

FIRST METHODIST CHURCH OF DENTON

Historical Narrative researched and written by Yvonne Mesler for Texas Historical Commission
THC subject marker application, Denton County (1996)

Narrative for
Subject Historical Marker Application

Methodism in Denton is as old as the town itself. Rev. William E. Bates, a Methodist minister, organized the Methodist Church at Denton in 1857. The church members arranged a meeting place for the new church in the log Court House located on the north side of the square. When the Masonic Hall was completed on South Elm Street, the congregation held their services in that building until 1871.

From the few records that exist, it would seem that the original members included William Loving whose land was surveyed in the town of Denton, Grandma S.A. Venters, Col. Otis G. Welch, Johnny Lovejoy, Sr., Mrs. C.C. Daugherty whose husband was sheriff of Denton County in 1860-1862, Mr. and Mrs. Sewall Brown and daughter, Anne Elizabeth and possibly John Stroud, Marion McNeil, John L. Dixon, D.H. Fry. Later early members would include members of the Goode, Hawkins, McMurray, and Bates families.

The congregation grew slowly along with the growth of the town of Denton. On the 30th day of May 1871, the Police Court of Denton County ordered that Lots No. 1 and 6 in Block No. 23 in the Town of Denton be set apart for the purpose of erecting church houses. It further ordered that any religious denomination or association who would build a house upon either of the lots for church purposes and in the value of at least \$2000 would receive a deed to the property from the Justice of the Police Court. The Methodist congregation did build their meeting house on Lot 1 of Block 23. In turn, the Police Court issued a deed to trustees J.C. Smith, C.C. Bell, J.A. Fain, W.J. McNeil, George Morris, A. Garrison and W.T. Graham of the Methodist congregation.

The Methodist congregation has held their worship services in this location from 1871 until the present.

Members of the Methodist congregation were influential in the development of the town of Denton serving as merchants, town and county officials, bankers, teachers, doctors, sheriffs, lawyers, judges, public school superintendents, college presidents and professors. Many church members served on boards and commissions, as mayors and city councilmen, and as members of various organizations. Methodist men who became sheriffs included C.A. Williams, C.C. Dougherty, Joe Marrs and James H. Goode. Those who were doctors included Dr. J.M Inge, Dr. McIlhane and Dr. Miller. John L. Lovejoy was an early merchant. Elijah Biggerstaff was

District Surveyor 1890 - 1906. S.A. Venters was County Judge at one time. J.W. Jagoe, Sr. was an attorney and also served as mayor at one time. I.D. Ferguson was an attorney. Jehew Hawkins was a county commissioner. C. C. Bell and J.W. Jagoe, Sr. served as State Representatives. W.J. McNeil was Assessor/ Collector 1860-1865 and again in 1880. W.C. Orr, Jr. was in banking. Dr. J. C. Matthews was president of North Texas State College now University of North Texas. Teachers and professors included W. N. Masters, C. M. Mizell, and Miss Phoebe Mizell. Emory C. Smith and C.C. Bell served on the search committee to secure the College of Industrial Arts for Denton, presently Texas Woman's University. The above are just a few of the Methodists who have served the Denton community in the past, and many Methodist continue to serve our community today.

Members of the congregation helped organize and support the City County Day Nursery, the Well Child Clinic, Hospice, and Friendship House which was the first after-school day care of school age children who attended Lee School which was across from the Methodist Church. A group of Methodist mothers who were concerned about the problems of high school children during the time of desegregation banded together and reached out to mothers of black high school children. This group eased many of the tensions that the children of both races were facing at the time. One of first Boy Scout Troups in Denton was organized by men of the Methodist Congregation. The Manna service program was developed by the congregation to provide needed assistance in securing food, shelter, transportation to jobs to those in need. This later developed into a city-wide program known as the Inter-Faith Ministries housed at First Methodist today.

In 1976, a special study commission of the Methodist congregation was set up to decide what to do about the deteriorating buildings and growing congregation. This commission decided that the Methodist church congregation would remain in the same downtown location that it had been in since 1871 and continue to serve the Denton community from that location.

The congregation has grown from the estimated 30-40 members in 1857 to approximately 2,000 members in 1996. Members of the First United Methodist Church congregation have been in the past and continue to be today a driving force in the development of Denton and in providing services to its people.

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Unpublished material: Original handwritten Police Court Order and deed to Lot 1 Block 23 in the Original Town of Denton. (in First United Methodist Church archives, Denton, Texas)

Written by Yvonne Mesler, 421 Gabe Court, Denton, Texas, 76207-7619. Historian/Archivist, First United Methodist Church, 201 S. Locust, Denton, Texas 76201. (817-382-5685)