A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE AUSTIN AVENUE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH OF WACO, TEXAS

by

T. Bradford Willis, DDS, MSD
Church Historian
Waco, Texas
1991
DEDICATED

TO THE GLORY OF GOD

AND TO THE CLERGY AND LAITY

WHO HAVE SERVED GOD FAITHFULLY

THROUGH THE AUSTIN AVENUE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH.
This brief history of The Austin Avenue United Methodist Church was written for the application for an Official Texas Historical Subject Marker and an Official Texas Historical Building Marker from the Texas Historical Commission. The historical subject and building markers were dedicated as a part of the celebration of the 90th anniversary of the congregation.

The author wishes to express his appreciation to the Rev. Dr. William P. Boyd and the Rev. R. Dean Reed for their encouragement and assistance in this historical marker project and to the members of the church committee on records and history: Mrs. Katrina McDavid, Mrs. Patty Williams, and Mr. and Mrs. James R. Wilson.
A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE AUSTIN AVENUE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH OF WACO, TEXAS

At the close of the nineteenth century, the members of the Fifth Street Methodist Episcopal Church, South, of Waco, Texas convinced Bishop Warren A. Candler and his cabinet of the Northwest Texas Conference that their congregation was becoming too large and that Waco needed another Methodist church (1). At the time, quite a number of members of the Fifth Street Church (later re-named First Church) lived north of Austin Avenue, and the Morrow Street Church (later re-named Saint John’s Church) was the only Methodist church north of Austin Avenue (2). Therefore, at the session of the annual conference which met in November 1900, Bishop Candler appointed two pastors to the Fifth Street Church to serve for 1900-1901 (3). These pastors were the Rev. John R. Nelson who had served as the pastor of Fifth Street Church since 1898, and the Rev. Milton S. Hotchkiss (4). The Rev. John R. Nelson’s time was to be devoted to organizing a new Methodist church in Waco.

On December 31, 1900 at the first quarterly conference of the Fifth Street Methodist Episcopal Church, South with the Rev. B. R. Bolton who was the presiding elder of the Waco district in the chair, a motion was made to organize the Austin Avenue Methodist Episcopal Church, South and

3 Ibid., p. 3.
4 Ibid.
to elect a board of nine trustees to receive and hold the property of the new church (5). The motion carried without dissent, and the following trustees were elected by ballot: T. P. Sparks, William Lambdin, A. P. Duncan, N. S. Hill, F. A. Winchell, John M. Connor, E. M. Barnes, G. H. Weibusch, and Tom L. McCullough (6).

The Rev. John R. Nelson then stated the proposition of Mr. W. T. Woodward to sell to the Austin Avenue Methodist Episcopal Church, South, three lots on the corner of Austin Avenue and 12th Street which were lots number 1, 2, and 3 in block number 2, in farm lot 24, in the city of Waco, for the sum of $5,500 (7). A motion was made by W. D. Jackson that the board of trustees be authorized, instructed, and empowered to purchase these three lots, and the motion carried without dissent (8).

The last item of business of this quarterly conference was the creation of a building committee for the Austin Avenue Church which had the power to raise money and to build the church edifice. It was decided to allow the Rev. John R. Nelson and the Rev. Milton S. Hotchkiss to select the members of the building committee (9).

Later that same evening at the century watch-night service held at 9:30 p.m. at the Fifth Street Church, the Rev. B. R. Bolton announced

5  Austin Avenue Methodist Church, Record and Minute-Book of the Board of Trustees, meeting of Dec. 31, 1900, pp. 3-4. (longhand)
6  Ibid.
7  Ibid., p. 4.
8  Waco Times-Herald, Jan. 1, 1901, p. 8.
9  Austin Avenue Methodist Church, Record and Minute-Book of the Board of Trustees, meeting of Dec. 31, 1900, pp. 4-5.
to the congregation of Fifth Street Church that the quarterly conference had approved the purchase of the Woodward property at Austin Avenue and 12th Street as a site for a new church to be named the Austin Avenue Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and of the formation of a board of trustees for the new church. This glorious news, ushering in the new year and the new century, was received by the large congregation with evident expressions of joy and gratitude (10).

On January 18, 1901, the Rev. John R. Nelson, on behalf of himself and the Rev. M. S. Hotchkiss, announced a partial list of the members of the building committee for Austin Avenue Church: A. P. Duncan, president; W. D. Jackson, vice-president; Tom L. McCullough, secretary; William Lambdin, F. A. Winchell, Ed Hall, N. S. Hill, R. L. Cartwright, and J. P. Sample (11, 12). Soon the following names were added to this committee: E. M. Barnes, T. J. Womack, John M. Connor, W. M. Manchester, T. P. Sparks, the Rev. J. R. Nelson, the Rev. M. S. Hotchkiss, L. B. Black, T. B. Barton, and F. M. Gardner. The goal of this committee was to raise $35,000 with subscriptions and to select an architect to design the church edifice.

On January 9, 1901, the Wesleyan Workers, a society of the Fifth Street Church, was converted into the Home Mission Society of Austin Avenue Church (13). At the home of Mrs. Joe Selman Willis on January 23, 1901,

12 Austin Avenue Methodist Church, South, Record and Minute-Book of the Building Committee, meeting of Jan. 18, 1901, pp. 4-5.
13 Waco Times-Herald, Jan. 11, 1901, p. 5.
the following women were elected officers of this new Home Mission Society: Mrs. W. J. Wigley, president; Miss Mary Randle, first vice-president; Mrs. Ed Hall, second vice-president; Mrs. W. J. Hill, third vice-president; Mrs. J. P. Sample, recording secretary; Mrs. L. T. Williams, corresponding secretary; and Mrs. T. L McCullough, treasurer (14, 15). The Home Mission Society was requested by the building committee to raise funds for furnishing the interior of the future church edifice (16).

During January and February 1901, notices appeared in the Waco Times-Herald announcing that architects were invited to submit plans for a $25,000 Austin Avenue Church (17, 18). By March 1, 1901, the following architects had submitted plans to the building committee:

1. Benjamin D. Price of Philadelphia  
2. W. C. Dodson of Waco  
3. Meesce and Smith of Fort Worth  
4. Herbert and Allen of Waco  
5. W. A. Cann of Saint Louis (19)

On May 6, 1901, the building committee accepted the architectural plan submitted by Mr. W. A. Cann (20). The building committee also secured the

17 Waco Times-Herald, Jan. 31, 1901, p. 5.  
19 Austin Avenue Methodist Church, South, Record and Minute-Book of the Building Committee, meeting of Mar. 1, 1901, p. 15.  
20 Ibid., p. 28.
services of Mr. W. C. Dodson as a supervisory architect to pass upon the Cann plan and its specifications, and to supervise the construction of the building.

At the annual session of the Northwest Texas Conference which met in November 1901, Bishop A. W. Wilson appointed the Rev. John R. Nelson to the Austin Avenue Church of Waco (21). Thus, Mr. Nelson was the first pastor of the Austin Avenue Church. (The Rev. Milton S. Hotchkiss was re-appointed to the Fifth Street Church of Waco.)

On December 2, 1901, the cornerstone for the Austin Avenue Church was laid by representatives of the Grand Lodge of Texas in an impressive ceremony at the building site at 12th Street and Austin Avenue (22). The Rev. John R. Nelson gave to the Masonic grand treasurer, J. S. McLendon, the numerous items which were placed in a copper box in the cornerstone (23).

On Sunday, December 29, 1901 at the Maccabee Hall located at 6th Street and Austin Avenue, the Sunday School of Austin Avenue Church was organized at 9:30 a.m. (24, 25).

“Services were opened by Superintendent Winchell. As this was the first service, the school was not supplied with literature, so the Ten Commandments were read as the morning lesson, and after the singing of several songs and a

23 Ibid.
prayer by Bro. J. R. Nelson, Pastor, Mr. Winchell read the following appointments: Secretary, S. H. McCartney; Librarian, Clyde Sparks; Organist, Mrs. F. M. Harding; Superintendent of the Primary Department, Mrs. W. L. Reese; Teachers, Mrs. T. E. Triplett, Mrs. W. H. McCullough, Mrs. Mackey, Mr. W. L. Perry, Miss Black, Mrs. A. D. Adams, Mrs. Hale, Mrs. W. J. Wigley, George Barcus, Miss Mary Randle, Mrs. B. H. Hill, Mrs. J. R. Nelson, Mrs. W. B. Green, Mrs. F. M. Allen, E. M. Barnes, Mrs. Edwin Harding, and Mrs. W. L. Perry; W. H. McCullough as Associate Superintendent. The balance of the time was taken up in arranging classes, enrolling scholars. The following report was read at the close: Officers present, 5; teachers, 14; scholars, 79; visitors, 8; total attendance, 106. Collection, $2.10. “ (26). The first service of worship followed at 11:00 a.m. at the Maccabee Hall and was conducted by the Rev. John R. Nelson (27). At this service the charter membership was formed with 81 members and was recorded in the church register (28, 29). The Sunday School and worship services were conducted at the Maccabee Hall until Sunday, April 13, 1902 when the congregation began worshipping in the completed edifice at 12th Street and Austin Avenue (30).

26  Ibid.
28 The Church Register of the Austin Avenue Methodist Episcopal Church, South.
In the Methodist church, all indebtedness must be discharged before any church building can be formally dedicated (31). On Sunday, November 11, 1906, the church edifice was dedicated by Bishop Elijah Embree Hoss (32).

As Waco expanded to fill the neighborhood around the church, the congregation also grew. During the first four years of his ministry at Austin Avenue Church in the early 1920s, the Rev. Robert E. Goodrich, Sr. took in over 1100 new members (33). Soon the lay leadership realized that although the Sunday School was well-organized, continued growth would not be possible because every class was so crowded (34). Thus, a building committee was appointed to oversee the construction of a new and larger church edifice; the following men served on this building committee: J. R. Milam, chairman, George W. Barcus, H. W. Carver, R. L. Cartwright, William Lambdin, N. S. Hill, H. R. Dudgeon, W. E. Terrell, S. C. Gage, W. H. McCullough, A. C. Patton, T. H. Jackson, F. A. Winchell, W. W. Woodson, and the Rev. Cullom H. Booth (35).

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32 Austin Avenue Methodist Church, Minute-Book of the Board of Trustees, meeting of Nov. 11, 1906.
34 Austin Avenue Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Quarterly Conference Record, meeting of June 10, 1920.
On the afternoon of March 25, 1925, the cornerstone was laid at 13th Street and Austin Avenue for the new edifice for the Austin Avenue Church. The cornerstone was laid by the Masons with W. Madden Fly, the past grand master of the Grand Lodge of Texas, officiating (36). After the Masonic ceremonies, Bishop James A. Dickey of Waco delivered an address. The cost of this new edifice was estimated at $350,000 (37). The architect was R. H. Hunt of Dallas (38).

The last service of worship in the edifice at 12th Street and Austin Avenue was on Sunday, April 26, 1925 (39). This building was sold to the congregation of the Trinity Presbyterian Church of Waco (40), and this Presbyterian congregation occupied the building on May 1, 1925.

On May 10, 1939, the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Methodist Protestant Church, and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South united into The Methodist Church (41). Thus the congregation of the Austin Avenue Methodist Episcopal Church, South became the Austin Avenue Methodist Church.

On Sunday, March 12, 1944, the church edifice at 13th Street and Austin Avenue was dedicated by Bishop Ivan Lee Holt (42), and a printed church history by Mr. W. H. McCullough was distributed for this occasion. On the back cover of

38 Austin Ave. Scrapbook, p. 1.
40 Ibid.
this church history was the following message from the senior pastor, Dr. A. Norman Evans:

We come today to dedicate our church building, free of debt, to
almighty God with the prayer that over the years it may be a sanctuary
where His children may meet for comfort, for guidance, and for strength.
To us, it is more than a building of brick and wood and stone. It is our
church. At its altars some of us received the sacrament of baptism; some
of us were united in marriage here; while for some, it was from this sacred
spot we bore away our loved ones to their resting place.

This occasion is more than the dedication of a building. In a very real
sense, it is a dedication of our very selves. This is the day to which we
have looked forward over the years. We have hoped for it. We have
prayed for it. Hope has been realized; prayers answered. For each of us,
may this be a day of thanksgiving, of enlarged vision, and of consecration.
Relieved of the burden of debt, may our church be continually attempting
greater things for God and humanity.

During 1940s, the congregation provided recreation and refreshments for the men and
women in military service on Sunday afternoons (43).

During the mid 1940s, the congregation participated in “union” (joint) Sunday evening
services which included the congregations of the Central Christian Church (Disciples of Christ),
the First Presbyterian Church (Southern), the Central Presbyterian Church (Northern), and the
Austin Avenue Methodist Church (44).

44 Ibid., July 22, 1945.
In the late 1940s, Austin Avenue Church contributed generously for the building of the Latin-American Methodist Church of Waco and for the purchase of a parsonage (45). The congregation continued to contribute for many years to the monthly salary of the pastor of the Latin-American Church.

In 1950, the annual conferences of the Methodist Church in Texas promoted the creation of a Texas Methodist Historical Commission, which body was formed by representatives from the eight conferences meeting at the Austin Avenue Church in November, 1950 (46).

On Saturday, November 13, 1954, the sanctuary of Austin Avenue Church was completely burned out by an early morning fire (47). The insured loss in the fire in the sanctuary was set at $335,395.61 (48). The congregation met at the 25th Street Theater for worship the next day. A building committee was soon elected to re-build the sanctuary and to build a three-story education building along Franklin Avenue and 13th Street (49). The members of this building committee were: C. W. Crisler, E. N. Dennard, Floyd Jensen, J. R. Milam, Jr., C. W. McDavid, Clyde C. Hays, and Carl M. Barrett,

45 Austin Ave. Methodist Church 1947-1948, p. 11.
chairman (50). Mr. Walter Cocke served as the architect for the educational extension and the sanctuary (51). The re-built sanctuary and the new children’s educational building were consecrated by Bishop William C. Martin on Sunday, March 11, 1956 (52) and were dedicated on March 5, 1961 (53).

In 1964, Austin Avenue Church built a Methodist Student Center for the Wesley Foundation at Baylor University. A plaque inside the building bears this inscription: “This building a Wesley Foundation Student Center was given by the Austin Avenue Methodist Church of Waco, Texas. Edward R. Barcus, minister; Carl M. Barrett, chairman of the building committee; Bush and Witt, architects, engineers; Waco Construction Company, builders.” (54). This Methodist Student Center is located at 821 Speight Avenue and still ministers to the Baylor community.

In 1968, The Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren Church united and became The United Methodist Church (55). Thus the congregation of the Austin Avenue Methodist Church became the Austin Avenue United Methodist Church.

During the mid 1970s, the church began the Montessori Child Development Center and a Meals-on-Wheels unit (56). For the occasion

50 Ibid.
51 Ibid., p. 16.
52 Ibid., p. 19.
53 Ibid., p. 20.
54 Ibid., p. 21.
of the 80th anniversary of Austin Avenue Church, a new church history was prepared by Mrs. Cecile Swayze Ramsey.

At the present time, a few of the ministries of Austin Avenue Church are:

1. Meals-on-Wheels which serves thirteen homes, three times per week.
2. Beyond-Our-Doors which provides funds to the needy in $50.00 increments using Caritas and Displaced Homemakers as sources of candidates. This ministry provided $4,000.00 to local families in 1988.
3. Austin Avenue Montessori School which is educating ninety-seven children during the 1988-1989 school year (57).

The present membership of Austin Avenue Church is around 2100 members. At present, the pastors are the Rev. Dr. William P. Boyd, senior pastor; the Rev. Gary L. Torian, executive pastor; and the Rev. William Horick, associate pastor.

57 Austin Avenue United Methodist Church, Minutes of the Council on Ministries, meeting of Jan. 21, 1989, p. 1.
AUSTIN AVENUE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

At the close of the nineteenth century, when it was determined that Waco’s Fifth Street Methodist Episcopal Church, South (now First United Methodist Church) had grown too large, its members petitioned the denominational conference for the organization of another congregation in Waco. As a result, the Quarterly Conference approved the establishment of Austin Avenue Methodist Church on December 31, 1900. The Rev. John R. Nelson was appointed to organize the new congregation.

Three lots were purchased at the corner of Austin Avenue and 12th Street for a church building. The congregation was officially chartered on December 29, 1901, with a membership of 81, and a sanctuary was completed in April 1902.

The congregation experienced a steady growth that paralleled that of its neighborhood. When the first building became too small for the growing church, it was sold to Trinity Presbyterian Church, and a new Methodist structure was built at Austin Avenue and 13th Street.

Throughout its history, this church has served its community with a variety of outreach programs. It continues to be an important part of Waco’s history.

(1990)

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The Official Texas Historical Subject Marker was given to the glory of God and in loving memory of Mr. and Mrs. Roy Elmer Beck and Mr. and Mrs. John Todd Willis, Sr. by Dr. T. Bradford Willis. The marker was dedicated on April 22, 1990.
AUSTIN AVENUE METHODIST CHURCH

Designed by R. H. Hunt, this edifice is a substantial interpretation of Gothic architecture. It was built in 1925 during the ministry of the Rev. Cullom H. Booth. The two-story-equivalent brick structure, which rests on a raised basement, features a prominent bell tower. The original tracery detail in the tower was removed by the 1940s. The original art glass windows and tracery detail in the sanctuary were replaced after a 1954 fire caused extensive damage.

Recorded Texas Historic Landmark – 1990

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The Official Texas Historical Building Marker was given to the glory of God and in memory of Mrs. Nellie Davis Hill, Mr. Willis Howell McCullough, Sr., and Mrs. Cecile Swayze Ramsey by Dr. T. Bradford Willis. Each of these persons wrote a history of the Austin Avenue United Methodist Church. The marker was dedicated on January 6, 1991.
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Austin Avenue United Methodist Church. Minutes of the Council on Ministries, 1989. (Typewritten.)


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