

The following church history was provided by Barbara Beadles:

NARRATIVE HISTORY

Fifth Street Missionary Baptist Church, Levelland, Texas

I. CONTEXT

In 1921, most parts of Texas had already been settled for a while, but due to the fact that large ranches, such as the XIT and Spade occupied this area, Hockley County was still largely unsettled. The land remained prairie, inhabited by cattle, buffalo and prairie dogs. Hockley County, Texas, was one of the final two counties in the contiguous forty-eight states to be opened for settlement.[1] It was one of the last frontiers. Much of its development has happened within the lifespan of one generation.

The county covers some nine-hundred square miles, and in the days of travel by horse and buggy or by Model T, the county was very large. To travel the distance across the county and back required a full day's effort. It was at this time that the great ranches opened the doors to development of the county. It was in this context that the county seat was organized in February of 1921 near the center of the county. The founding leaders of the county named the town Hockley City, but when the petition for a post office with that name was denied in the spring of 1922, the town's name was changed to Levelland.

As people migrated to this new, open area from all parts of Texas and the nation, they saw the need for a church to meet the spiritual needs of their families. The distance to the closest church required at least a half-day's drive one-way.

In November of 1921, there were two houses, several tents, a one-room school building, and a general store. Thirteen of the new settlers met in a one-room schoolhouse with Rev. Curry in order to organize the first church in the new town.

II. OVERVIEW

The building of churches whereby the people could worship was an important part of the development of any community. Levelland was no exception. The First Missionary Baptist Church was organized in November of 1921 by Rev. Curry, the same year the town was organized. It was the only church in Levelland for two years.[2] The church records, that document the church's continuous existence since that day, are also filled with the names of the founding fathers of the town and with bits of history of the era as well as of the economic difficulties of the early pioneers.

The church organizational meeting took place in a one-room school building which was located one block east of what was designated as the Courthouse square and on the south side of Houston Street.[3] The First Missionary Baptist Church had 13 charter members, including Mr. G.H. Tubb[4] who built the second house in Hockley City in October of 1921.[5] The church met twice a month, the first and third Sundays of each month in that one room school house for a year. When the one-room school was replaced by a two-room school in 1922, the church met in the newer building for a while.

Times were hard, money was scarce, and it was difficult to find a pastor who would move to this remote area. In order to make a living, the minister had to hold a full time job in addition to serving as pastor. The first minister to be ordained by the church was B. E. Gunn in January of 1922.[6] He was also the first Post Master of Levelland. The first minister to be called from outside the church was Rev. T. F. Suttle in 1923.[7] He was unanimously elected for half time - first and third Sundays in each month. The church voted to pay him \$300 per year and struggled to meet that commitment.

The church voted to affiliate with the Baptist Missionary Association of Texas in 1923.[8] With a membership of 42 in 1924, the Church began raising funds to build a church building.[9] Lots 5 and 6 in block # 9 in the city of Levelland were purchased on Dec 10, 1924 from Post/Montgomery for \$52.50.[10] It is on this land that the church is located still today.

In December of 1925 the church completed building the original wooden church building that measured 28 X 40 feet.[11] In Jan of 1926 the church moved into the new building and organized a Sunday School Program at that time.[12] A dedication ceremony was held later that spring.[13]

By 1946, the church boasted a membership of 166. In that year, the original wooden church building was sold and moved and a new brick building was built on the same site where the original wooden structure had been located. The first meeting in the new brick building was July 14, 1946. The church voted on Wednesday, July 17, 1946 to change the name of the church to Fifth Street Missionary Baptist Church.[14]

Through the years the First Missionary Baptist Church/Fifth Street

Missionary Baptist Church has been consistently active in supporting state, national, and foreign missionaries. The church has personally sent youth and adult groups to places nearby (such as Mexico) and far away (including Russia, Africa, and the Philippines). Through the Association, it has helped to send missionaries all around the world. The congregation has always actively supported the Associational Orphanage, the Associational College at Jacksonville, and the Associational Seminary at Jacksonville.

The congregation has consistently supported and been an active part of the local area in many ways. The congregation's activities during the years have included maintaining a food box for indigent people, teaching sewing classes, preparing community meals, quilting quilts, packing charity boxes for orphans, having bake sales for charity, holding Boy Scout meetings, Youth Meetings, Girls Missionary Auxiliary meetings, Women's Missionary Auxiliary meetings, Men's Bible Study meetings, Vacation Bible Schools, AWANA groups, and many other activities.

III. SIGNIFICANCE

The First Missionary Baptist Church, which was later renamed Fifth Street Missionary Baptist church, was the first church organized in Levelland, the county seat of Hockley County, Texas. It was organized in November of 1921 in the one-

room schoolhouse. The congregation built a small wooden structure to house the church in 1925 and then built the present house of worship in 1946.

Many of the charter members of the church were also founding fathers and civic leaders of the town. Mr. G. H. Tubb was a charter member of the church, the first deacon ordained by the church, the first Church Clerk, a barber and trucker. He was also a member of the first school board in Levelland.[15] As first church clerk, it was he that recorded the early history of the church. His son, Gano, who was also a charter member of the church, began school in the one room school and later became a teacher and coach and then County Judge. Another son of Mr. G. H. Tubb, Nathan Tubb, served as South Plains College's first Registrar. One of the early deacons of the church, Ed Hofackett, was also sheriff of Hockley County. A deacon, Sam Langford was County Commissioner as was Dale Reid who was also a member of the church.

The church congregation has actively been involved with the community throughout the years by initiating activities such as teaching sewing classes, having community meals, quilting quilts, packing charity boxes for orphans, having bake sales for charity, and holding Boy Scout meetings, youth meetings, Girls Missionary Auxiliary Meetings, Women's Missionary Auxiliary, Men's Bible Studies, and Vacation Bible Schools. The church has been a constant source of temperate, hard working, patriotic people who have impacted the culture of this community significantly.

Hundreds of people in this community have been affected by the church through charity and charitable principles. The church has been a constant source of civic servants for the community. It continues to grow with new members as well as retain many long time members.

On August 12, 2007, the church celebrated a milestone in honor of one of the members who had been a continuous member of the church for seventy-five years. A community dinner was given honoring this member and her family. On August 12, 1932, she was baptized in an earthen stock tank on the county square.

IV. DOCUMENTATION

- [1] William C. Billingsley, Recollections From the Heart of Hockley County. Dallas, TX: Taylor Publishing Co., 1986, pg 4.
- [2] Lillian Brasher, Hockley county 1921-1974, The First Fifty Years. Canyon, TX: Staked Plains Press, Inc. 1977, pp. 281-292
- [3] Nathan Tubb Notarized Statement 2007
- [4] First Missionary Baptist Church Minutes, (Nov., 1921)
- [5] Nathan Tubb Notarized Statement 2007
- [6] First Missionary Baptist Church Minutes, (1/22/1922)
- [7] First Missionary Baptist Church Minutes, (10/14/1923)
- [8] First Missionary Baptist Church Minutes, (12/23/1923)
- [9] First Missionary Baptist Church Minutes, (11/01/1924)
- [10] Deed Records of Hockley County, Book 19, page 499.
- [11] First Missionary Baptist Church Minutes, (03/04/1925)
- [12] First Missionary Baptist Church Minutes, (01/02/1926)
- [13] Picture of dedication in Church history.
- [14] First Missionary Baptist Church Minutes, (07/17/1946)
- [15] Levelland School Trustee Meeting Minutes (5/09/1923)