Hall.<sup>3</sup> Other early day ministers were C. M. Wilmeth and Alfred Mason Douglass, the first local minister. Douglass, who was born in Tennessee on August 20, 1840, moved to Sherman, Texas as a

young man, and there married Mary Johnson. They lived in Pilot Point about ten years, where he served as the church's preacher, then moved to Melissa, in Collin County, where he died on February 23, 1912.<sup>4</sup>

By 1874 the Church of Christ congregation had grown strong enough to purchase a tract of land upon which to construct its own building; on October 20, 1874, J. N. Gist and J. C. Blake, deacons of the Pilot Point Church of Christ, purchased the tract of land on which the building now sits (at 408 South Jefferson) from George W. and Alice B. Merchant, for a sum of \$100.00. The tract had been owned by the Merchants since February 4, 1872, when they bought it from Alice Merchant's mother, Elizabeth Emberson. The land is situated on a survey originally granted to the heirs of Charles Smith by the Republic of Texas in 1845.<sup>5</sup>

The present building was erected on the land in 1875, by members of the congregation supervised by A. W. Cooke, who moved into the area in the early 1850's by covered wagon from Missouri. The finished lumber for the building and its square nails were hauled by L. Z. Eddleman from Shreveport, Louisiana, in ox-drawn wagons. Much of the lumber for the framework of the structure was cut in the local area; one may still find bark on the split logs exposed in the attic of the building.<sup>6</sup>

The colonial style structure consisted of one large room serving as the auditorium. Two doors, one on either side, opened onto a covered porch which extended across the east end of the building. An open, crown-crested belfry towered above the porch of the building; a bell nestled in the tower, where it was used to peal out regularly an invitation to worship. Upon completion, the building was valued at \$2,000. Church meetings were held every Sunday, with preaching semi-monthly by C. M. Wilmeth. Serving as elder with Wilmeth was J. N. Thompson, at church sessions and at state meetings.

The 1875 congregation numbered seventy-five. Prayer meeting was held every Thursday night and Sunday school each Sunday. To pay the evangelist for preaching, the church budgeted \$500.<sup>7</sup>

Without specific documentation, one can study the general history of the Church of Christ in Texas and can speculate how the Pilot Point congregation practiced its faith. In most of the Churches of Christ into the 1880's, and in many of them afterwards, the men and women separated at the church door and sat on opposite sides of the building for the church program.<sup>8</sup> The size of the membership likely did not vary a great deal in the rural community. Several generations from the same families worshipped on the same hand-carpentered straight-backed benches. The elders passed along the aisles offering communicants the wine from glass goblets and the bread from plain white plates. The members filed to the front of the church to place upon the table their Sunday offerings.<sup>9</sup>

Among the ministers who served the Church of Christ in Pilot Point were Theophilus Brown Larrimore who held a 28-day meeting in the spring of 1904; Foy Wallace, Sr., R. H. Bowles, W. F. Ledlow, F. L. Young, and Billy Woolfrom. From 1944 to 1967 the preachers were Thomas Light, Stanley Singleton, Bryan Vinson, Horace Teal, Frank Ross, Vernon Moody, David McNeal, Roy Howell, John Dial, Ronald Rhodes, Dwight Whitsett, and N. L. Trice.<sup>10</sup> In recent years, L. L. Paul, Elwy Taylor, Johnny Wilkins, Willie Guest, and Rick Henslee have served the church as ministers.<sup>11</sup>

The church's original building has been the meeting site of the congregation from 1875 to the present. The first addition to the building was in 1952. Two classrooms were added, one on either side, at the back of the building. The old exterior wood siding was covered with asbestos siding. The two single doors on either side of the front were closed and

a large double door replaced them. Later, year round air-conditioning was added and the system has been updated from time to time. In 1968, three more classrooms, a nursery and restrooms were added to the building. Around 1975 a storage area of the classrooms was converted into a small kitchenette. On the inside of the auditorium, the walls have been paneled, florescent lighting installed, and the original oiled wood floor has been covered with vinyl floor covering and carpeting. The original pews, pulpit furniture and communion table are still in use.<sup>12</sup>

Although the church's membership has not been large (around sixty-five to seventy members at present) its achievements have been significant. In 1959 the church was instrumental in starting another congregation in Aubrey, Texas. The Pilot Point church bought a building and moved it to the present site of the Church of Christ in Aubrey, where the men of both congregations worked after hours to remodel and prepare the building for a meeting house. Current activities and programs supported by the church are Christ Haven for Children at Keller; the Herald of Truth broadcast; support of the Bible Chair at North Texas State University; monthly programs at an area nursing home; youth devotionals and benevolent community work. Current elders of the church are E. E. Hammons, J. T. Marshall, Hollis Calvert, and Earl Tate.<sup>13</sup>

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## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>"History of the Church of Christ Building in Pilot Point," undated affidavit signed by A. J. Miller and E. E. Hammons, elders, based on church records.

<sup>2</sup>Carter E. Boren, Religion on the Texas Frontier. San Antonio. The Naylor Company (1968), p. 26. An article from the Christian Messenger, Sept. 22, 1875, which was published in Bonham, Texas by T. R. Burnett beginning in 1875, states that the Pilot Point church was organized in 1865. This is the earliest documentation concerning the beginning of the Church of Christ in Pilot Point.

<sup>3</sup>"History of the Church of Christ in Pilot Point," undated affidavit. Research to date indicates that a B. F. Hall, a minister of the Church of Christ purchased land in Grayson County in 1856 and built a home in Mormon Grove. He was born in Kentucky about 1803, and preached at Union Church in Sherman. See A History of Grayson County, Texas, by Hall and Lucas, p. 144. Confederate military records at the National Archives, and Arkansas History Commission documents reveal that a Dr. Benj. F. Hall, a native of Sussex, Virginia who lived in Sebastian, Arkansas, served as surgeon in the Confederate service and performed field and hospital duty until the war ended. A biographic sketch of Dr. Benjamin F. Hall, born 1833, noted on page 353 of a publication whose title is not known to this researcher, relates that Hall, the doctor, came to Texas in 1865. Whether any of the above documents refer to the B. F. Hall who served the Pilot Point congregation, is not clearly determined.

<sup>4</sup>"Aged Minister Called Home," typed undated newspaper obituary of Elder Alfred Mason Douglass, from McKinney Examiner, ca Feb. 23, 1912, compiled by R. W. Eddleman.

<sup>5</sup>Denton County Deed Records, Denton County Courthouse. Vol. C, p. 173; Vol. I, p. 46; Vol. M, p. 325.

<sup>6</sup>Denton County Historical Society records - Pilot Point Branch; "Church History," by L. L. Paul; in Pilot Point Church of Christ Membership Directory, ca 1967, based on church records.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*; "History of the Church of Christ Building in Pilot Point," undated affidavit; Christian Messenger, Sept. 22, 1875.

<sup>8</sup>Boren, Religion on the Texas Frontier, p. 29.

<sup>9</sup>Mary Blanche Wright, On Their Roaring Way, p. 124. A partial list of the charter members were the families of S. A. Rimey, John Welborn, Joe Gist, G. Blake, A. W. Cooke, L. G. Balew, the McKenneys, the Embersons and the Edwards. There were others, of whom there is no record. (See 1967 Church Directory's "Church History.")

10 "Church History," Pilot Point Church of Christ Membership Directory, 1967.

11 Data by Nelda Cook, current church member.

12 "History of the Church of Christ Building in Pilot Point," undated affidavit.

13 Ibid.; Data by Nelda Cook, current church member.

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Hammons, E. E., and A. J. Miller, "History of the Church of Christ Building in Pilot Point," undated affidavit.

McKinney Examiner, ca. Feb. 23, 1912.

National Archives. General Services Administration. Confederate Records of B. F. Hall.

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Wright, Mary Blanche. On Their Roaring Way. John T. McInnis Printing and Publishing. Orange, California (1957).

## HISTORY OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST BUILDING IN PILOT POINT

The Church of Christ Building is situated on land that was originally in a grant made to Heirs of Charles Smith by the Republic of Texas in 1845 (1). J. N. Gist and J. C. Blake, Deacons of the Church of Christ, at that time, purchased the tract October 20, 1874 from Alice B. Merchant and George W. Merchant (2) "for and in consideration of the sum of one hundred dollars". The tract had been owned by the Merchants since February 4, 1872 when they purchased it from her mother, Elizabeth Emberson(3).

The congregation was organized in the early 1860's by Dr. B. H. Hall of Kentucky (4). The people met for worship in various homes. After the erection of the building, now owned by the Masonic Lodge, in 1862 by the Methodists, the congregation met there for worship until they built their own building in 1875.

The present building was erected on the land in 1875 by members of the congregation (4) supervised by A. W. Cooke. Mr. Cooke and wife came to this area in the early 1850's by covered wagon from Missouri. The lumber for the building was hauled by L. Z. Eddleman from Shreveport, La. in ox drawn wagons. L. Z. Eddleman was the first white child born in Pilot Point in 1856 (4) to Dr. and Mrs. R. W. Eddleman, early settlers who came to Pilot Point about 1845.

The colonial style structure consisted of one large room serving as the auditorium. Two doors, one on either side, opened onto a covered porch which extended across the east end of the building. An open, crown crested belfry towers above the porch of the building, where the old bell still hangs and can be heard pealing out a solemn invitation for "Who so ever will" to come worship God.

The first addition to the building was in 1952. Two classrooms were added, one on either side, at the back of the building. The old exterior wood siding was covered with asbestos siding. The two single doors on either side of the front were closed and a large double door replaced them. Later year round air-conditioning was added and the system has been up-dated from time to time. In 1968, three more classrooms, a nursery and restrooms were added to the building. Most recently, a storage area of the classrooms was converted to a small kitchenette. Even though there have been additions to the building, the colonial style and general outward appearance of the structure have been preserved.

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1. Denton Co. Deed Records Vol C. Page 173
  2. Denton Co. Deed Records Vol I Page 46
  3. Denton Co. Deed Records Vol M Page 325
  4. Denton Co. Historical Society - Pilot Point Branch



On the inside of the auditorium, the walls have been paneled, Floriscent lighting installed and original oiled wood floor has been covered with vinyl floor covering and carpeting in some areas. The original pews, pulpit furniture and communion table are still in use. The pews, however have been cushioned an upholstered.

Even though the finished lumber for the building was hauled in, along with "square nails", much of the lumber for the frame work of the structure was cut in the local area. One may find bark on the split logs exposed in the attic of the building.

This building has been the meeting site of the congregation of the Church of Christ since it was erected in 1875. The elders of the congregation, at the present time, are E. E. Hammons H. C. Calvert and J. T. Marshall. W. C. Guest is the minister. The congregation meets regularly three times weekly.

This structure is the second oldest church building in the city of Pilot Point.

In 1959 the Church of Christ, 406 S. Jefferson St. in Pilot Point, Texas, was instrumental in starting another congregation in Aubrey, Texas. The Pilot Point church bought a building and moved it to the present site of the Church of Christ, Aubrey, Texas. The men of the Pilot Point congregation labored with Aubrey men, after their regular days work, to remodel and prepare the building for a meeting house.

The Church of Christ in Pilot Point contributed for several years to the support of the Bible Chair in Denton, Texas. The Bible Chair, under the direction and supervision of the University Church of Christ, Denton, Texas, offers Bible courses for college credit to North Texas State University and Texas Womans University students, regardless of religious affiliation. The Pilot Point Church of Christ pledged monthly support when the program was started, in the mid 1950's, and continued that support until 1974.

The Pilot Point Church of Christ contributed to the support of a man of the congregation, when he decided to attend the School of Preaching, Lubbock, Texas. This school prepares men as ministers of the gospel. The Pilot Point church gave him support for two years and he has been preaching since completing the school.

The Pilot Point Church of Christ is contributing monthly and has for many years, to Christ's Haven, an orphans home in Keller, Texas.

A. J. Miller and E. E. Hammons were serving as Elders of the Church at Pilot Point, Texas during the time that the church participated or began participation in the programs mentioned above. They have signed this statement as being true facts.

  
A. J. Miller

  
E. E. Hammons

## CHURCH HISTORY

Early settlers began to make their homes at Pilot Point in 1845, two years before Denton County came into being. Among them was the family of Dr. and Mrs. R. W. Eddleman, their son L. Z. Eddleman was the first white baby born in the settlement. In the early fifties A. W. Cooke and wife arrived from Missouri in a covered wagon, driving a team of mules.

The early settlers were religious people and met for worship in their various homes. Later a Masonic Lodge Hall was erected and the various denominations met there until they could build their own places for worship.

The congregation of the Church of Christ came into being in 1864. B. F. Hall was active in this first work. Following him were Brother Wilmeth and Alfred Douglass all of whom preached for the new congregation. Some of the charter members were the families of S. A. Rimey, John Welborn, Joe Gist, G. Blake, A. W. Cooke, L. G. Balew, the McKenneys, the Embersons and the Edwards. There were others, no doubt, of whom we have no record.

The present church building was erected in 1875, on land purchased by the church in 1874. A. W. Cooke supervised the work done by the members. The lumber and "square nails" were hauled from Shreveport, Louisiana on ox drawn wagons by L. Z. Eddleman. It required six weeks to make a round trip.

From Jefferson Street the front walk leads through the shade of two giant oak trees, to the inviting front columned porch entrance to the auditorium, where one finds rest from the turbulence of life and can commune with God. The building is now air-conditioned and has classrooms across the rear of the building. The old bell still hangs in its crown-crested open belfry and peals out a solemn yet tender invitation for "Who-so-ever-will" to come—it's time to worship God.

Among the illustrious evangelists, who have conducted meetings in this perfectly preserved old building, was the late T. B. Larrimore. He held a 28-day meeting in the spring of 1904. Sister Ruby McKenney was baptized during that meeting. She is now a member of the Pearl Street Congregation in Denton, Texas. Other preachers of the early nineteen hundreds were Foy Wallace, Sr., R. H. Bowles, W. F. Ledlow, F. L. Young, Billy Woolfrom (he baptized Bro. R. W. Eddleman). Then from 1944 to 1967 the preachers were Thomas Light, Stanley Singleton, Bryan Vinson, Horace Teal, Frank Ross, Vernon Moody, David Mcneal, Roy Howell, John Dial, Ronald Rhodes, Dwight Whitsett and N. L. Trice. Brother John D. Moore has done a lot of good work conducting the services between changing preachers, and is now a very active member of the congregation, always ready to fill the pulpit when and where he is needed.

Brother L. L. Paul began his work here November 1st, 1967. During the first thirteen months, there have been 25 baptisms, 8 restorations and 7 placing membership. The Auditorium extended for restrooms and three classrooms added to those existing, all air-conditioned.

The first two classrooms to be constructed were built in 1952 with the \$1600 fund left to the church by Sister Laura Cook when she passed away. At the beginning of our 1968 classroom expansion, Sister Ruby McKenney gave \$6000 for the project; Mrs. R. L. Massey, widow of the late Brother R. L. (Lee) Massey, gave \$1500 in the memory of her husband; and Brother C. E. Hudspeth gave \$500. And with the funds on hand, when the work was completed we had no debt left over to hinder our future growth. We now look on the future as a great and grand opportunity to fulfill our part of the Great Commission.



Mrs. Iris Anderson



Mr. & Mrs. H. C. ...



Mr. & Mrs. Melvyn ...  
monds



Mrs. Lorene Hooper

From the East a well-trodden path leads back through the shade of of three great post oaks to a quaint old church. From the two front doors, aisles lead into the sanctuary.

The doors have always stood ajar that they who wish may enter, and in meditation, find respite from weariness and from that which disturbs. At vesper time, the church is sweet as the late sunlight filters through the large, squarepaned windows and casts a warm glow over the interior.

The old bell still hangs in its square open belfry, but the long bell rope no longer dangles from the ceiling and between the two front doors. Its clanging was always the same whether it chanted sorrow, or rang out jubilation, or summoned to worship; always the same, that is, until the indulgent sexton would lift up the tiny tike that was I that I might "help". Then because of the cadenzas that I rang out everyone within sound of the bell knew that "little Mary Johnson had hold of that bell rope again."

The Christian Church was built in 1875, by the men of the congregation, the lumber having been hauled from Shreveport in ox wagons. The straight-backed benches and the pulpit furniture were hand-carpentered. From the platform the shepherds of the little flock spoke many truths from Holy Writ that all might know and trust--that there is a true and a living God, that his Son died for us, that he was buried and arose from the grave, ascended to heaven and sits at the right hand of His Father; and that He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

My grandmother Emberson was a staunch member of this Christian Church, she worshipped there for forty-five years. There her children, her grandchildren, and her great-grandchildren attended Sunday school and church. It was indeed "our church", and this was not because she helped to found and nurture it, but because we loved the old church house so well, and also the people who gathered there each and every Sunday.

Steeple, dominating the landscape, gave evidence that Pilot Point was a church-going community, and "our" church boasted of the largest and the most active church group in the town. There were many young people and lots of children, hence, a large and exuberant Sunday school. Exuberant it was, indeed, when the several classes distributed themselves about the auditorium and, every so often, one would recite in unison, or break out into song; and during the hour, the minister who taught the adult class, could wax loud and long.

In Pilot Point there was a regularly established custom for the churches to hold a series of "protracted meetings." In fact, a good part of the late lazy summer was given over to revivals, for each church planned the time of its meeting so as not to interfere with another.

Provided with comfortable chairs and wired for lighting, a large open tent was usually erected in front of the Christian Church and under the spreading oaks; so "our" meeting was the best attended and the most enjoyable of them all.

The members of the Christian Church were accustomed to cultured and eloquent ministers, and only the outstanding evangelists of the brotherhood were called to take charge of our meetings. Such preachers proclaimed the glorious doctrines of the Bible, God's love and grace; edified the church, and warned of the evils of transgression.

Among such preachers was T. B. Larimore. It is possible that I shall forget many personalities met with in the past, but never shall I fail to remember the tall, thin preacher who stood in the pulpit with his hands joined in front of him, the right palm resting in that of his left hand--the distinguished evangelist who had no peer, Theophilus Brown Larimore.

Without regard for denominational limitations, everyone called him "Brother Larimore," since he was looked upon as a representative Christian in the broadest sense. Following his discourses on Prophecies, the Destruction of Jerusalem, the Dispersion of the Jews, and kindred topics, he seemed entirely swept away in an upsurge of thought and expression; but when he presented the teachings of the New Testament, the hearer had the feeling that the minister was inspired.

The last time that I saw the old church building, my husband and I visited it together. The doors stood slightly ajar and we entered. I sat down on a rear pew, remembering other days, little things that I could recall, and by so doing, I added warmth and color to the scene.

Just what ~~xxx~~ did I remember? My grandmother sitting, singing and praying in the amen corner. My grandmother marching me down the aisle of the church and out of the door, for I could usually be counted on to explode in an outburst of temper during services.

I remembered the familiar scene of our elders passing along the aisles offering communicants the wine from glass goblets and the bread from plain white plates; the congregations filing to the front of the church to lay upon the table their Sunday offerings. A modern silver communion service has replaced the glasses and plates, and the deacons of the congregation pass baskets in which to collect the contributions.

When I saw the beautiful carpet which covered the rostrum and the aisles, I was reminded of "church cleaning days" when we children got down on our knees to pick ~~xx~~ out all sorts of particles which clung to the rough, prickly carpeting. As to the old home-made furniture in its stead is beautiful golden oak; comfortably curving seats, a large pulpit stand of classic design, and a handsome communion table. Carved into the apron of the table is the Heaven-given admonition, "This do in remembrance of me."

As if speaking from afar, I heard my husband saying, "We must be getting on." As I walked along the shaded path leading from the church, I paused for a moment to look about me. There was never grass nor shrubs nor flowers under the trees, only acorns were on the clean swept ground.

For what was I searching? For the pokeweed which thrived under the oaks every spring. Neighboring families watched for the coming of the pokeweed and gathered it for greens, preferring its flavor to the mustard, or turnip tops which grew in their vegetable gardens.

We drove away, and as I glanced back over my shoulder I said: "The old church is proud, a pretty thing to see." The bell hanging high in its belfry winked at me through the tree tops. I shall always retain in my memory the picture of "our" church with the late afternoon sun falling ~~upon~~ warmly upon the ~~tran~~ tranquil old building sleeping amidst its three oaks.