

THE OLD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH -- NOW THE SANGER, TEXAS, COMMUNITY CENTER
Recorded Texas Historic Landmark 1972
Texas Historical Marker October 7, 1972

The Sanger Cumberland Presbyterian Church was organized by the Rev. Mr. Goodson on August 30, 1896. The town of Sanger was comparatively new, having been founded in 1887 as a station on the new Santa Fe Railroad. It was named by the railway company for the Sanger family, one of its best customers in its chain of stores throughout Texas. In 1901 the 66 members of the Presbyterian Church decided to build a house of worship. Until this time the con-spirited citizen of the community and a Baptist, donated the land for the church. He was the grandfather of Mrs. Paxton H. Gray, vice-chairman of the Sanger Community Center Association. Completed in 1902, the Presbyterian Church was the first church in the community that was not a boxed square building and it was the only auditorium of the ensuing ten years.

The church was built by local carpenters, possibly led by a Mr. Kay. Mr. W. L. Meek assisted by his son, Dick, helped with the building. Mr. Meek was the father of Mrs. Lou LeGear Amyx of Sanger and the grandfather of Mrs. Royce Jones. Jasper Wells, a prominent citizen, donated a bell, always cher-ished by the townspeople for its sweetness of tone, for the tower. The Wells family produced in a later generation a Texas legislator who served Denton County for 14 years and is now assistant professor of government at Texas Women's University, Jasper Wells' grandson, Alonzo Jamison.

Once completed, the Presbyterian Church structure was in rather constant use by the community. The auditorium had the largest seating capacity of any building in the town during the subsequent ten years, and was frequently called into service. Since the local school has always been directly across the street, mass exercises were held here, baccalaureate sermon on Sunday and the graduation exercises on Monday night following.

The Presbyterians were indeed generous with their building. The east room (a Sunday School room) was used for the studio of "Professor" A. B. Condo, teacher of music in Sanger from 1902 - 1905. Students whose parents yearned to make them "accomplished" in the cultural sense of the performing arts would run across from the public school to be taught piano or elocution, then later would perform in recitals given in the church building.

The first formal church wedding ever to occur in Sanger was that of Miss Myra Martin to Will Jones in 1903 in this church. Miss Martin was the daughter of the Presbyterian pastor, the Rev. J. Monroe Martin.

The Presbyterians had only half-time (two Sundays a month) services of their pastor, sharing the minister with the people of Valley View, 6 miles to the north, in Cooke County. The Methodist people of Sanger had a similar arrangement with their pastor, but with Sundays not identical with those of the Presbyterians--so that the two congregations commonly arranged to worship together with whatever pastor was officiating in the town on any given Sunday.

One innovation dear to the hearts of the young was the setting aside of a section in the center of the auditorium of the Presbyterian Church for the occupancy of courting couples on alternate Sunday nights during the worship service. Many had their first dates under this arrangement. This special project was the idea of a young minister, the Rev. Hardin Mallard, who had recently graduated from Trinity University, Waxahachie.

2.

In 1970 the Presbyterians felt the need of a new church. They wanted a masonry structure suited to their more recent programs of the church. Dr. Dwight Russell, district superintendent, helped the congregation obtain a grant for the building from the Board of Missions. Don Boots, a lay preacher, Andy Barentine, and Alfred Burks did much of the work of erecting the new building. It is situated on land donated by the Bill Switzer family in honor of the memory of Switzer's father, Earnest Cecil Switzer. The membership of the Presbyterian congregation has dropped to 38. All of the church members of the current years have cooperated in raising funds and constructing the new church.

Meantime the community was aware of its affection and need for the continuing function of the building in the life of the town of Sanger. The Sanger Friends of the Library had been organized in 1970 and opened the Sanger Public Library for the use of all people of the community. Hundreds of books donated by people of the community and contributions of money allowed the volunteer staff to open the library in temporary quarters in the building so generously afforded by Dr. and Mrs. J. Clyde Chapman. The building was used free of charge for its first two years. On February 1, 1971, a group of citizens went a step further by meeting in the home of Mrs. W. B. Chambers to form the Sanger Community Center Association for the express purpose of acquiring the old building of the Presbyterians for continuing its use as a community center, housing the library, a small museum and providing a meeting place in the auditorium for various organizations of the town.

Dick Chatfield was elected chairman of the group; Mrs. Eunice Sullivan Gray, vice chairman; Mrs. Judy Knowles Selph, secretary; Mrs. Rene Kerby and Mrs. Eulalia McDaniel, co-treasurers. Official board members, other than the officers were: Mrs. W. B. Chambers, Mrs. Jane Cornell, Alton Greene and Mrs. Evaline Stippich plus Mayor Ken Cornell, and Mrs. Ralph Amyx (Homemakers Club), Mrs. Thomas Moore (Arts and Crafts), Mrs. Chester V. Stippich (Wednesday Study Club), Richard Muir (now John Wilson) of (Sanger Chamber of Commerce), John Richardson (now Grover Sebastian) of (Lions Club) and Mrs. Estelle Voss (now Mrs. Harry Smith) of (C-C Ettes). By concerted efforts of the various community groups the church was purchased with funds of Sanger Community Fair under the jurisdiction of the Sanger Chamber of Commerce board of Directors, with Bob McLaughlin, president.

The last services of the church were held in the old building on August 22, 1971, and the congregation forthwith moved into its new church.

Early in 1972 restoration of the old structure for its new function was begun. Funds for this work came from the Federated Clubs of Sanger, Mrs. Rene Kerby, treasurer. By May of 1972 the library began its move to the new quarters. The building of 1902, the first actual center for cultural activities in the town of Sanger, thus began to function as a community center aware of its community responsibilities. An antique case for the museum was the first acquisition of that section and was the gift of the C-C Ettes. Former Mayor Tilford Wilson has given funds for a brick patio honoring his wife, Lillian Craddock Wilson. Seventy years after this building began its role which the townspeople now so greatly cherish, the "Old" Presbyterian Church, now the Sanger Community Center, continues as the bulwark of civic pride.

August 1972, from notes of Mrs. W. B. Chambers, the late Una Burkholder Burks and Mrs. Paxton H. Gray