



THREE INTO ONE
1888-1988
A Brief History of One Hundred Years
of Presbyterian Witness
in Vernon, Texas

The First Presbyterian Church (USA) of Vernon, Texas evolved from the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, the Presbyterian Church US and the Presbyterian Church USA.

To the small village in north central Texas came Rev. George Van Emmans about 1885 or 1886. He was sent by the Board of National Missions of the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. to form a church. Soon after Van Emmans' arrival, Rev. W. D. Wear of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church came from Chillicothe, Texas and he successfully organized his church on Dec. 9, 1888 with 29 charter members. They worshiped in the courthouse, Logan Opera House and "Austin Chapel" until they built their church in 1899 at 2129 Wilbarger Street. To the area came Rev. W. N. Dickey, an evangelist from the Presbyterian Church U. S. He founded thirty-three churches in Texas, and one was the church in Vernon. His church had 34 founding members when it began in early 1890. W. E. Johnston gave a lot at 2027 Main Street and a small frame church was erected. The US and USA congregations both shared the building. Because it was necessary that the deed be in the name of one church only, a vote was taken and the U. S. congregation won by a small margin. Van Emmans withdrew his flock, and they purchased

land in the 2000 block of Cumberland Street building a frame church named "Austin Chapel" in honor of the man who gave generously for its construction.

A severe drought hit the area and many people who were primarily farmers were forced to move away. By 1891 Van Emmans had to close the doors of his small church and he moved back north. There are no records of the members of his church and we must assume that they joined one of the other churches.

The men who were pastors of the U. S. Church were; Revs. J. R. Jacobs, J. W. Smith, C. W. Peyton, and then a series of supply ministers who were: Revs. Shive, Gladney, Mosely and Cleveland. In 1907 W. C. Hagan was called and it was in this year that Anna Rembert gave property on which a manse was to be constructed. This manse at 2304 Paradise was to serve the pastors for 50 years. After Hagan had been in Vernon for 5 years he left and was followed by Rev. McElroy who remained 2 years. Thomas Murphy became the pastor in 1915 and he remained until 1918 when the church united with the Wilbarger Street church.

The Cumberland Presbyterian Church called Rev. Sam Logan in 1890. He served one year and was followed by Revs. W. C. Collier, A. A. Davis, W. W. Martin, and J. M. Burrows. Each of these served only a short tenure. When Rev. R. E. Chandler was called in Feb. 1898 the church building was nearing completion. The foundation had been laid in 1892 but lack of funds had delayed progress. On May 28,

1899 the \$6000 church was dedicated. Shortly after this event Rev. Chandler married Luna White, one of the daughters of founding member, Mrs. John A. White. Chandler was followed by Revs. P. D. Tucker and L. D. Grafton. In June 1905 Rev. J. M. Cocke was called.

In 1906 the Cumberland Presbyterian Church and the Presbyterian Church USA were united at the General Assembly level. To reflect this union with which they were in agreement the members voted to rename their church the First Presbyterian Church of Vernon USA. Cocke attempted to interest the Main Street US church in uniting but the members declined to consider it at that time.

After Cocke's sudden death in November 1907, Revs W. L. Livingston, P. D. Tucker and W. H. Baker were called. Realizing that neither of the Presbyterian churches was able to make an effective witness due to small memberships and lack of funds, the sessions of both congregations appointed committees to draw up a resolution to unite. The "Articles of Federation" were presented to both congregations and in 1918 they were united in worship in the Wilbarger Street building. The name now became The Federated Presbyterian Church. It was decided that the first pastor would be called from the US church and calls would be alternated after this. The church had membership in both Presbyteries. The women's groups were able to function more effectively. One of the stipulations of the agreement was that a new and more commodious church would be erected as soon

as possible.

Rev. Gaines B. Hall was the first pastor to be called and he remained from 1918 to December 1920. In May 1921 Dr. E. L. Moore assumed the pastorate and held it until his untimely death in June 1934. During 1923 the congregation held services in the local theater while a new brick building was constructed. This three-story church had a full basement with a gymnasium and large dining area. In the sanctuary was a magnificent Moeller pipe organ. Stained glass windows and crystal chandeliers were featured and there was a balcony too. The first service in the new church was held on June 1, 1924. Dr. Moore was not only a fine minister but also concerned with the community. He was for a number of years the head of the local Welfare Association. The church kept food and clothing on hand for the needy. Mrs. F. B. Elliott held a "Junior Church" in the basement during the morning worship. It served children ages 4 to 14 and the service was identical to the one going on upstairs only in miniature form. The Boy Scouts were able to use the gymnasium for their meetings.

After Moore's death Rev. Horace Cunningham was called in January 1935. In March of that year the "Men of the Federated Presbyterian Church" was begun. Cunningham worked with the youth taking them to out of town meetings of other youth groups. The congregation at this time numbered about 356 and the offering in 1936 totaled \$5048. During this year necessary repairs were made on the building including strengthening the balcony.

When Cunningham left in September 1937 he and his wife were given a standing vote of thanks for the many contributions they had made to the church and the manse including a new stove, landscaping and other improvements. It was noted also that the Cunninghams had generously given to the fund to pay the salary owed to Dr. Moore when he died.

Called to the church October 1937 was Rev. J. Albert Steele. He was an eloquent speaker and often gave dramatic programs i.e.: portraying Judas and his part in the death of Christ. While he was here he began a class for couples called "The Sunday Morning Club" and they chose the hymn "Leaning On The Everlasting Arms" as their theme song. In 1938 the church celebrated the 50th year of Presbyterianism in Vernon. An elaborate worship service with special music was held. Gifts were given to the church to celebrate the occasion and these included silver crosses, candelabra, and table covers for the Communion table. The first children's choir in the Vernon churches was begun at the Federated church. During World War II the doors of the church were opened to the men in flight training at the Army Air Corps Victory Field south of Vernon. The women's groups were actively engaged in helping the Red Cross and in the mission work.

In 1952 the pastoral relationship between the church and Rev. Steele was dissolved. It is probably true that in the life of every church there are certain traumatic experiences and this was one for the

Vernon church. Some members left, but those who remained redoubled efforts to further the work of the church. In 1953 Rev. Forrest K. Whitworth was called. The children's choir was reorganized. The youth became involved in Presbytery work. Plans were begun for a new manse and a new church. In 1957 the pastor and his family moved into the new brick manse at 4005 Texas Street.

Whitworth left in December 1958 and supply ministers served the church until Oct. 1959 when Rev. J. Arthur Strickland came. To raise \$125,000 was the goal of the building committee for the new church to be built at the corner of Paradise and Yucca Lane. Ground was broken on July 23, 1967 followed by the dedication on June 2, 1968. The new edifice of Gothic architecture was constructed of sandstone. It featured stained glass windows, paneled sanctuary and large rose window. One of the former pastors, Rev. Horace Cunningham, took part in the ceremonies.

In mid 1970 Strickland left and the church once again called upon supply ministers until in early 1971 when Rev. Jimmie Thames arrived. During his stay the youth program was strengthened. Camping trips, meetings in other churches, and a mission trip through Oklahoma and Arkansas were undertaken. Tapes of the Sunday worship services were made and taken to the homebound members. Mrs. Quanah Parker, who had previously been ordained an Elder in her former church, was installed on the Session January 9, 1972, to be our first woman to serve. Palo

Duro Presbytery met at the local church in 1974 with 125 in attendance.

After Thames left in Jan. 1975 two men served as moderators: Revs. Bill Weeks and Rev. Val Fowler. In January 1977 Rev. Isaac Butterworth came from Levelland, Texas to be the pastor. Since "Ike" began serving the church there have been many new activities. Sunday evening seminars or study times have been held, a "greeter program" established, Little Fellowship Dinners held, and the placing of a rose in the sanctuary to honor the birth of a baby to a member of the congregation. For several years a Mother's Day Out Program has been held. In 1978 the church hosted Presbytery and in 1979 became the recipient of monies from Presbytery to help defray some of the expense involved by our members whose homes were destroyed or badly damaged by the disastrous April 10, 1979 tornado that hit Vernon. For 11 months John Barnett served the church as "tithe of life" intern with his major responsibility being the youth program. The first of the Palo Duro Reflecting and Exploring Leadership Conferences was held at the Vernon church in 1983. In 1985 a wing was added to the building to provide space for a parlor, kitchen, bride's room, and the nursery was remodeled. To brighten the narthex three stained glass windows that had been kept in storage since the move from the Wilbarger Street church were placed in oak shadow boxes. They were illuminated and not only serve to add a feeling of reverence but also heighten our sense of our heritage. The wing was dedicated at the Praise Service in November 1985 and by the end of

December the entire debt for the new construction had been paid.

1987 marked the tenth anniversary of Dr. Butterworth's coming to the church. He and his wife Jan were honored with a reception in The Parlor to which all members and friends in the community were invited.

In April 1987 the Women of Palo Duro Presbytery met in Vernon and two of our members were installed as officers: Mary Ann Couch as Moderator and Helen Lutz as Secretary. In September photographs were taken for a new pictorial roster. In October at the 48th Stated Meeting of Palo Duro Presbytery Dr. Butterworth was elected Moderator for 1988. He was installed in Plainview in January 1988.

As we enter our Centennial Year we look back on the years of dedication put in by so many. The women have carried out their objectives both for Presbytery and locally, have contributed to several Children's Homes, given to Missions, made articles for White Cross, and supported the work of the Federated Church Women of Vernon. The men have enjoyed fellowship through participating in church league sports and both evening and breakfast meetings. The choir has provided outstanding music and on occasion even given concerts. Some of the members have served beyond the local level on Presbytery and Synod committees. In recent years three members have responded to the call to enter the ministry and they are Ila Mayes, Eula Rae McCown and Richard

Safford.

This very brief history of the Presbyterian witness in Wilbarger County, Texas illustrates how the three separate churches merged into one. Since the erection of the church building on Yucca Lane the members have called it the First Presbyterian Church, and of course are a part of the Presbyterian Church (USA).

Our membership as of January 1988 numbered 233 people and we enjoy having several dozen who call themselves "friends of the church" who help support our activities. We are fortunate to have some members who are direct descendants of our very early Presbyterians. They are: Mary Tom Lisman Hansard, Linton Sullivan, Margaret Bennett Luttrell, Wallace Baird, Ruth Sewell Bourland, Odessa Copeland Rainwater, Lois Copeland Greenwood, Helen Thompson Lutz, and Dave Summerour. Although she is not a direct descendant, we count Bea Thompson too as her in-laws were very early members.

This history has been compiled from church records, both from the Session and women's work; from newspaper articles; from two Wilbarger County histories, and interviews with members. To try to name each minister and member citing the contributions each has made would be an impossible task. Each one who has worshiped here, been on the teaching staff, sung in the choir, played the organ or piano, held any office has been a vital part in making

this church the ongoing and committed organization it is today. We salute all of you.

No doubt there are errors in this writing and if someone else were to undertake the project, there might be emphasis put on different events, but it has been a great privilege and an honor to learn about our heritage and those who have kept alive the dream of our early Presbyterians.

Mrs. Paul Singleton
February 1988

CUMBERLAND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
CHARTER MEMBERS

December 9, 1888

BROTHERS

S. W. Mabry
F. B. Bulles
T. Mo Kell
M. J. Billingsley
W. S. Woodward
D. S. Holt
W. D. Bulles
W. J. Neal
B. F. Simmons
A. D. Parks

29 in all

SISTERS

M. Mabry
S. C. White
M. A. Kell
J. Billingsley
S. E. Woodward
N. A. Holt
E. A. Bulles
Leslie Bulles
M. C. Neal
Annie Kuykendall
Ethel R. Phillipps
Cora E. Phillipps
Blanche E. Phillipps
N. F. Simmons
Mary Mabry
W. M. Lisman
Fannie Perry
M. H. Parks
Adah Parks

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH US
CHARTER MEMBERS

1890

Mr. and Mrs. J. M. Napier
Mr. and Mrs. T. H. Shive
Mr. and Mrs. J. W. Kerr
W. E. Johnston

34 in all, but records not found

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH USA

No records to be found.