

APPLICATION FOR OFFICIAL TEXAS HISTORICAL  
SITE MARKER

for

CHINN'S CHAPEL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
COPPER CANYON  
DENTON COUNTY

TEXAS

11/3/94

BY SHIRLEY B. FAILE AND FRANKIE SPRABARY

"'So Dear to My Childhood:' The Rural Church Site as  
an Artifact of Material Culture"

By Shirley B. Faile

"There's a church in the valley by the wildwood,  
No lovelier spot in the dale;  
No place is so dear to my childhood  
As the little brown church in the vale."

"The Church in the Wildwood"  
Dr. William S. Pitts 1938

What is it exactly that endears a geographic site to our hearts? What family quest could have led an out-of-state visitor to slip a note under the locked door of old Chinn's Chapel United Methodist Church, saying, "My ancestors were early settlers in this church. Can someone with history contact me?"<sup>1</sup> What went through the minds of the couple who sent a check for the renovation of Chinn's Chapel, now standing near the site of Chinn's Chapel School which is no longer in existence?<sup>2</sup> Is today's religious experience anything like the testimony of the Alabama octogenarian who has returned to the spot of his childhood once more and recalls for us the exact date he was saved by Jesus, the circumstances of the revival meeting, and the way it changed his life?<sup>3</sup> What is the compelling nature of this four-acre vintage location in Denton County, Texas?<sup>4</sup> Surely such a beloved spot has a special cultural significance.

Historian Pierce Lewis has written about the landscape itself as material culture, stating that any landscape which is altered by humankind thus becomes an artifact of material culture.<sup>5</sup> The subdivision, allocation, and aesthetic decor of an area (what is done to make an area "look nice" or conversely to harm or decimate it) reveals patterns of basic rituals of American culture that are bound by strictures of good

taste, proper behavior, religious doctrines, and political codes.<sup>6</sup> Certain events in the history of Chinn's Chapel United Methodist Church site have conferred such special significance upon it that individuals return to it on a regular basis to remember and renew the meaning it has held for them throughout their lives. How can we understand today the significance of a religious era and rural lifestyle that has vanished from existence?

Chinn's Chapel United Methodist Church site has been an important landmark since the settlement of the area in 1845.<sup>7</sup> Here were abundant timber and water that furnished the settlement which grew up around four freshwater springs near Hickory Creek.<sup>8</sup> The fifth settlement of pioneers who had received land grants from the Republic of Texas to Peter's Colony was established in what is now the Chinn's Chapel community during 1845, the year Texas became the twenty-eighth state of the Union.<sup>9</sup> Essentially it was a farming frontier and part of the first large Texas settlement on the prairies.<sup>10</sup> A nondenominational congregation gathered to worship in a log cabin surrounded by their burial ground on a hill called Antioch.<sup>11</sup> The ten-acre site, donated by Mary (1808-1871) and Elisha Chinn (1802-1876), pioneer settlers who came from Alabama in 1853, is located one-fourth mile northwest of the present Chinn's Chapel United Methodist Church site in Denton County, Texas.<sup>12</sup> One of the most precious artifacts of North Texas Methodism is the Chinn Bible, given to the church by Mrs. Randy McMakin (Katie) in 1990.<sup>13</sup>

Although no regular services were held at Antioch, runners were sent out to call the community together

whenever a preacher passed through or a "burying" took place.<sup>14</sup> Used as a church, a school, and a temporary shelter for pioneer families building their own log cabins, Antioch became the center of social and religious activity of one of the chief settlements of the county.<sup>15</sup> In 1846, Denton County was named for John Bunyan Denton, known as "the Indian fighting Methodist circuit rider."<sup>16</sup>

A lawyer and local preacher, Denton had been killed defending a settlement from Native American enemies in 1841. His grave lies on the Denton County Court House lawn. Denton's two sons, John B. Denton, Jr. and J.F. Denton, entered the Methodist ministry.<sup>17</sup>

The Methodist circuit rider of that day knew he traveled to preach the Gospel at the peril of his life, as the settlements were far apart and relations with Native Americans of the plains were then dangerous. There were approximately 14,200 Native Americans in Texas in 1836, chiefly Cherokee, Choctaw, and Commanche.<sup>18</sup> The Cherokee tribes were broken up and removed to the Indian Territory in 1839, but only a shallow river lay between it and North Texas. The Commanches were considered more hostile and dangerous, and many clashes were frequent until the mid 1840's.<sup>19</sup> Diaries of the Methodist circuit riders reveal long journeys, hard fare, and dangers from crossing streams and rivers and from wild animals. Yet they were studious men of intellect and often high culture, brave men of brains and brawn, consecrated to spreading the Gospel.<sup>20</sup>

Their pioneer parishioners were similarly devoted and sacrificial. Houses were opened to preachers who had never been seen before and might never be seen again. Meager rations were willingly shared. At camp meetings, settlers might kill a beef a day, if necessary,

and furnish enough cornmeal or flour, if available.<sup>21</sup>

Denton County was then not heavily populated, the 1850 census listing only 641 inhabitants, ten of them African-American slaves.<sup>22</sup> It was "the real frontier, raw, wild, and wide open."<sup>23</sup> From 1850 to 1867, the year North Texas was designated the Trinity Conference in American Methodism, there was rapid growth in the Chinn's Chapel area. Circuit riders dealt with poor salaries from the new Conference, hard traveling conditions, and distressingly inadequate buildings or no buildings. Theirs was the challenge to build the church of Jesus Christ in the wilderness.<sup>24</sup> New roads were being laid out, often with guidance from Methodist preachers.<sup>25</sup> The Reverend William E. Bates was perhaps most responsible for introducing Methodism to Denton County. Arriving from Kentucky in 1851, he served as a supply junior preacher from Dallas in 1853, and joined the East Texas Conference in 1854. His son described his last circuit assignment after many years of organizing churches in Denton County: "He rode from Denton up Clear Creek to Chisum's ranch, thence to Decatur and Big Sandy, thence to Montague, thence to Jacksboro and Weatherford and back through Tarrant County via Birdville, to Lewisville and then home in the eastern part of Denton County... He had thirty-one appointments, and it required twenty-seven days to make his monthly trip... He had several narrow escapes from hands of wild Indians."<sup>26</sup> ~~The route from Lewisville to eastern Denton County very likely led through what is now the Chinn's Chapel area.~~

When the congregation at Antioch decided to hold regular Sunday services and adopt organizational plans, they sought membership in the North Texas Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church South. Admitted in 1872, they officially named the log cabin "Chinn's

Chapel" since members of the Chinn Family were recognized both for the existence of the original nondenominational log cabin church, as well as the organization of its congregation as Methodists.<sup>27</sup> In 1877 the church's trustees purchased four acres in the valley below the log cabin and cemetery, and there they built a new building in the style of late nineteenth-century rural Texas religious architecture.<sup>28</sup> Those trustees who undertook the provision of a more adequate new house of worship were Martin Guthrie, A. McLean, Ezekiel H. Rowell, J.R. Lester, and L.N.Carter.<sup>29</sup> The new church was built on the site of their early day camp meetings.<sup>30</sup>

## II. Camp Meeting at Chinn's Chapel

Camp meetings were at their height from about 1850 until 1900.<sup>31</sup> They were the chief evangelical tool of the church and followed a format designed to save souls and win converts. For almost thirty years, from 1867 to 1896, there was a steady increase in the number of church members and church buildings in the North Texas Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church South. The number of members grew from 7,495 to 51,028, and the number of preachers grew from forty-nine to 146.<sup>32</sup> In August, the most convenient time in the agricultural calendar, families arrived at Chinn's Chapel in wagons, riding horses and mules, and on foot to worship and enjoy one another's company, refreshed by nearby spring water and shaded by spreading oak trees. (Many measuring over four feet in diameter remained standing in 1975; one of that breadth remains standing in 1994, along with eight

other old growth trees of lesser breadth.)<sup>33</sup> After setting up tents and cookfires, families attended preaching morning, noon, and night, seated on backless benches under a "brushy arbor" built for the occasion. The arbor was a cheap and easy to provide covering. It was a light framework of small timber, roofed over with leafy branches. All sides were open, and underneath were benches and a platform with a crude pulpit. There was always danger of fire from the torches or lanterns at nighttime, and bugs were an accepted inconvenience.<sup>34</sup>

Camp meetings were significant events in the social and religious lives of Texans, deepening the commitment of believers, winning new converts, and producing impressions never to be forgotten. The whole populace almost in its entirety turned out from many miles around. Many preachers were invited to participate, and they prepared diligently. People waited until camp meeting to join the church, and there was great speculation as to which members of the community, what strangers, and how many in all, would be converted. This was the chief evangelistic tool of the church, a meeting half-revival, half-vacation, and it was designed to produce a profound effect.<sup>35</sup> All sorts of people attended: elderly saints, active church members, seekers, troublemakers, hucksters, and lovers. The mounting exuberance of the preachers was often puzzling to the children, as well as the unrestrained outpouring of emotion among those adults usually engaged in the sobering realities of farm work.<sup>36</sup> Camp meeting continued day after day indefinitely, and the preaching and singing part was called a "protracted meeting." If enough souls were won and new members added to the church, the entire camp meeting experience would be called a "revival" after it

ended, as there had occurred a revival of religion. So many members were converted in camp meetings that North Texas Methodists were said to be suspicious of anyone who "got religion in the winter, between 'layin-in' and 'fodder-pullin' time." The outward expression of inner feeling, of 'getting in touch with God,' was expected behavior of those in attendance.<sup>37</sup> Not only did they discuss their religious experience, but also their farm and family experience, from birthing babies to seed crops to curing meat to hiving bees.<sup>38</sup>

"My grandfather Billie Potts would come west out of Argyle," recalled Marvin Dillard, "and camp for two weeks or longer. They had a large brush arbor where they held meetings. This is where my father John met my mother Lila. My father joined Chinn's Chapel in 1909. My mother and I joined in 1925 on the same night."<sup>39</sup> Though Mr. and Mrs. John Dillard had met at Chinn's Chapel Camp Meeting, they did not join the church until later during a time when summer revivals had taken the place of camp meetings.

Toward the end of the nineteenth-century, North Texas became more thickly populated, and railroad travel made large camp meetings, such as those in Paris, Texas and Galveston, more accessible to statewide Methodists. Intimate, rural meetings drew fewer and fewer participants as families made plans to travel to exciting new places. These large camp meeting revivals soon became too protracted and sometimes violent. Drinking water was at a premium, interest centered on food, and campfire cooks found themselves sharing all that they had with tramps, politely called "strangers." Lemonade and ice cream stands produced a carnival atmosphere. Methodists complained of viewing what some considered insincere conversions, marked only by a stand-up introduction and a handshake, as well as a lack of doctrinal preaching.<sup>40</sup>



### III. Summer Revivals at Chinn's Chapel

As camp meetings declined even in the rural church, the summer revival took its place with a visiting preacher, often a husband and wife team, and a visiting song leader. No longer urged to conversion by a concerted team of visiting preachers, musical expression gained in prominence. Services were held in the early morning or evening inside the building for ten days to two weeks.<sup>41</sup> As the nineteenth-century drew to a close, Chinn's Chapel was regularly served by circuit-riding Methodist preachers appointed first from the Gainesville District and then by the Dallas-Denton District of the Methodist organization.<sup>42</sup> George William Jackson (1827-1906), Methodist preacher, school administrator, and pioneer merchant from Tennessee, settled near Chinn's Chapel in 1882. He farmed and served Chinn's Chapel along with Argyle, Farmer's Branch, and Pilot Point.<sup>43</sup> His Presiding Elder was the famed Methodist administrator J.S. Sherrill, well-known for his administrative achievements in North Texas Methodism. Jackson shared his circuit with the Rev. L.E. Joshua and the Rev. L.D. Addington.<sup>44</sup>

A popular revival leader, George W. Jackson delivered his "soul-stirring oratorios" and spread the practice of shaped-note singing, using tunes from a Methodist hymnal written by his circuit-riding father John Batchelor Jackson in 1838.<sup>45</sup> George W. Jackson travelled with his wife Sarah Ann who brought her pump organ, and his four sons who were known as "The Jackson Quartet" or "The Singing Jackson Boys."<sup>46</sup>

August continued as the chief social season of the church, regularly marking the investments of years of church membership and work by the lay members of the congregation. W.N. Rowell wrote the life story of his grandfather Ezekiel H. Rowell, physician, Captain in the Civil War Confederacy, cattle rancher, and Trustee of Chinn's Chapel during the building of the church in the valley. "He was deeply religious and could always be found in the seat reserved for him at the revival meetings held each summer at Chinn's Chapel." <sup>47</sup>

After the turn of the century, revival meetings moved outside at Chinn's Chapel. A permanent structure was built on the site of the former brushy arbor, which resembled the arbor in that it was a roof supported by log poles, having open sides, but now with a shingled roof. These structures built on many rural churchgrounds were called "tabernacles." Members standing on the church grounds at twilight recall John Dillard, known as "the old lamplighter," striding across the field toward the tabernacle with a lighted Coleman lantern. He pumped, ignited, adjusted, and hung the lanterns from exposed pine ceiling joists, providing a bright white light. Jewell Russell played the piano while her husband Johnnie led the singing, swaying to and fro and from side to side. The preacher paced, shouted, and exhorted, and the people responded in kind, fanning all the while with cardboard fans with wooden handles to alleviate August's heat and defend themselves from insects. <sup>48</sup>

"We had a special reason to go to Chinn's Chapel," recalled Roy Bradford. "There used to be an old man lived at the top of the hill called 'Shoutin' Griffin.' When he was full of religion, he would get poured out.

Everybody liked him better than the preacher. He got everybody good and stirred up too. People loved hard-driving preaching. The texts from the Bible concerned them all ... hardship, famine, sickness, and loss. They would really sing out on "The Old Rugged Cross," "Til We Meet Again," "Farther Along," and "I love Jesus." It was morning preaching in August."<sup>49</sup>

The spiritual condition of the church was assessed by the lay members in August and strength built among them for the coming winter, during which time it was tended by travelling preachers. Chinn's Chapel supported the initiatives of the North Texas Conference through finances, service, and prayer. On March 22, 1879, the Quarterly Conference assessed Chinn's Chapel \$90 for the support of preachers, \$70 for the support of the district's presiding elder, \$15 for Conference claims, and \$4.50 for Sunday School literature.<sup>50</sup> On February 2, 1887, the circuit's quarterly conference was held at Chinn's Chapel. The Rev. R.M. Powers served as Presiding Elder, and the Rev. J.M. Stephenson was guest preacher. "We are glad to report that we find the charge in fine spiritual condition," wrote Rev. Powers. "We have visited about fifty families and would have done better, but we have been hindered by sickness in our family as well as the cold weather."<sup>51</sup>

From 1896 to <sup>1907</sup>1897 there was, however, little gain in Methodist membership throughout North Texas. There was a depression in business matters, turmoil over "the holiness movement," and problems with "professional" evangelists. Also changes in the Methodist organization's district lines led to membership losses.<sup>52</sup> Those active in the holiness

movement insisted that every Christian must have a second cleansing or blessing or renewing. Some set themselves up to judge whether others had fully claimed the experience, and they behaved in judgmental, prideful, and divisive ways.<sup>53</sup> In addition to these problems, there was the effect of technological change. Improvements in transportation and communication, as well as a growing urban environment in North Texas, brought about changes in the way people responded to religious influence or expressed religious feeling. There was the recognition that earlier evangelism had been too exclusively individualistic and emotional. The sins of an urban society made up largely of transient residents could not be reached through cyclical rural revivalism.<sup>54</sup>

#### IV. Sunday School at Chinn's Chapel

Chinn's chapel remained a busy and important site to community members due to the close relationship of home, church, and school. Even the log cabin in the cemetery, which first bore the name "Chinn's Chapel," had long served as Sunday Bible School and weekday public school for the children of the community. Non-denominational Sunday schools of the type first held in the log cabin known as Antioch were known as "union schools." The Methodist circuit riders recognized the importance of the Christian nurture of children and came to the communities prepared to give some attention to Christian education, as well as preaching. An "Essayist" wrote anonymously in the Texas Wesleyan

Banner in 1851, "Our most imperious obligations are to prepare ourselves to instruct the little company of rustics in the log cabin when we have found it; to 'feed the flock of Christ' when we minister to it."<sup>55</sup> The circuit riders realized that concentration on the winning of souls to Christ and adding members to the rolls was detrimental to the planning and carrying out of Christian education. One pastor frankly admitted in 1876 that he had been so preoccupied with revival meetings and camp meetings that he had neglected the pastoral instruction of the children.<sup>56</sup> This concern for Christian nurture, to carry forward the effects of conversion, was the forerunner of the development of a strong emphasis on effective Christian education in Texas Methodism, guided from the Nashville, Tennessee, Methodist publishing headquarters.<sup>57</sup> In 1855 at their annual conference, the Methodists adopted a resolution pledging the body to serve as a "Sabbath School Society Auxiliary to the Sunday School Union of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, & that we will co-operate with the preacher in carrying out the Sunday School enterprise."<sup>58</sup> By 1877 the purpose of Sunday Schools was very clear: "The chief design of the Sabbath School is to lead children to Christ, and this part of our work should be made purely evangelical."<sup>59</sup>

A movement was surfacing to move away from the nondenominational union Sunday Schools to Methodist doctrinal classes using Methodist literature. Sunday School was for children. Adult classes were almost nonexistent until after the turn of the century. Great effort was expended to have teachers use Methodist literature. Church buildings, when there was one, served double-duty as a worship sanctuary and as a Sunday School.

Sunday Schools met more often than the regularly worshipping congregation, since the circuit riding preacher might come once a month on Sunday but the members who taught Sunday School would be present each week. Teachers became important members of the community, often earning a special place in the memories of the children. At Bridwell Library at Southern Methodist University, we find a lovely silk handkerchief given to Ethel Calvert in 1918 by her Sunday School teacher Ruby Harris. It had been kept pressed in Mrs. Calvert's Bible for well over three-quarters of a century.<sup>60</sup>

Quarterly Conference records depict Chinn's Chapel's struggle to minister to its children. In 1888, "We have three Sunday Schools within the bounds of our circuit which are all in wonderful operation ... The School at Chinn's Chapel is growing in interest considering the unpleasant weather we have passed through ..."<sup>61</sup> In January, 1889, "The School at Chinn's Chapel was reorganized the first Sun. in Jan. with Bro. J.B. Shelton as Superintendent, forming ten classes. We have done what we could for the children within the Quarter. We fully appreciate the magnitude of the work that may be done in winning the children for Christ."<sup>62</sup> In September, 1889, "We Have but two Sunday Schools in operation at present. The Schools at Chinn's Chapel and Oak Grove have suspended. It seems impossible to keep up interest at these points ..."<sup>63</sup> And in November, 1890, "Owing to the failure of the crops, conference collections are behind..."<sup>64</sup>

Methodist Sunday School literature included "Our Little People, Illustrated Lesson Paper," and "Sunday School Magazine."<sup>65</sup> These sought to please the children, though the attitude of North Texans toward children was that they should be made to fear the consequences of sin and seek the Savior's pardon.<sup>66</sup> High infant and child mortality rates made parents aware of the fragility of child life and the need for early conversion and Bible knowledge. From 1890 to 1910, Sunday Schools declined, but as the status of children rose in society and the viewpoint of the child came under consideration, a surge of interest during the

first quarter of the ~~nineteenth~~<sup>twentieth</sup>-century boosted Sunday school membership to 72.8 per cent of church membership by 1910.<sup>67</sup> Faced with doctrinal differences with the Baptists, Presbyterians, and the Campbellites, the need for trained leadership became a conference concern. In 1851, Robert Crawford was appointed Sunday School Agent in the North Texas Conference in order to establish and improve Sunday Schools, but he did not continue after the year's end, and there is no reference to another appointment of an agent until Wiley Shook in 1869. After that, the office was filled sporadically by Richard Lane in 1870, W.P. Petty in 1875, D.P. Haggard in 1880, W.F. Clark in 1888, and M.A. Smith in 1893-94.<sup>68</sup> Early in the twentieth-century North Texas Methodists raised \$50,000 to endow chairs in religious pedagogy, half going to Emory University and half to Southern Methodist University in Dallas. The chair was first filled by Dr. J.L. Cunningham, and he, along with other members of the faculty and Mrs. W.B. Ferguson of Nashville and Mrs. Clay E. Smith of Fort Worth, conducted a training school for Sunday school leadership in the North Texas Conference.<sup>69</sup> Beginning in 1919, the Western Training School for Sunday School Leaders was held in summers at Southern Methodist University.<sup>70</sup>

On Mother's Day in 1933, Chinn's Chapel honored Mrs. Orlean Jarnigan, aged eighty-seven, with a ceremony and service in her honor as the only living member of the Sunday school class that had been formed in 1872.<sup>71</sup> Later the Bradley family gathered for a family reunion, and they decided that Mrs. Jarnigan's grave needed a marker. Viola J. Crozby, a member of the Bradley family, reported to her friends the Clemments about Chinn's Chapel: "Sunday School is held in this building, also called Chinns Chapel (sic) as the old chapel is no longer

used every Sunday. There are 17 benches in the church. A shingled arbor about 30 by 50 feet is close to the west side of the building. The Rev. Atchley, who makes his home in Lewisville, preaches at Chinn's Chapel once a month, the other Sundays being divided between the Methodist churches at Argyle, Lake Dallas, and Cooper."<sup>72</sup>

#### V. Public School at Chinn's Chapel

In addition to the Methodist Sunday School, a weekday school was conducted at Chinn's Chapel. It had as its precedent the weekday school which formerly had been held in the log cabin in the cemetery. Chinn's Chapel School was established as Public School Number 62 in 1884.<sup>73</sup> The two-story Chapel School was well known in southwest Denton County and reached its peak enrollment just after the turn of the century. A souvenir booklet with 128 names was presented to the students of 1903-1904 by teacher Frank McMath. The upper floor of the building served as the Woodmen of the World Lodge where a men's social group sponsored by an insurance company of that name met on a regular basis. One of the benefits to members included providing grave markers in the shape of a hewn log, one of which remains standing in Chinn's Chapel Cemetery.<sup>74</sup>

Chinn's Chapel site was home to large gatherings for area softball games, and families arrived with wagons loaded with watermelons and picnic fare, also chairs from home.

While children's social roles continued as receivers of traditional farm values and the experiences of farm life, changes in transportation, communication, and technology



began to alleviate hardships and open doors to new ways of thinking and new occupations. Living side by side with adults, children learned the difficult competencies of farm labor, from canning, winnowing, bee keeping, and hog killing to planting, tending, and harvesting corn, cotton, sorghum cane, and peanuts.<sup>75</sup> They brought joy and laughter to farm parents and relatives as they fished for crawdads and played hide-and-seek, piggy wants a signal, knock the tin can, and tree tag.<sup>76</sup> They were also a source of major concern and responsibility for struggling parents.

"I want to tell you one thing that happened in my life that made such an effect I never got over it," Ethel Calvert shared. She grew up on a forty-acre farm in the Chinn's Chapel community and attended Chinn's Chapel School. "At times we didn't have enough to eat, because my mother was making a living for eight children and her old mother. So one time ... my mother knelt down beside the old fireplace... and she said, 'Now Father, I can't feed my children. I'm out of food. And would You show me a way, because they're Your children as well as mine. And I can't stand to see them go hungry.' My brother and sister went to the mailbox that day. There was a five dollar bill that my uncle had sent us, never before nor never after. Five dollars in those days would buy as much as fifty dollars nowadays, or maybe seventy-five. And that's the way He showed us He cared. It made such an impression on me, seeing my mother go down on her knees asking God to send us something to eat. He did."<sup>77</sup>

Medical care in the community was primitive, and church members were called to take turns "sitting up with the sick and dying." Whooping cough, diphtheria, measles, chicken pox, small pox, and polio were the scourges of

childhood and threatened adult health as well. Community children walked to Chinn's Chapel School, often several miles, and the legend exists of a tiny girl, unable to keep up with her peers walking home, who froze to death in the sudden temperature change Texans call a "blue Norther." <sup>78</sup>

Enrollment declined at Chinn's Chapel School from 1910-1920, and the Chinn's Chapel School and Hawk School were consolidated into the new Annie Webb Blanton School in 1921. The consolidation and the drawing of district lines between Annie Webb Blanton School and Bethel School caused bitter feelings among community members. The dividing line closely followed Chinn Chapel Road with those on the east going to Bethel and those on the west going to Annie Webb Blanton. Denton County permitted those near the official line to choose. Adding to the ill feelings concerning the severing of home, school, church ties was the decision to use lumber from Chinn's Chapel School to build Annie Webb Blanton School. In 1938, this school itself was consolidated with Double Oak, which closed its doors in 1962 when the district was split between Lewisville Independent School District and Denton Independent School District. <sup>79</sup>

After the demolishing of the Chapel School, the lone structure left standing on the Chinn's Chapel site was the Chapel itself, shaded by majestic old-growth oak trees. The east side of the structure sank precariously into the ground due to a rotted sixteen-foot-long hand-hewn foundation log, and the pews inside slanted so severely that the eight remaining church members slid to the right ends of the pews. Birds, squirrels, mice, bees, and wasps made their homes inside the Chapel, and weeds abounded outside.

Though Chinn's Chapel Community had remained an isolated, rural, row-crop farming community as late as the 1930's, its young people were drawn into the cities, and then into the world community, first in search of work in the Depression Era, and then through the call to war when World War II was declared in 1941. Adults travelled to work in defense plants far from the community, and the graves of the young who gave their lives for their country lie in Chinn's Chapel Cemetery.<sup>80</sup> After the war, few young people returned to carry on the farm work and rural lifestyle of their childhoods. Travel, education, new technology, economic conditions, social issues, and new understandings of religious experience led them to seek employment and to live their adult lives away from Chinn's Chapel Community. Row-crop farming gave way to cattle ranching, and eventually, to nearby light industry. Brick homes were built on acre lots on the hills overlooking the Chapel, and paved roads heavy with traffic heading for work in Dallas or departing for far-away destinations from nearby Dallas-Fort Worth Airport shimmer in the summer heat beside the old white chapel in its field of wildflowers near centuries old freshwater springs.

#### VI. Chinn's Chapel is Rejuvenated!

Faced with the prospect of closing the doors of Chinn's Chapel forever, in 1988 the remaining members made a pact to seek to understand the history of Chinn's Chapel and to draw on its strengths in order to preserve rural American Methodism in North Texas. District

Superintendent Bruce Weaver, impressed with twelve tiny churches, including Chinn's Chapel, which had long paid their conference apportionments in full and well before they were due, noted that these churches formed a crown when pinpointed on the map. Dubbing them "the Crown Churches," he provided the encouragement and leadership necessary to enable the members to rebuild the congregation. Eighty-five-year-old Methodist pastor Don W. Duran came forth from retirement to lead the congregation. Tirelessly visiting in the homes, teaching confirmation classes, and overseeing the construction of a new educational building providing the church's first running water, he and his wife Gemini Duran were honored with the naming of the Don and Gemini Duran Christian Education Building, and preaching, and dinner on the grounds in 1991. The church received the Marvin T. Judy Award for Excellence in Small Churches in 1992, awarded for its progress in evangelism and community outreach.

In 1994, Chinn's Chapel bustles with activity of Sunday School and Sunday services, as well as weekday wiener roasts, community club meetings, craft fairs, and heritage events. The children profit from new Sunday School literature designed to carry out a lesson theme with a number of ages combined into one group. The youth attend Methodist Youth Fellowship twice monthly, travelling to the other Crown Churches for combined meetings and hosting the meeting once annually at Chinn's Chapel. Descendants of farm families befriend new suburban members seeking a home in Christ. Though never able to fund a full-time pastor, Chinn's Chapel is ably led by young Rev. John Pflug who manages an insurance business and studies for the Methodist ministry at Southern Methodist University. He and wife Linda are busy foster parents for the Methodist Children's Home

in Waco, Texas, as well as caring for three young children of their own. Due to the size and location of Chinn's Chapel, it has often served as a training ground for young pastors entering the Methodist ministry and a final charge for those pastors nearing retirement. Members are busy renovating the nineteenth-century chapel, and plans have been drawn for a new building which would accommodate 300 members.

Asked why she thought Chinn's Chapel had survived all these years, Ethel Calvert responded, "Well, my answer's going to sound funny, but I think God's been in this church all along, and He's overseeing it. As long as people will come there and will listen, it will be there. Now I may have that down wrong, but that's my belief. You've seen so many little churches just be done away with, but so many people love to go to a small church. And it's always been a small church, although there has been more people than go there now, but ... God is there."<sup>80</sup>

Historically, Chinn's Chapel is a significant landmark site because it was the social, educational, and religious center of an important farming community for well over a century since the 1840's. It was an important Methodist camp meeting site during the era of protracted meetings. It was the site of large annual summer revivals as Methodism moved across North Texas. It was endeared to the hearts of children through their attendance at Sunday School and public school. It was a training ground for many young Methodist ministers launching their pastoral careers and a homecoming to those nearing retirement. Today Chinn's Chapel is the site of activities that continue to preserve the pioneer values of a now unique rural, agrarian lifestyle based on simplicity, togetherness, and trust in God.

END NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Bill Knight, Note to Church Historian. Copper Canyon, Texas: Shirley Faile, July 16, 1994.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. and Mrs. Jesse Chinn, Gift to Chinn's Chapel. Copper Canyon, Texas: Marvin Dillard, October 25, 1990.

<sup>3</sup> Andrew J. Wood, Letter to Church Historian. Copper Canyon, Texas: "Dear Dr. Faile," Huntsville, Alabama, October 29, 1994.

<sup>4</sup> Deed and Abstract Plat, Deed Records. Denton County, Texas, Vol. L, 459, February 7, 1877.

<sup>5</sup> Pierce Lewis, "Learning from Looking: Geographic and Other Writing about the American Landscape," ed. Thomas Schlereth, Material Culture: A Research Guide (Lawrence: UP of Kansas, 1985) 35, 41-43, 49.

<sup>6</sup> Lewis, "Learning from Looking," 43-45.

<sup>7</sup> C.A. Bridges, History of Denton, Texas, From Its Beginning to 1960 (Waco, Texas: Texian Press, 1978) 59.

<sup>8</sup> Ed. F. Bates, History and Reminiscences of Denton of Denton County (Denton, Texas: Terrill Wheeler Printing, Inc., 1976) 75.

<sup>9</sup> C.A. Bridges, History of Denton, 14.

<sup>10</sup> Seymour V. Connor, The Peter's Colony of Texas (Austin, Texas: The Texas State Historical Association, 1959) 120.

<sup>11</sup> Ed. F. Bates, History and Reminiscences, 75.

<sup>12</sup> Gene Porter Bradford and Edd Painter, "Chinn Chapel Cemetery," Unpublished MS, (Lewisville, Texas, 1992) 13; Ed. F. Bates, History and Reminiscences, 74.

<sup>13</sup> The Cottage Bible and Family Expositor... Explanatory Notes by Thomas Williams, Vol. 1 (Hartford: Carl, Tiffany, and Burnham, 1841) Bridwell Library, Southern Methodist University, 1992; Ricky Teig, "Chinn's Chapel Gets Boost with 149 Year Old Bible," The Lewisville News, April 27, 1990, 4A; "Chinn's Chapel Celebrates Gift of Historic Bible," North Texas United Methodist Reporter, April 20, 1990, 1A.

<sup>14</sup> Ed. F. Bates, History and Reminiscences, 74-75.

<sup>15</sup>"Chinn's Chapel pioneers prayed, died, and left this behind," Lewisville Leader, Airport News Advertiser, July 9, 1975, 1B; Ed. F. Bates, History and Reminiscences, 74-75; C. A. Bridges, History of Denton, 50.

<sup>16</sup>Walter N. Vernon, Methodism Moves Across North Texas (Dallas, Texas: The Historical Society of the North Texas Conference of the Methodist Church, 1967) 45; Ed. F. Bates, History and Reminiscences, 14; "County history has wild western flavor," Lewisville News, June 27, 1993, 53.

<sup>17</sup>Walter N. Vernon, Methodism Moves, 45.

<sup>18</sup>Walter N. Vernon, Methodism Moves, 70.

<sup>19</sup>Walter N. Vernon, Methodism Moves, 69-71; See also Robert C. Monk, Robert W. Sledge, Norman W. Spellmann, Walter Vernon, The Methodist Excitement in Texas (Dallas, Texas: The Texas United Methodist Historical Society, 1984) 26-27, 34, 47-48, 53, 56-57, 64, 67.

<sup>20</sup>Homer Thrall, A Brief History of Methodism in Texas (Nashville: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church South, 1894) 96; Walter N. Vernon, Methodism Moves, 45.

<sup>21</sup>Walter N. Vernon, Methodism Moves, 50.

<sup>22</sup>C. A. Bridges, History of Denton, 59.

<sup>23</sup>C. A. Bridges, History of Denton, 58-59.

<sup>24</sup>Walter N. Vernon, Methodism Moves, 95-102.

<sup>25</sup>Walter N. Vernon, Methodism Moves, 73; "100th Anniversary: Lewisville woman discusses history of Chinn's Chapel Road," Lewisville News, July 28, 1985, 4A; Record of Minutes, Commissioners Court of Denton County, February Term, 1885, 8-9.

<sup>26</sup>Walter N. Vernon, Methodism Moves, 73-74.

<sup>27</sup>Walter N. Vernon, Methodism Moves, 387; Ed. F. Bates, History and Reminiscences, 75.

<sup>28</sup>Deed and Abstract Plat, Deed Records. Denton County, Texas, Vol. L, 459, February 7, 1877; Minutes of the Quarterly Conference, September 28, 1908, "History of the First Methodist Church, Lewisville, Texas," Unpublished MS, First Methodist Church, Lewisville, Texas.

<sup>29</sup> Deed and Abstract Plat, Deed Records, Denton County, Texas. Vol. L, 459, 7 Feb., 1877.

<sup>30</sup> C.A. Bridges, History of Denton County, ; "Chinn's Chapel, where pioneers lived and died," Denton Record Chronicle, 4 July, 1975, 4-5; Alma Lain Chambers and Emily Fowler, "Towns and Communities of Denton County," Scrapbook, Emily Fowler Public Library, Denton, Texas; "Chinn Chapel," Scrapbook I - Denton History, Emily Fowler Public Library, Denton, Texas; Lee Nettie, "Testimony of Lee Nettie at the Jackson Reunion," Oral History. McKinney, Texas, 19, Sept., 1984.

<sup>31</sup> R.C. Monk, et al, The Methodist Excitement, 116.

<sup>32</sup> R.C. Monk, et al, The Methodist Excitement, 119.

<sup>33</sup> "Chinn's Chapel, where pioneers prayed and died," Denton Record Chronicle, 4 July, 1975, 4-5.

<sup>34</sup> R.C. Monk, et al, The Methodist Excitement, 87-88, 175-176.

<sup>35</sup> Homer S. Thrall, History of Methodism, 73-75; R.C. Monk, The Methodist Excitement, 175, 181.

<sup>36</sup> Walter N. Vernon, Methodism Moves, 113.

<sup>37</sup> Walter N. Vernon, Methodism Moves, 115-116.

<sup>38</sup> Walter N. Vernon, Methodism Moves, 113.

<sup>39</sup> Marvin E. Dillard, "Chinn's Chapel Church: Dillard," Unpublished MS, Copper Canyon, Texas, 1993.

<sup>40</sup> R.C. Monk, et al, The Methodist Excitement, 117.

<sup>41</sup> R.C. Monk, et al, The Methodist Excitement, 117.

<sup>42</sup> Robert C. Monk, et al, The Methodist Excitement, 161-167; Minutes of the Annual Conference



43 Frankie Sprabary, "The Rev. George W. Jackson of Chinn's Chapel," Unpublished MS, Lewisville, Texas, 1994; Quarterly Conference Records by C.M. Jacobsen, Gainesville District, 1879, in "History of the First Methodist Church of Lewisville, Texas," Unpublished MS, undated, First Methodist Church, Lewisville, Texas.

44 Quarterly Conference Records by C.M. Jacobsen, Gainesville District, 1879, in "History of the First Methodist Church of Lewisville, Texas," Unpublished MS, Undated, First Methodist Church, Lewisville, Texas.

45 J.B. Jackson, Knoxville Harmony of Music Made Easy (Madisonville, Tennessee: D. & M. Shields & John B. Jackson, Proprietors, Printed by A.W. Elder, 1838).

46 Frankie Sprabary, "The Rev. George W. Jackson"; Edd Painter and Gene Porter Bradford, "Chinn Chapel Cemetery," unpublished MS, Copper Canyon, Texas, 1992. See "Graves List:" Rev. George W. Jackson (1827-1906), Sarah Ann Jackson (1837-1925), Francis W. Jackson (1871-1882), son of G.W. and Sarah Ann Jackson, George T. Jackson (1862-1887), son of G.W. and Sarah Ann Jackson, William A. Jackson (1858-1882), son of G.W. and Sarah Ann Jackson, James E. Jackson (1860-1930) is buried in the family plot with the same type upright single headstone.

47 W.N. Rowell, "My Father," unpublished MS, Denton, Texas, 1959, 8. See also W.N. Rowell, "The Incomplete Life Story of E.H. Rowell, Copied by W.N. Rowell from a Small Notebook in His Father's Own Handwriting," Denton, Texas, 1959. See also William E. Bergin, Major General, USA, Letter to Lennice R. Donnell, "Dear Mrs. Donnell," 16 July, 1859. See also "Graves List," in Edd Painter and Gene Porter Bradford, "Chinn Chapel Cemetery," 62: E. Rowell (1801-1894). See also Deed and Abstract Plat, Deed Records, Denton County, Texas. Vol. L, 459, February 1877, which lists Ezekiel Rowell as a trustee of Chinn's Chapel.

48 Marvin E. Dillard, "Chinn's Chapel: Dillard," 3; Edd Painter, "June Bugs and Tabernacle Arrows: Remembrances of Rural Texas," unpublished MS, Denton, Texas, 21.

49 Roy Bradford, Oral history to Shirley Faile, Chinn's Chapel Decoration Day, Chinn's Chapel Cemetery, Copper Canyon, Texas, 3 May, 1988.

<sup>50</sup>Quarterly Conference at Chinn's Chapel, 19 February, 1877. MS Record of Conference Minutes by C.M. Jacobsen, in "History of the First Methodist Church of Lewisville, Texas." First Methodist Church, Lewisville, Texas.

<sup>51</sup>Rev. R.M. Powers, Presiding Elder, quoted in "Quarterly Conference at Chinn's Chapel," 19 February, 1887. MS Record of Conference Minutes by C.M. Jacobsen, in "History of the First Methodist Church of Lewisville, Texas." First Methodist Church, Lewisville, Texas.

<sup>52</sup>Walter N. Vernon, Methodism Moves, 118.

<sup>53</sup>Walter N. Vernon, Methodism Moves, 143-151; R.C. Monk, et al. The Methodist Excitement, 143, 205-209.

<sup>54</sup>William Warren Sweet, Revivalism in America (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1944) 162-182.

<sup>55</sup>Essayist, Texas Wesleyan Banner, January 19, 1851; R.C. Monk, et al. The Methodist Excitement, 115.

<sup>56</sup>Pastor's Report, Fourth Quarterly Conference, Greenville, Texas, 9 October, 1876. Dallas: Bridwell Library, Southern Methodist University.

<sup>57</sup>Walter N. Vernon, Methodism Moves, 127, 196; R.C. Monk, et al. The Methodist Excitement, 70, 145.

<sup>58</sup>R.C. Monk, et al. The Methodist Excitement, 70-71.

<sup>59</sup>North Texas Journal, 1877, 6; R.C. Monk, et al. The Methodist Excitement, 177.

<sup>60</sup>Item: Silk Handkerchief, Gift of Ruby Harris to Ethel Calvert, 1918, Ethel Calvert to Southern Methodist University, 1992. Dallas, Texas: Bridwell Library, 1992.

<sup>61</sup>Rev. W.H. Stephenson quoted in Pastor's Report, Quarterly Conference, 23 February, 1888. MS Record of

Conference Minutes by C.M. Jacobsen in "History of the First Methodist Church of Lewisville, Texas." Lewisville, Texas.

<sup>62</sup>Rev. W.H. Stephenson quoted in Pastor's Report, Quarterly Conference Record, 19 January, 1880. MS Record of Conference Minutes by C.M. Jacobsen in "History of the First Methodist Church of Lewisville, Texas." Lewisville, Texas.

<sup>63</sup>Rev. O.S. Thomas quoted in Pastor's Report, Quarterly Conference Record, 28 July, 1889. MS Record of Conference Minutes by C.M. Jacobsen in "History of the First Methodist Church, Lewisville, Texas." Lewisville, Texas.

<sup>64</sup>Rev. O.S. Thomas quoted in Pastor's Report, Quarterly Conference Record, 1 November, 1890. MS Record of Conference Minutes by C.M. Jacobsen in "History of the First Methodist Church, Lewisville, Texas." Lewisville, Texas.

<sup>65</sup>R.C. Monk, et al. The Methodist Excitement, 178.

<sup>66</sup>R.C. Monk, et al. The Methodist Excitement, 177.

<sup>67</sup>R.C. Monk, et al. The Methodist Excitement, 177-178.

<sup>68</sup>Walter N. Vernon, Methodism Moves, 198.

<sup>69</sup>Walter N. Vernon, Methodism Moves, 198.

<sup>70</sup>Walter N. Vernon, Methodism Moves, 197.

<sup>71</sup>"Mrs. Cozby Shares Data on Chinns Chapel Former Days," (sic) Lewisville Leader, 18 December, 1969; "Viola Cozby Provides Added Lore: Old Waketon, Chinn's Chapel Recalled," Lewisville Leader, 14 September, 1967, Lewisville, Texas.

<sup>72</sup>"Mrs. Cozby," Lewisville Leader.

<sup>73</sup>Minutes of the Commissioner's Court, Court House on-the-Square, Denton County, Texas, 1877; Myrtle Watson, "Education: A Debt the Present Owes to the Future," paper presented to the Denton County Historical Society, 3 May, 1977, Denton, Texas.

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ADDENDUM  
ORAL HISTORY

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